

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP IN MANAGING AI-DRIVEN WORKPLACE CHANGES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: *This study examines the role of spiritual leadership in navigating organizational transitions driven by artificial intelligence implementation and explores how leaders foster employee resilience and meaning during technological transformation. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, data were collected from 25 organizational leaders and 40 employees across six companies undergoing AI integration through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and organizational document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and construct meaningful interpretations of spiritual leadership practices in AI-driven contexts. The findings reveal that spiritual leadership significantly mitigates employee anxiety and resistance to AI adoption by cultivating organizational purpose, fostering psychological safety, and emphasizing human value beyond productivity metrics. Four key themes emerged: the importance of vision articulation that balances technological advancement with human dignity, creation of meaningful work environments amid automation, empowerment through reskilling initiatives framed as personal growth opportunities, and the establishment of ethical frameworks for AI deployment. Leaders who demonstrated spiritual leadership qualities facilitated smoother transitions by addressing existential concerns about job displacement and helping employees redefine their roles in AI-augmented workplaces. This research concludes that spiritual leadership provides a humanistic counterbalance to technology-driven organizational change, promoting sustainable transformation by addressing both practical and existential employee needs. The findings suggest organizations should integrate spiritual leadership development into change management strategies for AI implementation.*

Keywords: *Workplace Transformation, Organizational Change Management, Employee Resilience*

Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has brought very rapid and significant changes in various aspects of modern organizations. AI not only automates routine processes, but also changes ways of working, organizational structures, and the relationship between humans and technology in the work environment. Research conducted by Babashahi et al. (2024) shows that the integration of AI in the workplace is causing transformations in skills and work patterns that require significant adaptation from the workforce and organizational management (Administrative Sciences, 2024).

The transformation triggered by AI brings major opportunities such as increased efficiency, accelerated data-based decision making, and innovation in products and services. These changes also create new challenges, namely employees' concerns about job security,

competency pressure, and role uncertainty that impact their psychological well-being. This can give rise to technostress, resistance to change, and a decline in work engagement if not handled with a humane approach. Research by Alawiye et al. (2025) shows that leadership and organizational culture are important mediating factors between AI adoption and employees' mental well-being, where a work environment supported by strong leadership can enhance psychological safety and reduce burnout caused by AI-driven changes.

In a complex environment of change like this, the role of leaders becomes very crucial. Leadership is no longer only focused on technical and operational aspects, but must also be able to respond to human dynamics that arise due to technological integration. One leadership style that is increasingly discussed in academic studies and organizational practice is spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership emphasizes human values, moral integrity, and intrinsic motivation that are able to provide deeper meaning and purpose for individuals in the work context. Yulianti et al. (2022) in their literature review assert that spiritual leadership has a close relationship with quality of work life, job satisfaction, ethical behavior, and organizational commitment because it is able to shape an inclusive and value-oriented work climate.

Spiritual leadership is not merely leading in a religious manner, but combines spiritual values such as empathy, hope, and connectedness with a higher purpose into daily leadership practices. This leadership helps employees understand the meaning of their work, not only as routine tasks, but as meaningful contributions to the organization and to themselves. Spiritual leaders also create a sense of togetherness and psychological safety in the workplace, which allows employees to feel valued and supported in facing rapid technological change. *Frontiers in Psychology* (2019) found that spiritual leadership has a positive impact on employees' proactive behavior through increased organizational identification and psychological safety, which form the basis for effective adaptation to change.

Considering the challenges and opportunities faced by organizations in this digital era, it is very important to understand how spiritual leadership can become an effective strategy in managing AI-driven workplace changes. Leaders who apply the principles of spiritual leadership not only facilitate technological transitions, but also build employee resilience, while maintaining human dignity in the change process. The focus of this research is directed toward a deep understanding of the role of spiritual leadership in responding to AI-based changes, especially how leaders can help employees adapt, maintain psychological well-being, and reinterpret their work amid technological transformation.

Literature Review

1. Spiritual Leadership

The concept of spiritual leadership in this study refers to the theory proposed by Fry (2003) which views leadership as a process based on values, attitudes, and behaviors that are able to motivate individuals intrinsically through the fulfillment of spiritual needs in the workplace. Spiritual leadership is not only oriented toward achieving organizational goals, but also toward building work meaning, inner well-being, and individual moral integrity within the organization.

Fry (2003) emphasizes three main elements of spiritual leadership, namely vision, hope or faith, and altruistic values. Vision provides meaningful shared direction and purpose, hope/faith reflects belief that the vision can be achieved, while altruistic values are reflected in attitudes of empathy, care, and respect for others. These three elements are interrelated and form the foundation of leadership that is able to build employees' intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, Fry explains that spiritual leadership aims to create two main psychological conditions in employees, namely calling and membership. Calling is related to the feeling that work has meaning and valuable contribution to personal and social life, while membership refers to a sense of being accepted, valued, and an important part of the organization. When calling and membership are fulfilled, employees tend to have higher work commitment, better job satisfaction, and lower levels of work stress.

Research by Milliman et al. (2003) supports this view by finding that workplace spirituality has a positive relationship with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work engagement. The study shows that when organizations pay attention to aspects of spirituality, employees do not only work to obtain financial rewards, but also to achieve self-fulfillment and meaning in life.

Reave (2005) in her study on spiritual values and leadership effectiveness states that spiritual values such as honesty, humility, and care have a strong correlation with leadership effectiveness. Leaders who apply spiritual values tend to be more trusted and able to build healthy working relationships. In the context of modern organizations full of pressure and uncertainty, spiritual leadership becomes increasingly relevant because it is able to provide psychological calm, build resilience, and strengthen emotional bonds between employees and the organization.

2. Artificial Intelligence and Workplace Change

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has had a significant impact on the structure and dynamics of the workplace. AI is no longer only used as a technological tool, but has become an integral part of business processes, decision making, and human resource management. Davenport and Ronanki (2018) explain that the application of AI in organizations aims to improve operational efficiency, accelerate data analysis, and support product and service innovation.

Behind these various benefits, AI also brings consequences for the way humans work. These changes include shifts in job roles, new competency demands, and increased dependence on digital systems. Employees are required to adapt to continuously evolving technology, learn new skills, and face uncertainty regarding the sustainability of their jobs. This condition often gives rise to anxiety, work stress, and resistance to change if not managed properly.

Babashahi et al. (2024) state that the integration of AI in organizations causes transformations in skills and work patterns that require significant adaptation from the workforce. Employees who are not equipped with learning support and competency development risk experiencing decreased self-confidence and alienation in technology-based work environments. This shows that the success of AI adoption depends not only on technological readiness, but also on human resource readiness.

AI also has the potential to improve work quality if applied appropriately. Ellicia et al. (2026) show that AI can reduce routine workloads and provide space for employees to focus more on creative and meaningful work. However, the use of AI without a humanistic approach has the potential to reduce social interaction, work autonomy, and employees' emotional engagement with their work.

AI-based transformation demands a leadership approach that is not only oriented toward efficiency, but also toward the protection of human values. Without proper management, AI can instead widen the gap between humans and the meaning of work itself.

3. Value-Based Leadership in Facing Digital Transformation

Digital transformation marked by the rapid development of information technology and AI demands a leadership approach that is more adaptive and value-oriented. Value-based leadership places ethics, morality, and spirituality as the foundation in decision making and organizational management. This approach becomes important to maintain employees' psychological and social stability amid the dynamics of technological change.

Zuhdi et al. (2019) explain that servant leadership is able to create a more humane work environment through attitudes of service, empathy, and moral example. Such leadership encourages leaders not only to focus on achieving results, but also on the well-being and development of individuals within the organization. This is in line with the principles of spiritual leadership that place humans at the center of the change process.

In the context of Islamic value-based organizations, Mulyawan (2020) found that the application of Islamic work ethics and moral leadership has a positive effect on employee performance and loyalty. Values such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, and justice become an important foundation in building trust and work commitment. These values are also relevant in the context of digital transformation, where transparency and fairness in the use of technology become crucial issues.

Research by Hadirin Beruh et al. (2024) shows that spiritual leadership is able to improve motivation and performance through leader exemplarity, habituation of religious values, and attention to individuals' inner well-being. These findings strengthen the view that spiritual leadership is not only relevant in educational or religious organizations, but can also be applied effectively in modern organizations undergoing technology-based transformation.

Spiritual leadership can be viewed as a leadership approach capable of bridging technological progress with human values. This approach is important to ensure that AI-driven digital transformation continues to pay attention to work meaning, human dignity, and organizational sustainability in the long term.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of the research subjects regarding the role of spiritual leadership in managing workplace changes triggered by the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This approach allows researchers to explore social phenomena contextually and holistically, especially in complex and dynamic organizational change situations.

The multiple case study design is used because this study involves more than one organization experiencing AI integration processes. By comparing several cases, researchers can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of patterns of spiritual leadership that emerge in various organizational contexts, as well as identify similarities and differences in leadership practices in dealing with technology-based changes.

This study was conducted in six organizations that have implemented or are implementing AI in their work operations, whether in administration, data management, or customer service. These organizations come from diverse sectors, such as financial services, education, manufacturing, information technology, and public services, so it is expected to provide a broader picture of the application of spiritual leadership in different contexts.

The research subjects consisted of 25 organizational leaders and 40 employees directly involved in the change process due to AI implementation. The selection of informants was carried out through purposive sampling, namely based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for selecting informants include:

1. having a strategic role in decision making or implementation of policies related to AI.
2. being directly involved in the organizational change process.
3. having a minimum of one year of experience in the organization.

With these criteria, it is expected that informants are able to provide rich and in-depth information related to the phenomenon under study. Data collection was carried out through several main techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and analysis of organizational documents.

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore informants' views, experiences, and subjective interpretations regarding spiritual leadership and AI-based change. The interview guide was prepared flexibly, thus allowing researchers to explore issues that emerged during the interview process. Questions covered topics such as perceptions of AI, changes in work roles, the role of leaders in the adaptation process, work meaning, and values applied in leadership.

2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

FGDs were conducted to obtain collective views of employees regarding the impact of AI and the role of leaders in creating a meaningful work environment. These group discussions also served to confirm and enrich data obtained from individual interviews, as well as identify social dynamics developing among employees in facing technological change.

3. Document Analysis

Document analysis included the study of internal organizational policies, annual reports, AI implementation guidelines, and HR training and development documents. These documents were used to understand the organizational context, policy directions, and values formally adopted by organizations in managing AI-based change.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process began with transcription of interview and FGD results, followed by the initial coding stage to identify relevant units of meaning. Furthermore, these codes were grouped into categories and main themes representing important patterns in the data. The stages of analysis include:

1. data familiarization.
2. initial coding.
3. searching for themes.
4. reviewing themes.
5. defining and naming themes.
6. constructing thematic narratives.

Through this process, researchers sought to build systematic and meaningful interpretations related to the role of spiritual leadership in managing AI-based workplace change. To ensure data validity, this study applied several qualitative validation strategies, namely:

1. Source and method triangulation by comparing data from interviews, FGDs, and organizational documents.
2. Member checking, namely asking informants to re-verify interview summaries to ensure conformity with their intentions.
3. Peer debriefing by involving fellow researchers to critically discuss findings and data interpretations.

4. Audit trail, namely recording the entire research process systematically to ensure transparency and traceability of the analysis process.

This study paid attention to the principles of social research ethics. Each informant was given an explanation regarding the research objectives, data collection procedures, and their rights as participants, including the right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time. All informants’ identities were kept confidential, and the data obtained were used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained before the data collection process was carried out, both in written and oral form, in accordance with research ethics standards.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that spiritual leadership has a strategic role in helping organizations manage workplace changes triggered by the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Based on thematic analysis of interview results, FGDs, and organizational documents, it was found that spiritual leadership is able to act as a counterbalance between technological demands and employees’ human needs. This role is seen in how leaders build vision, create work meaning, empower employees, and instill ethics in the use of AI.

In general, respondents stated that AI-based change not only affects the technical aspects of work, but also affects feelings of security, work identity, and social relations in the workplace. Under such conditions, spiritual leadership functions as both a guide and a psychological buffer for employees.

Table 1. The Role of Spiritual Leadership in AI-Based Change

Aspect of Spiritual Leadership	Impact on Employees	Impact on Organization
Delivery of value-based vision	Reducing anxiety toward AI	Increasing acceptance of change
Creation of work meaning	Increasing work engagement and satisfaction	Maintaining stability of work climate
Empowerment through training	Increasing self-confidence and adaptation	Increasing HR readiness
Instilling ethics in AI use	Increasing sense of security and trust	Strengthening reputation and sustainability

1. The Role of Spiritual Leadership in Communicating the Vision of Change

One of the main findings in this study is the ability of spiritual leaders to communicate a vision of change that does not merely emphasize technological efficiency, but also affirms the importance of human values in the AI-based transformation process. The vision conveyed by leaders does not stop at targets of increasing productivity or organizational competitive advantage, but is directed to placing technology as a supporting means for human development, not as a substitute for the human role itself.

Spiritual leaders position AI as a tool that strengthens human capacity, for example by reducing routine workloads so that employees can focus more on strategic, creative, and socially valuable tasks. The communication of such a vision has been proven to reduce employees' anxiety about the threat of job loss and strengthen their sense of belonging to the direction of organizational change.

Employees who understand this value-based vision of change tend to be more open to innovation and do not view AI merely as a threat, but as an opportunity to grow. This shows that a meaningful vision functions as an important psychological tool in managing resistance to change. This finding is in line with Chen et al. (2019) who state that spiritual leadership is able to increase psychological safety and organizational identification, which are crucial in facing major changes such as digitalization and AI adoption.

Spiritual leadership does not only act as a conveyor of strategic direction, but also as a planter of meaning in change, so that technological transformation is not perceived as pressure, but as a valuable collective process.

2. Creating a Meaningful Work Environment Amid Automation

The results of the study show that spiritual leadership helps maintain work meaning even though many tasks have been automated. Employees feel that their work remains valuable because leaders emphasize human contributions in aspects that cannot be replaced by machines, such as empathy, creativity, and value-based decision making.

This approach is in accordance with workplace spirituality studies which state that spirituality in the workplace contributes positively to work engagement, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Spiritual leadership plays a role in maintaining a balance between technological progress and the sustainability of employees' work meaning.

3. Empowering Employees Through Competency Development

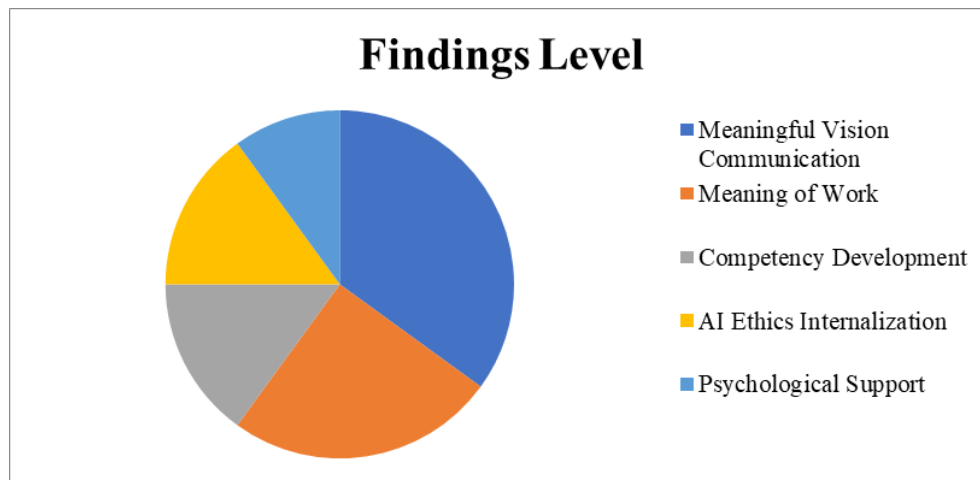
The next theme that emerged is the role of spiritual leadership in encouraging employee empowerment through training programs and competency development. AI-related training is not positioned merely as a demand, but as an opportunity to grow and develop both personally and professionally.

Many employees stated that this approach makes them more confident in facing change and not feel left behind by technology. This is in line with the findings of Babashahi et al. (2024) which mention that the success of AI integration is largely determined by human resource readiness and leadership support.

4. Instilling Ethics in the Use of AI

Another important finding is how spiritual leadership encourages the application of ethics in the use of AI, especially related to transparency, justice, and social responsibility. Employees stated that they feel more at ease when organizations have clear moral boundaries in the utilization of AI, for example in HR decision making and performance monitoring.

This is reinforced by research by Alawiye et al. (2025) which mentions that leadership and organizational culture are important mediating factors between AI adoption and employees' mental well-being. With the presence of spiritual leadership, AI is not viewed as a tool that oppresses humans, but as a technology controlled by values.



These findings show that although spiritual leadership has made a significant contribution in building vision and work meaning, there is still room for strengthening in other aspects that are operational and psychological in nature. Therefore, the following discussion will further examine how each of these aspects plays a role in supporting the success of AI-based workplace transformation more comprehensively.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that spiritual leadership has a strategic role in managing workplace changes driven by the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Spiritual leadership is proven to be able to act as a counterbalance between technological demands and employees' human needs. In the context of digital transformation which often gives rise to anxiety, uncertainty, and crises of work meaning, spiritual leadership emerges as an approach that is not only oriented toward efficiency, but also toward values, meaning, and psychological well-being of individuals within organizations.

This study shows that spiritual leaders are able to communicate a meaningful vision of change, namely by positioning AI as a tool that supports humans, not as a substitute for the human role. This value-based vision helps reduce resistance to change and increase employees' acceptance of technology adoption. This confirms that the success of AI-based transformation is not only determined by technological readiness, but also by how the change is understood and interpreted by employees.

Spiritual leadership plays a role in creating a work environment that remains meaningful amid increasing automation. Leaders emphasize that human aspects such as empathy, creativity, and value-based decision making are contributions that cannot be replaced by machines. Thus, employees do not lose their identity and work meaning, but are encouraged to adjust their roles in a technology-based work environment.

Spiritual leadership also contributes to employee empowerment through competency development. Training and reskilling programs accompanied by a humanistic approach not only improve technical skills, but also strengthen employees' self-confidence and mental readiness in facing change. This shows that human resource development in the AI era needs to pay attention to psychological and value aspects, not merely technical aspects.

This study emphasizes the importance of the role of spiritual leadership in instilling ethics in the use of AI. Leaders encourage the application of principles of transparency, justice, and social responsibility in the utilization of technology, so that AI is not viewed as a tool that oppresses

humans, but as a technology controlled by values. This contributes to increased employee trust in the organization and strengthens the social legitimacy of AI use.

Overall, this study concludes that spiritual leadership is a relevant and important approach in supporting sustainable AI-based workplace transformation. Spiritual leadership does not reject technological progress, but rather directs its utilization to remain aligned with human values and organizational ethics.

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