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Exploring the Intersections of Authentic and Servant Leadership: A Systematic Literature Review across Sectors (2020-2025)

Mohd Zulkeflee Abd Razak

Department of Management, UNITEN Business School (UBS), Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Kampus Putrajaya, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Corresponding author: zulkeflee@uniten.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review (SLR) reviews the evolution of leadership from hierarchical theories to moral models that include authenticity, ethics, and connection. The review focuses on Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL). It reviews twenty empirical and conceptual articles (2020–2025) studying the health industry, education, energy, and public administration guided by the PRISMA framework. The synthesis examines theoretical foundations, methodology, results, and gaps in the research. The results demonstrate significant differences between Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL) in their approaches to building trust, psychological empowerment, moral objectives, and structural resilience. AL emphasizes self-awareness and transparency in the person of the leader, making trust important, while SL focuses on humility, servanthood, and growth in the followers. These two paradigms help address various factors that contribute to eliminating burnout, enhancing personal engagement, and promoting organizational civic behaviors (OCB). The issues brought to light are often based on contextual and cultural factors that are especially evident in Islamic and collective cultures, which mandate the need for a hybrid model of leadership. The study concludes with an integrative model of Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL) designed to facilitate sustainable organizational transformation and guide the formation of goals related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, which focuses on Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 16, which emphasizes Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership; Servant Leadership; Ethical Leadership; Employee Engagement; Psychological Empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the most examined yet fluid concepts in organizational behaviour. Its traditional conceptualization, which is based on power, control, and transactions, has gradually changed to relational, ethical, and human-centric paradigms. This has occurred in conjunction with a larger socio-economic shift in which organizations are expected to not only satisfy their performance targets but also to have moral integrity, inclusiveness, and sustainability (Avolio et al, 2009). Within this enlarged family of positive leadership theories, Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL) have joined ranks primarily because they share an emphasis on morality, humility, and purpose. Authentic Leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; George, 2003) refers to self-awareness, transparent relational behaviour, balanced processing, and a solidified internalized moral perspective. Relatedly, authentic leaders are genuine, consistent, and motivated by internal values that promote ethical decision-making and trust. In contrast, Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2010) centres upon its members through a focus of concern and service for the others. A servant leader will look to develop their followers and improve their growth while promoting an agenda of community benefit rather than boosting the leader out of self-concern. Both leadership paradigms contest the earlier transactional and transformational models of leaders by focusing on the identity of the leader rather than the actions of the leadership (Eva et al., 2019). New studies indicate that AL and SL share many values that overlap, such as humility, empathy, and moral obligation. In education, authentic leaders will further enhance the trust-based efficacy of teachers (Baștea et al., 2024). Servant Leadership in health care will reduce burnout and enhance compassion of those in the following nurse-positions, with their basic service toward others first (Khan et al., 2025). The common values have also resonated with themes of responsible organizations and Islamic leadership. For example, the common theme of grounding in ethics and moral service is reflected in the epistemology of AL and SL (Madadha, 2024; Cyfert et al., 2022).

Despite conceptual similarities, there are differences of fit. Authentic Leadership is carved from the theories of self-regulation and psychological capital (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), with the emphasis on leaders motivating themselves through their internal moral compass. In contrast Servant Leadership finds root in ancient moral philosophy (Greenleaf, 1977) and altruism, where the themes of follower development and community transformation are of first importance. Indeed, recent scholarship consistently highlights the emergence of congruency aspects, demonstrating their ability to coexist and collaborate at a higher level. For example, leaders who are authentic in knowing themselves learn how to serve better overall, and leaders that serve others at a higher level become more authentic through reflection and empathy. While AL and SL are based on different schools of thought, specifically, AL is grounded in positive psychology, while SL stems from the school of thought in moral philosophy, both share a focus on improving trust, psychological safety, and the ethical climate of organizations. Multiple studies have shown that AL provides transparency, engagement, and organizational trust, while SL has demonstrated decreased burnout, increased compassion, and improved organizational citizenship behaviours (Eva et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2025). These forms of leadership have been especially meaningful in education, healthcare, and public administration contexts, where issues dealing with ethical behaviour, trust, and human connection matter most.

Though the literature has expanded in recent years, a review of current literature suggests that research related to AL and SL is primarily focused on Western contexts, creating a cultural bias and substantial gaps in terms of applicability and relevance in countries with Muslim majority or in Asian contexts more generally (Hoch et al. 2020; Newman et al. 2020). Indeed,

a fair amount of literature assumes individualistic cultural orientations (e.g., low power distance, autonomy, self-expression, etc.) that do not represent collectivist, relationship-focused, and spirituality or faith-based attributes of Asian/Islamic contexts (Nguyen et al, 2020; Ali & Gibbs, 2021). It is these cultural attributes, such as the behaviours associated with perception, authority and relationship building, that underline how people followers or leaders are perceived, how authority is exercised, and how trust is established. There is recent literature that has demonstrated how values such as amanah (trustworthiness), adl (justice), ihsan (excellence), and communal harmony (a central theme in Islamic, Asian values), have significant conceptual similarities to AL and SL, yet empirical evidence in studies of leadership literature is limited (Afsar et al, 2020; Al Halbusi et al, 2022). In addition, expectations of leadership in Asia also tend to align with relational humility, collective welfare, and moral responsibility components that also mirror Servant Leadership, while those values may be expressed differently within cultural contexts (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2023).

In a post-pandemic environment marked by emotional exhaustion, moral disillusionment, and hybrid organizational dynamics, blending AL and SL offers a sustainable leadership approach grounded in human well-being. Nevertheless, literature remains fragmented, particularly in cross-disciplinary applications and non-Western contexts. This review, therefore, seeks to consolidate theoretical and empirical evidence on AL and SL to address three central questions:

1. What are the key theoretical and conceptual intersections between Authentic Leadership and Servant Leadership?
2. How have empirical studies demonstrated their impact across various sectors?
3. What gaps remain for future research and leadership practice?

This systematic literature review contributes to scholarship in leadership by providing an integrative framework that links authenticity and service through psychological empowerment, ethical consciousness, and organizational well-being, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8 and SDG 16), and which promotes ethical, inclusive and sustainable organizational cultures.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

One can summarize the evolution of leadership studies over the last century as a gradual shift from power-based models to ethical and humanitarian ones. Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL) are two of the most momentous events experienced in this transformation of values. Both are values-driven, morality-based, and follower-enhancing constructs opposed to the traditional authoritarian and transactional avenues of leadership.

Authentic Leadership arose from the conviction that ethical alternatives to transformational leadership were necessary after the corporate scandals of the early part of the decade (2000). “Authentic Leadership” was first proposed by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and has four basic components; self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. These four basic dimensions are consistent with aspects of values-based humanistic psychology and self-determination theory, in that they espouse leadership characterized by authenticity and sustained behaviour consistent with one’s true self (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The genuine leader attempts to improve the psychological safety of the organization and establishes a development culture that mirrors values that align with open communication, trust, and commitment (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Scholars argued that AL

supports long-term integrity of organizations, especially in climates of ethical tension or institutional distrust (Hoch et al., 2020).

Servant Leadership was proposed by Greenleaf (1977) and is based on the concept that leaders exist above all else to serve others. Spears (2010) expanded on Greenleaf's work and listed ten basic characteristics of Servant Leadership, among which are empathy, listening, stewardship, and community building. The focus of the Servant Leader is altruistic, concerned more with the growth and well-being of followers than in personal aggrandizement, etc. Eva et al. (2019) maintain that the enduring impact of Servant Leadership concept results from the humility, moral bravery, and commitment to the common good on the part of the Servant Leader.

AL and SL develop from opposites, but the two philosophies represented are converging. They are both perspectives focusing on ethical behaviour, authenticity, and social responsibility. AL emphasizes internal integrity, whereas SL is concerned with the external orientation of the leader. The two together, however, produce a leadership paradigm that incorporates the best of both in a model that represents a combination of internal awareness and selflessness. The synergy is truly great to identify a clear directional focus on the leaders of complex organizations recognized for their multiculturalism (Lemoine et al., 2019). There is recent evidence that SL can be regarded as culturally flexible within collectivist cultures that value harmony and group accountability (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2023).

Theoretical Convergence and Divergence

While there are many conceptual similarities between Authentic and Servant Leadership, they diverge in the source of their motivation and their orientation. Authentic Leadership originates with the leader's internal moral compass and self-awareness; the complexities of the leader's integrity and personal beliefs shape how relationships are formed and trust is developed. Authentic leaders, display behaviours, exhibit transparency, make decisions based on values, and build trust in their meaningful relationships through reliability and openness. Conversely, Servant Leadership originates in an external direction, prioritizing the needs of the follower or the well-being of the community or the better good of all over the leader's self-interest. Servant Leadership is inherently altruistic, guided by service, compassion, and elevating and helping others. Conceptually both paradigms value ethical behaviours, empathy, and empowering followers, but their motivational sources diverge:

1. AL is motivated by internal authenticity and moral self-regulation.
2. SL is motivated by outward compassion and service to others.

Although the study of authentic and servant leadership is new, empirical studies have shown that that exhibit similar organizational outcomes when displayed together, including increased trust, psychological safety, ethical climates, employee engagement, decreased burnout (Baștea et al., 2024; Dinwiddie, 2022; Khan et al., 2025). Their convergence is reflected in both being founded in a desire to do morally and become morally better, while their divergence lies in the start point of the leader's behavioural orientation.

Cross-Sector Applications in Education, Healthcare, Energy and Public Administration

Recent investigations have demonstrated the relevance of AL and SL in a variety of fields. In the area of education, AL has been subject to some limited investigation. AL has been associated with improved morale, transparency, and efficacy (Baștea et al., 2024); for instance, the authors examined rural leaders in Romania and reported that those who exhibited AL attributes were able to foster teacher confidence and relational trust. SL has also been

investigated in an educational context. A study showed that SL school principals fostered inclusive learning environments and authentic relationships with the community (Dinwiddie, 2022). In healthcare, where emotional labour and burnout are normative aspects of a professional life, SL has been an effective response. For example, Khan et al. (2025) showed it was the leader's servanthood that was positively associated with lower levels of burnout and psychological well-being (notably higher when expressive transformational behaviours were also present that facilitated shared meaning and collaboration). The energy sector is a new emerging space for hybrid leadership; mixing responsibility, authenticity, and service, which are increasingly relevant attributes for organizational leaders (Cyfert et al., 2022). The authors found that responsible leadership, an approach tangential to both AL and SL, was positively associated with enhancement in workforce agility through psychological empowerment. Responsible leadership demonstrates the relevance of ethical leadership in rapidly changing and extremely high-risk environments. In public administration, an Islamic leadership model was developed based on the Islamic principles of amanah (trust), adl (justice), and rahmah (compassion) (Madadha, 2024). The Islamic leadership model is congruent with AL and SL leadership paradigms. The values and beliefs in performance driven by moral and service orientation strongly resonate with the Muslim-majority context. Leadership is often a moral obligation and communal responsibility in both faith and community. For all of these contexts, there is a pattern of leaders that practice authentic or servant, or both, providing trust, purpose, ethical culture, and sustainability in organizations.

Application of AL and SL in Non-Western Contexts

It has been recently documented that there is a lack of research on leadership that addresses the manifestations of authentic leadership (AL) and servant leadership (SL) in contexts that are Asian and Muslim-majority. AL and SL map closely with Islamic values such as amanah (trustworthiness), adl (justice), rahmah (compassion) and ihsan (excellence), however, there is a gap in the literature (e.g., Afsar et al., 2020; Al Halbusi et al., 2022). These studies point out that Asian cultures, which values collectivism, relational harmony and high-power distance, potentially conceive authenticity, humility, or service differently than research conducted in western contexts. For example, Nguyen, et al. (2020) found that in Vietnam, authentic leadership is influenced by collectivism associated with family and the expectation that individuals have interpersonal obligation to one another, rather than individual self-expression. Similarly, Newman et al. (2020) showed that servant leadership is constructively debated as a culturally legitimate way of leadership within high-context Asian societies because the expectation is for the leader to guide, protect, and care for followers.

Emerging Constructs and Mediators Influencing AL and SL Outcomes

Recent empirical research highlights numerous psychological and behavioural mediators through which Authentic and Servant Leadership affect organizational outcomes. Psychological empowerment, as explained by Spreitzer (1995), is the primary mediator that can enrich employees with a sense of autonomy, competence, and purpose. The provision of trust and relational transparency as per Walumbwa et al. (2008) yields psychological safety and open communication, which enhance the level of team affiliation and team endurance. Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) furthers how these styles of leadership can impact organizational functioning, as employees can often correspond to moral realms by way of delivering of discretionary effort which goes beyond the formal confines of their job descriptions considered as morally or uplifting and empowering leadership styles (Eva et al., 2019) Spiritual well-being, specifically for faith-based organizations, can be seen as both relevant and another behavioural mediator that interlinks the inner authenticity of the individual

with transcendent moral dispositional thought (The Cinderella of Positive Psychology, 2023). These things considered as mediators can give insight as to how Authentic and Servant Leadership can enhance performance outcomes and additionally the psychological and ego well-being of employees in so much as it strengthens the credentials of paradigms of leadership concerned with human service for modernity.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 framework, a method used to provide accountability, structure, and replicability of the review. The SLR consisted of four stages of systematic and structured review of the literature on Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL), published from 2020 to 2025, with 2020 and 2025 representing any articles that were published during the given years. The four stages were identification, screening, determining eligibility, and confirming inclusion in the review process.

A search strategy was devised to capture the full scope of scholarship across academic disciplines in relation to AL and SL. Four major databases underwent a search: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Each database search included multiple searches utilizing standard keywords and combinations of keywords and Boolean operators. The terms 'Authentic Leadership' and 'Servant Leadership' were combined with other keywords, related to ethics, trust, psychological empowerment, employee engagement, and organisational outcomes, to capture a robust selection of articles. Boolean expressions such as 'Authentic Leadership' OR 'Servant Leadership' AND ethic* OR trust OR "psychological empowerment" were used in Scopus, and to link various leadership constructs with organisational outcomes, a topic search function was used in Web of Science to conduct the searches. Due to the larger search coverage, Google Scholar searches employed simplified strings of "(authentic leadership or servant leadership) and (employee) and (empirical) and (2020...2025)", while searches in ScienceDirect were limited to only include leadership published in or after 2019. Utilising this methodology maximised the selection of articles from 2020 to 2025 that addressed the topic of interest and methodological quality of research studies included in the dataset.

The articles selected for review went through primary filtering using a structured approach of inclusion and exclusion criteria as in Table 1. The review included reported empirical studies that utilized a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method research design that addressed an idea of Authentic Leadership, Servant Leadership, or a Student Leadership model. Studies published from 2020 to 2025 were included to reflect the most recent developments of theoretical understanding and the movement to ethical and human-centred leadership in the post-pandemic era. The review included English published studies found in either peer-reviewed journals or as a doctoral dissertation to maintain an academic level of quality and remove potential errors with translation. Non-empirical studies, such as conceptual discussions, opinion essays, and commentary articles were excluded. Additionally, studies published prior to 2020, articles for investigations of AL or SL, articles not in English, and conference abstracts without full empirical data were filtered out. All of these filters enhanced the clarity of a theoretical concept and levels of methodological reliability, supporting the evidence of the quality of the study.

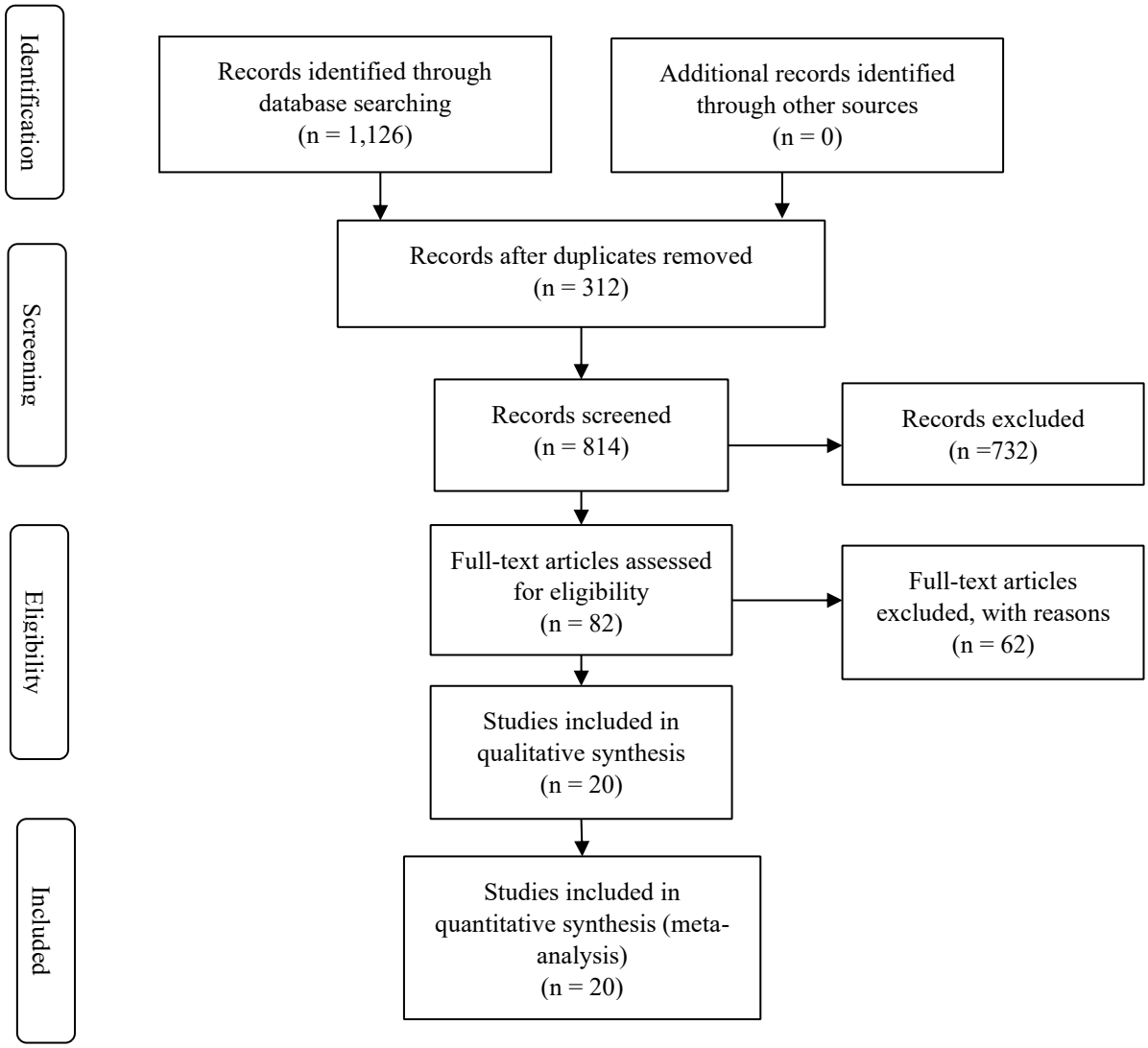
Table 1
Inclusion and Exclusion

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed method)	Opinion papers, essays, commentary articles
Published between 2020–2025	Studies published before 2020
Focus on Authentic Leadership, Servant Leadership, or integrated leadership models	Studies unrelated to AL or SL
English-language publications	Non-English articles
Peer-reviewed journal articles or dissertations	Conference abstracts without full data

The application of the above-mentioned and more purposeful filtering of studies followed the PRISMA flow process to document the progress of the article selection (Figure 1). The study's first database search resulted in 1,126 records. This number was filtered by removing 312 articles to identify the remaining 814 records to review title also, to include title and abstract screening. Of the 814 studies, 732 were excluded for not meeting the relevance or methodology inclusion criteria; this leaves 82 studies reviewed for full text examination. The intensity of the filtering continued with 62 studies being excluded for relevance, conceptual misalignment of data, and lower levels of methodological certitude. In total, 20 studies met eligibility criteria for detailed synthesis. The systematic use of the PRISMA flow process supported transparency and accuracy for evaluating the systematic review. To ensure the quality assurance of the studies considered in the review, a rigorous quality appraisal was undertaken, based on PRISMA-oriented criteria. Each study was assessed on the clarity of the research problem or problems, the appropriateness of the study design, its evidence of reliability and validity or quality of measurement, clarity around data collection and data analysis procedures, and the existence of any ethical considerations. Only studies that exhibited a strong methodological rigor (or typically scored between 70-100%) were considered for the review (study) while studies that did not exhibit any empirical robustness were not included in the review. By undertaking this quality appraisal, we ensured the findings that were synthesized as part of the review reflected a sufficiently robust evidence base.

PRISMA Flow Process

Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Article Selection Process



Data extraction and analysis was completed through an inductive thematic synthesis approach. Each study was reviewed for context, methodological orientation, theoretical approach, variables of interest, and important findings. Thematic coding commenced using the steps with a scripted approach characterised by Braun and Clarke (2006) that began with familiarisation with studies through multiple readings, followed by open coding of studies to identify meaningful, sense-making concepts. Codes and generated information were later grouped into corresponding higher conceptual clusters reflecting what was effectively identified in the studies or that evidenced bonding, linking, recurring patterns and themes across the included studies. Themes or category clusters were then reframed and refined into higher-order themes that captured the contributions of the literature: The moral and ethical epistemological bases of leadership, the role of authenticity and trust, follower agency-centred empowerment processes that occurred through Servant Leadership [role of followers], and how cultural, and contextual dynamics shape and inform leadership practice. As a mechanism to strengthen coding rigour we had one evaluator independently review the higher order themes for consistency and bias.

The decision to apply a five-year cut-off on studies between 2020-2025 was intentional. COVID-19 fundamentally altered expectations for organisational leadership, which elevated authenticity, empathy, transparency, and moral obligation as an ever-increasing contemporary issue in the leadership discourse. The addition of the digital transformation regarding working relationships and hybrid working arrangements, as well as the increasing diversity of workforce within global organisations during this time added a layer of contemporary relevance and nuances to the most recent research on contemporary leadership. Selecting studies from a five-year cut-off ensured that research of the most recent leading understandings and insights captured contemporary leadership issues in workplaces today.

Overall, the method applied in this study offers a rigorous, reflective, and reparable way of synthesising contemporary evidence of Authentic Leadership and Servant Leadership contributing to a strong recount of Critical Discourse of the theories, cultural consideration, and practice of each theory across various leadership and this offers a reconsideration of practice in sectors.

Theoretical Frameworks Observed

The studies reviewed were based upon a number of well-known frameworks. These included Authentic Leadership Theory introduced by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and validated by Walumbwa et al. (2008) which grounds the principles of self-awareness and moral character of leadership, Servant Leadership Theory proposed by Greenleaf (1977) and enhanced by Spears (2010) which is the basis for explorations of altruism and follow their development, Positive Organizational Behaviour (Luthans & Avolio, 2003) giving it a psychological basis, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) explaining the reciprocity of trust and loyalty between leader and follower and theories on the moral and ethical basis of leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006) which fit well with these theories by emphasising the ethical basis of leadership behaviour. Recent studies such as Cyfert et al. (2022) and Madadha (2024) have presented hybrid models for responsible and Islamic leadership that localize these models to a non-Western culture.

RESULTS

The final sample as summarized in Table 2, consisted of 20 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025, which reported on studies in the fields of education, healthcare, public administration, energy, and faith or pastoral settings. All of the studies explored the effects of Authentic Leadership (AL), Servant Leadership (SL), or combinations of moral leadership on psychological, behavioural, and organizational outcomes. All of the studies identified statistically significant positive correlations between both leadership styles with regard to trust, engagement, empowerment, ethical climate, and burnout. Differences were also reported by sector, with some constructs being emphasized in some sectors above others.

Table 2
Final sample of 20 Empirical Studies Published between 2020 and 2025

No.	Author(s)	Year	Country	Methods	Findings
1.	Baștea, Catalano & Puie	2024	Romania	Quantitative survey design	AL improved teacher confidence, trust, and relational climate.
2.	Dinwiddie	2022	USA	Qualitative phenomenology	SL fostered inclusion, student engagement, and equitable practice.
3.	Khan, Naz & Gul	2025	Pakistan	Quantitative (survey)	SL significantly reduced burnout and improved resilience.
4.	Cyfert et al.	2022	Poland	Quantitative	Psychological empowerment mediates leadership to agility relationship.
5.	Madadha	2024	Jordan	Mixed methods	Amanah, adl, rahmah align with AL and SL.
6.	Faisal et al.	2023	Pakistan	Quantitative	Trust and safety mediate SL lead to well-being.
7.	Legutko	2020	Poland	Quantitative survey	AL increased trust, creativity, and ethical climate.
8.	de Jager Meezenbroek et al.	2023	Netherlands	Quantitative	Spiritual well-being mediates authentic leadership effects.
9.	Eva et al.	2019	Global	SLR	SL fosters sustainable moral climates.
10.	Ali & Gibbs	2021	Middle Eastern Muslim Organisations	Qualitative	Islamic values parallel AL and SL.
11.	(Adjunct Faculty Study)	2023	USA	Qualitative	Need for authentic institutional support.
12.	Kuntari & Novitasari	2022	Indonesia	Quantitative	AL increased engagement.
13.	DeBoer, J., Hora, M., & Korte, R.	2021	USA	Mixed method	Early exposure to leadership concepts cultivates stronger identity formation, confidence, and professional readiness.
14.	Potts, J. R., & Cunningham, C.	2023	USA	Qualitative thematic analysis	Physicians experience identity strain when servant leadership expectations conflict with hierarchical medical culture.
15.	Dafouz, E., Ruiz, M., & Valenzuela, A.	2020	Spain	Quantitative survey across SMEs.	SL positively influenced internal organisational satisfaction, which indirectly improved external performance.
16.	Wong, T.	2021	USA	Conceptual theological analysis.	Human dignity and spiritual values shape moral leadership behaviour and strengthen organisational commitment.
17.	Firdiansyah, S., & Prasetyo, B.	2020	Indonesia	Quantitative survey	SL improves safety communication, accountability, and employee safety behaviour.
18.	Bersabal, B. G.	2021	Philippines	Qualitative interviews	Teachers formed stronger value-driven leadership identities rooted in service and reflection.
19.	Dinwiddie, J. D.	2021	USA	Quantitative	Positive leadership practice correlates with improved student achievement.
20.	Abun, D., Julian, F. P., & Apollo, E.	2023	Philippines	Quantitative	Ethical leadership significantly increases motivation and performance.

Baștea et al. (2024) reported on a quantitative study with Romanian rural schools, which illustrated that Authentic Leadership contributed to teacher morale, confidence, and professional efficacy by enabling relational transparency and self-awareness. Dinwiddie (2022) utilized a qualitative phenomenological design in U.S. K-8 schools that explored how Servant Leadership by principals promoted inclusion, collaboration, and culturally responsive school climates. Khan et al. (2025) studied healthcare workers from Pakistan and found that Servant Leadership was associated with reductions in burnout and increased psychological well-being, particularly when combined with transformational behaviours. Cyfert et al. (2022) explored post-secondary institutions within the energy sector and found that responsible leadership, which is a synthesis of elements of AL and SL promoted workforce agility through psychological empowerment. Madadha (2024) researched a public administration context in Jordan using a conceptual and empirical mixed methods approach. Madadha introduced an Islamic leadership model that was founded on amanah, adl, and rahmah, and was compatible with aspects of both Authentic and Servant leadership.

Outside of education and healthcare, Faisal et al. (2023) reported on a service organization and found that trust and psychological safety mediated the relationship between Servant Leadership and employee well-being. Legutko (2020) indicated that AL promoted creativity, organizational trust and professional integrity in European organizations. In their systematic review, Eva et al. (2019) noted that SL was long-term sustainable because of its moral courage and values that served the community at large. De Jager Meezenbroek et al. (2023) study relates to work within pastoral environments and indicates that spiritual wellbeing is a critical mechanism in connecting authentic leadership behaviour with follower flourishing. In addition, a few studies that were conducted in Islamic schools, universities, and public organizations have indicated that ethicality, spirituality, and moral dimensions are often, and naturally, connected with pillars of both AL and SL (Ali & Gibbs, 2021; Al Halbusi et al., 2022).

Combined, most studies used a quantitative design (45%), followed by qualitative (35%), and mixed methods (20%). Finally, the consistency of high trust, empowerment, diminished burnout and a positive ethical climate across all settings further justified the applicability of both styles of leadership across sectors.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that both Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL) maintain a common ethical foundation, while producing outcomes via different motivational pathways. The studies reviewed indicate that AL primarily impacts organizational results using internal mechanisms such as self-awareness, transparency, and moral authority, which develop trust and psychological safety for followers (Baștea et al., 2024; Legutko, 2020). On the other hand, SL, accounts for results through external mechanisms to followers' needs, humility, and empowerment, which in turn improves emotional wellness while reducing occupational stress (Khan et al., 2025; Dinwiddie, 2022).

Cross-Sector Comparison Strengthened

The comparison of impacts across sectors indicated important differences. In education, AL was especially useful to enhance relational trust and teachers' professionalism (Baștea et al., 2024) while SL aided in the development of inclusive school cultures and community engagement (Dinwiddie, 2022). In healthcare, SL showed a more substantial influence than AL, partially due to the emotional labour and possibility of burnout that is inherent throughout

the sector (Khan et al., 2025). In the energy sector, AL/SL hybrid leadership composed of responsible leadership showed to enhance agility and adaptability in high-stress and rapidly changing environments (Cyfert et al., 2022). In the context of Muslim public-sector leaders, a variety of Islamic ethical constructs were strongly aligned with both AL and SL, suggesting a potential for cultural relevance of moral leadership through trust, justice, compassion, and service (Madadha, 2024; Al Halbusi et al., 2022).

Linking Claims Directly to Studies

Each outcome identified in the review is explicitly supported by empirical evidence:

1. Trust was consistently improved by AL in education (Baștea et al., 2024) and corporate settings (Legutko, 2020).
2. Psychological safety was enhanced under both AL (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and SL (Faisal et al., 2023).
3. Burnout reduction was uniquely strong under SL in healthcare (Khan et al., 2025).
4. Empowerment mediated outcomes in the energy sector via responsible leadership (Cyfert et al., 2022).
5. Employee engagement improved under both AL and SL (Dinwiddie, 2022; Faisal et al., 2023).
6. Spiritual well-being emerged as a distinctive mediator in pastoral environments (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2023).

These results support the ethical nature and effectiveness of both AL and SL but imply that their effectiveness varies depending on the nature of the job demands, cultural contexts, and emotional engagement of the work. The evidence suggests that AL is particularly effective in contexts that call for transparency, ethical decision-making, and the establishment of professional trust, whereas SL is more effective in emotionally demanding contexts that require care, empathy, and resilience. The observation that both AL & SL converge on whether and how to engage in ethical behaviour in both Islamic and Asian cultural contexts suggest a strong cultural compatibility where leaders are expected to not only act ethically, but to serve their communities in the spirit of ethical behaviour.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Nonetheless, despite the expanding body of literature on this topic, there are several major gaps that remain. One major gap is the lack of integrative models, specifically a single theoretical model, to empirically test the relationship between AL and SL. Most of the studies undertaken have dealt with Western or specific Asian cultures (Korea), so there is little research data available on African and Middle Eastern cultures. Additionally, there is a significant lack of compatibility regarding the measures used for the constructs, such as the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) compared to the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ). Furthermore, this incompatibility hampers comparability. Finally, many studies have used cross-sectional designs, making it somewhat difficult to evaluate the long-run effect of AL and SL. Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed designs, specifically PLS-SEM, so that these models can be validated for integrated frameworks for authentic leadership, servant leadership and the concept of sustainability.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Contribution

This discussion suggests that Authentic and Servant Leadership offer a cohesive ethical framework that incorporates personal authenticity with service outwardly directed. When combined, these theories produce a holistic construct, which we term "Authentic Servant Leadership," characterized by self-awareness, humility and moral conviction. This synthesis relates the psychological antecedents of authenticity to the moral philosophy of service and illustrates that responsible leadership is the mediating construct that relates both variables. Therefore, while the specific idioms employed may differ, notice is taken of the cultural and spiritual aspects regarding Islamic leadership and by doing so it is possible to prove that this integrated model is flexible by being applicable in various cultural nuances worldwide.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, institutions should prioritize leadership development programs that instill values such as authenticity, empathy, and empowerment. Training programs should foster ethical awareness and reflection so that leaders can connect their personal philosophies to the missions of their institutions. Management programs based on empathy can boost trust, reduce burnout, and promote better well-being, while initiatives based on empowerment can bring a spirit of innovation and accountability. When all of these values are promoted as part of a corporation’s overall goals for ESG and SDG, leadership can be involved in not only performance but also broader societal improvement.

Policy and SDG Alignment

Authentic and Servant Leadership directly support SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting humane and empowering cultures in workplace environments. At the same time, they reinforce SDG 16 by cultivating ethical governance, transparency, and institutional trust. When embedded in organizational policy, these two leadership approaches encourage inclusion, ethical stewardship, and sustainable prosperity.

CONCLUSION

The recent systematic review analysed twenty empirical and conceptual articles published since 2020 and makes contributions towards understanding the overlap, similarities and differences between the two leadership constructs Authentic Leadership (AL) and Servant Leadership (SL) across sectors and cultural contexts. What emerged from this review was a finding that is consistent: both leadership theory and practice levels generate trust, safety, ethics, follower empowerment, and improvements to the overall organisation. However, while AL achieves this through self-awareness, moral character and transparency in the relationships that leaders build with their followers, SL utilises humility, compassion and recognition of followers' needs ahead of the leaders'. While both styles systemically work from a different motivation for their followers internally in AL, or from externally motivated service for SL, both converge on ethical practice, ethical obligation and human centred leadership. At the same time this systematic review illustrates that sectoral differences matter, e.g, AL appears especially effective in the educational and corporate sectors where authentic and ethically consistent input is valued by stakeholders, while SL appears to clearly exist with context specifically in

healthcare, service industries, and in pastoral situations where emotional labour, care, and relationship of human connection are present.

There are limitations to this review. First, the analysis is drawn from only the twenty articles, and while diverse in context, may only represent a small sample of the overall empirical work examining AL and SL. Second, the time period of publication 2020-2025 is limited and reflective of the global pandemic and significant re/organising of routine work sent in motion through the pandemic. Admittedly, this time frame would lend itself to the most contemporary evidence to review, however there are empirical studies that are foundational to our understanding of concepts and which could help further integration theoretically pre-dating the most recent publishing period .In the final analysis, it should be noted that the review included only English language articles and this potentially limited a broader insight to needed research conducted in non-English speaking Asian, Middle Eastern, or African contexts where moral and spiritual leadership is very important. There were also limitations to the generalizability of findings due to the variances of study design, methodological tools, and definitional concepts across articles, which suggests a heterogeneity limitation meaning the findings may not be completely trusted.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the implications of the findings remain important in terms of leadership development especially in Asian and Islamic organizational contexts. Both concepts of leadership were found to be congruent with positive leader, act and socially responsible principles and behaviours inter-related in these cultures, such as humility, a positive reliance of the good of family and community welfare, justice (*adl*), trustworthiness *(amanah*), compassion (*rahmah*) and moral accountability. Therefore, professional organizations that primarily serve a Muslim and broader Asian populace can be encouraged to purposively add principles of Authentic and Servant Leadership into their current and future leadership training and capacity-building programming. For example, leadership development programs may consist of a greater focus on self-reflection, ethical reasoning, community service, and relational transparency, all of which would further resonate with cultural expectations about moral leadership. Additionally, the synergies of both Authentic and Servant Leadership with Islamic teachings in leadership suggests that leadership training based on morality could credibly add integrative evidence-based practices from both leadership approaches. Working in multicultural Asian workplaces, the partnership of authentic behaviour to behaviours associated with a service-orientation could contribute to building inclusive, trust and ultimately social-responsible organizations.

In summary, the review illustrates that Authentic and Servant Leadership continue to have important practical, ethical and cultural relevance as two credible leadership frameworks that can effectively contribute to building modern organizations, especially in Asian and Islamic contexts. Future research could focus on exploring outside of the Western context, be multilingual, and highlight hybrid models of leadership that encompass Authentic and Servant Leadership behaviours, ethics and spiritual practice. These attentiveness's would support further theoretical building and effective culturally appropriate humanising leadership practices internationally.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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