

Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion (JMSR)

Special Issue

The Spiritual Dimensions of Love in Leadership: Critical Perspectives, Shadow Aspects, and Integral Approaches

1. Background and Rationale for the Special Issue

*Through Love all that is bitter will be sweet
Through Love all that is copper will be gold
Through Love all dregs will become wine
Through Love all pain will turn to medicine.*

Rumi

Love as a “supreme emotion” holds powerful potential in determining the nature and quality of our interpersonal, family, community, and societal experiences and connections. In other words, it touches every aspect of our lives and affects our mental, biological, physical states of being (De La Torre, 2014). Despite this powerful potential, the nature and role of love has received limited attention in the leadership, organization, and management studies. In the context of leading and organizing, Guillén (2021) observed, “True human relationships based on a logic of love have the capacity to take the person as a whole into account and not just exclusively as a resource or source of utility and satisfaction.” (p. 155) (cited in Hummel, 2024). Love plays a pivotal role in leadership, fostering care and understanding. It provides compassion purpose, and meaningfulness. With love, leaders may inspire growth and guide others through challenges. Leadership becomes a means for positive transformation, building connections and encouraging development in those they serve.

Although mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Rumi, and Ramana Maharshi have suggested that the Kosmos is fundamentally made of love and that love is the essence of everything, practical experiences in human relationships reveal the presence of other forces that add complexity to these beliefs. This dichotomy—*the presence and absence of love in leadership*—raises compelling questions about its influence on organizational dynamics and human connection.

The theoretical understanding of love in leadership contexts has evolved through various frameworks and conceptualizations. Scholars have approached this construct from multiple perspectives: Cunha et al. (2017) explored love as an organizational virtue, while Delbecq (2010) examined love as an offset to leadership hubris. These perspectives complement psychological frameworks such as Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love and philosophical approaches to understanding love in human relationships and organizations.

While previous scholarship has explored altruistic love in spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, 2005; Fry & Slocum, 2008), this special issue aims to advance theoretical understanding beyond existing frameworks like altruistic love and compassion (e.g., Shuck et al., 2019; Espedal, 2021; Raei, 2024). Recent research points to potential risks associated with an overemphasis on altruistic love. For instance, Oh and Wang (2020) noted that “spiritual leadership has potential risks due to its heavy emphasis on altruistic love and belongingness” (p.17).

Over the last couple of decades, selective but intriguing insights have emerged about the relationship between leadership and love. For instance, Parry and Kempster (2014) examined such a linkage between love and charismatic leadership by studying followers' implicit narratives of their lived experiences of charismatic leadership in organizational contexts. In terms of values-based and spiritually inclined works on leadership, Patterson (2010) argued that servant leadership is anchored in love. Her work explored how the concept of love might be approached from the leaders, followers, and organizational perspectives. On the practical side, an important lesson during and after the Covid-19 pandemic was the globally expressed need for human connection, care, and compassion (Ramachandran et al., 2024; Tirmizi et al., 2023), which touch on important ways to understand the expression and role of love in relation to leadership. These works and global human aspirations make a compelling case to refine our theoretical understanding of love in terms of its conceptualization, operationalization, *antecedents*, and outcomes in relation to leadership dynamics.

This special issue aims to:

- Explore the ontological distinctions between the presence and absence of love in leadership; how is leadership different when it is coming from a place of love, and how is it different when love is absent.
- Integrate multiple theoretical frameworks including developmental (Dempsey, 2023; Freinacht, 2017; Kegan, 1998), integral (Wilber, 2000, 2001, 2007), spiritual (Severan, 2021), and humanistic perspectives (Andrews, 2022).
- Develop integrative frameworks to advance our understanding of leadership and love (or leading with love).
- Examine the paradoxical nature of love-based leadership approaches.
- Examine and integrate various theoretical conceptualizations of love in leadership contexts.
- Develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks that bridge secular and spiritual understandings of love in leadership.
- Advance theoretical understanding of how different definitions and forms of love manifest in leadership practice.

2. Theoretical Framework Requirements:

Submissions must make explicit theoretical contributions in one or more of these areas:

a. Ontological Theories:

- Theoretical frameworks distinguishing between the presence and absence of love in leadership as distinct phenomena
- Models explaining how these ontological states differently impact organizational dynamics
- Theoretical integration of Eastern and Western perspectives on presence/absence of love

b. Integrative Theoretical Approaches:

- New theoretical syntheses combining developmental theory (Kegan, 1998), integral theory (Wilber, 2001), spiritual/religious, and humanistic frameworks
- Theoretical models explaining how different spiritual/religious/humanistic traditions conceptualize love in leadership
- Cross-paradigmatic theoretical frameworks incorporating multiple epistemological perspectives (Dempsey, 2023; Freinacht, 2017)

c. Paradox Theories:

- Theoretical models explaining the paradoxical effects of love in leadership
- Frameworks for understanding how love-based leadership approaches can generate shadow aspects
- Theoretical integration of positive and negative manifestations of love in leadership

3. Scope:

We seek papers that make explicit theoretical contributions through:

a. Theory Building:

- Development of new theoretical constructs building on existing frameworks (Fry & Whittington, 2005)
- Integration of existing theoretical frameworks in novel ways
- Proposition of testable theoretical models

b. Theory Evaluation:

- Conceptual analysis of existing theoretical frameworks
- Theoretical critique and extension of current models
- Meta-theoretical analysis of love in leadership literature

c. Theory Synthesis:

- Integration of multiple theoretical perspectives
- Development of more comprehensive theoretical frameworks
- Cross-cultural theoretical synthesis

We encourage authors to review and consult Gilson and Goldberg (2015), Corley and Gioia (2011), and Cornelisson (2017) to inform their thinking and writing of their theoretical works.

4. Topics of Interest

We invite submissions that investigate the theoretical complexities of love in leadership, including but not limited to:

a. Theoretical frameworks distinguishing between the presence and absence of love in leadership including:

- Ontological differences
- Organizational implications
- Measurement approaches

b. Theoretical models integrating spiritual/religious perspectives on love in leadership:

- Cross-traditional theoretical syntheses
- Comparative theoretical analyses
- Integration with management theory

c. Paradox theory applications to love in leadership:

- Shadow aspect theoretical frameworks
- Unintended consequence models
- Theoretical integration of positive/negative manifestations

d. Meta-theoretical analyses of love in leadership:

- Epistemological frameworks
- Methodological approaches
- Integration strategies

e. Humanistic Leadership Approaches

- Explore and refine the concept of love from a humanistic perspective?
- Examine the role of humanistic leadership, such as servant leadership (e.g., Patterson, 2010) in promoting love
- Linkages of love to humanistic considerations and outcomes (e.g., wellbeing, compassion, empathy, thriving, flourishing)

f. Developmental theory applications (Kegan, 1998; Wilber, 2000):

- Stage-specific manifestations of love in leadership
- Developmental trajectory models (e.g., spiral dynamics)
- Integration with spiritual development frameworks

5. Expected Theoretical Contributions

Successful submissions will:

- Develop new theoretical constructs
- Integrate existing theories innovatively
- Propose testable theoretical models
- Advance methodological approaches
- Create synthetic frameworks incorporating multiple perspectives

6. Manuscript Preparation

- Submissions should generally not exceed 10,000 words (including references)
- Manuscripts must make explicit theoretical contributions
- Must be original contributions not under consideration elsewhere

a. Formatting

- Double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font
- Follow latest APA guidelines for references
- Include DOIs for references
- Prepare an abstract (150 words maximum)
- Include three mandatory keywords from JMSR list and three author-chosen keywords

7. The use of generative AI in manuscripts

- When using generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process, authors should only use these technologies to improve readability and language.
- Authors need to carefully review and edit as authors are ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of the work. AI technologies cannot be attributed in authorship.

Disclosure instructions:

- The use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process must be disclosed by adding a statement at the end of the manuscript before the References list. The statement should be placed in a new section entitled 'Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process' Statement: The author(s) used [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] in order to [REASON]. The author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.
- This declaration does not apply to the use of basic tools for checking grammar, spelling, references etc. If there is nothing to disclose, there is no need to add a statement. Nor does it refer to AI tools used to analyze and draw insights from data as part of the research process.

8. Submission and Anticipation Publication Timeline

- Full manuscripts due: 30th October 2025
- Initial review completed: 20th December 2025
- Revised manuscripts submitted: 20th February 2026
- Second revision manuscripts review: 30th April 2026
- Revised manuscripts submitted: 30th June 2026
- Finalize accepted manuscripts 30th September 2026
- Publication: Fall of 2026

9. Submission Process

- Submit manuscripts via ScholarOne system at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rmsr>
- Prepare anonymous manuscripts (remove self-references)
- Upload a separate title page with author contact details

10. Special Edition Guest Editors

Mohammed Raei, PhD, is an independent scholar, leadership and organization development consultant, executive coach, and dissertation coach. He has consulted on strategic planning, program evaluation, and 360° feedback. Additionally, he facilitated workshops on trust, adaptive leadership, and immunity to change. He also served as the programming chair for the Pacific Northwest Organizational Development Network (PNODN). He is the co-editor of *Leadership at the Spiritual Edge: Emerging and non-Western Perspectives and Adaptive Leadership in a Global Economy: Perspectives for Application and Scholarship*. He presented for a variety of professional organizations, including PNODN, Puget Sound Project Management Institute, and the International Coaching Federation (Jordan and Seattle chapters) in addition to several times at the ILA conference. In 2019, he had a Kundalini awakening that changed his life. He resides in Amman, Jordan.

S. Aqeel Tirmizi, PhD, is a Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at Antioch University's Graduate School of Leadership and Change. His research and teaching focus on responsible leadership, dignity and well-being, cross-cultural leadership, and social innovation. He has developed and published multiple models of leadership. Aqeel has worked with leaders and senior managers from the private, public, and non-profit sectors. His academic and applied experience spans over 25 years and includes multiple countries and cultural settings. Aqeel's current work focuses on integrating research wisdom and practice-based knowledge to meaningfully inform leadership and organizational practices that contribute to improving human condition. He holds a PhD in Management from the State University of New York, Binghamton and Masters in International Administration from the School for International Training.

References

- Andrews, W. A. (2022). Toward a systematic approach to building a loving organization. In M. Pirson (Ed.), *Love and organization: Lessons of love for human dignity, leadership and motivation* (pp. 160-181). Taylor & Francis.
- Corley, K. G., & Gioia, D. A. (2011). Building theory about theory building: what constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of management review*, 36(1), 12-32.
- Cornelissen, J. (2017). Editor's comments: Developing propositions, a process model, or a typology? Addressing the challenges of writing theory without a boilerplate. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(1), 1-9.
- Cunha, M. P., Clegg, S. R., Costa, C., Leite, A. P., Rego, A., Simpson, A. V., Sousa, M. O., & Sousa, M. (2017). Gemeinschaft in the midst of Gesellschaft? Love as an organizational virtue. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 14(1), 3-21.
- Delbecq, A. L. (2010). The spiritual challenges of power humility and love as offsets to leadership hubris. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 7(3), 141-154.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14766080609518615>
- De La Torre, P. (2014). *Standing in Love: Unpacking and Unlocking the Supreme Emotion* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania).
- Dempsey, B. G. (2023). *Metamodernism: Or, the cultural logic of cultural logics*. ARC Press.
- Espedal, G. (2021). "It is those people": Religious scripts and organizing compassion. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 18(4), 293-311. <https://doi.org/10.51327/pbhc7916>
- Freinacht, H. (2017). *The listening society*. Metamoderna ApS.
- Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(6), 693-727. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001>
- Fry, L. W., & Whittington, J. L. (2005). In search of authenticity: Spiritual leadership theory as a source for future theory, research, and practice on authentic leadership. In W. L. Gardner, B. J. Avolio, & F. O. Walumbwa (Eds.), *Authentic leadership theory and practice: Origins, effects and development* (pp. 183-200). Emerald.
- Fry, L. W. (2006). Toward a theory of ethical and spiritual well-being, and corporate social responsibility through spiritual leadership. In R. A. Giacalone, C. L. Jurkiewicz, & C. Dunn (Eds.), *Positive psychology in business ethics and corporate responsibility* (pp. 47-84). IAP.
- Fry, L. W. (2008). Spiritual leadership: State-of-the-art and future directions for theory, research, and practice. In J. Biberman & L. Tischler (Eds.), *Spirituality in business: Theory, practice, and future directions* (pp. 106-124). Springer.
- Gilson, Lucy L., and Caren B. Goldberg. (2015) "Editors' comment: so, what is a conceptual paper?" *Group & Organization Management*, 40(2), 127-130.
- Hummels, H. (2024). Love and meaningful organizing. Introduction to a special issue and a tribute to prof. Dr. Manuel Guillen. *Humanistic Management Journal*, 9(2), 145-153. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-024-00180-0>
- Patterson, K. (2010). Servant Leadership and Love. In D. V. Dierendonck & K. Patterson (Eds.), *Servant leadership: Developments in theory and research* (pp. 67-76). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kegan, R. (1998). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Harvard University Press.
- Oh, J., & Wang, J. (2020). Spiritual leadership: Current status and agenda for future research and practice. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 17(3), 223-248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2020.1728568>

- Parry, K., & Kempster, S. (2014). Love and leadership: Constructing follower narrative identities of charismatic leadership. *Management Learning*, 45(1), 21-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507612470602>
- Patterson, K. (2010). Servant leadership and love. In *Servant leadership: Developments in theory and research* (pp. 67-76). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK
- Raei, M. (2024). Adaptive Leadership and Spirituality: The Inherent Spirituality of Being an Adaptive Leader. In M. Raei, S. K. Guenther, & L. A. Berkley (Eds.), *Leadership at the spiritual edge: Emerging and non-Western concepts of leadership and spirituality* (pp. 34-51). Routledge.
- Ramachandran, S., Balasubramanian, S., James, W. F., & Al Masaeid, T. (2024). Whither compassionate leadership? A systematic review. *Management Review Quarterly*, 74(3), 1473-1557.
- Severan, A. (2021). Metamodernism and the return of transcendence.
- Shuck, B., Alagaraja, M., Immekus, J., Cumberland, D., & Honeycutt-Elliott, M. (2019). Does compassion matter in leadership? A two-stage sequential equal status mixed method exploratory study of compassionate leader behavior and connections to performance in human resource development. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 30(4), 537-564. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21369>
- Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119-135. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295x.93.2.119>
- Tirmizi, S. A., Williams, K., & Tirmizi, S. N. (2023). More human, not less: global relevance of values-based leadership. *Humanistic Management Journal*, 8(1), 13-28.
- Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*. Shambhala Publications.
- Wilber, K. (2001). *A theory of everything: An integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality*. Shambhala Publications.
- Wilber, K. (2007). *A brief history of everything*. Shambhala Publications.