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Abstract:

Purpose - The current challenges to traditional business practices increasingly involve spirituality. However, existing literature on spiritual leadership (SL) has not been used to date for obtaining a better understanding of why and how knowledge sharing (KS) occurs in organisations, particularly from the perspective of social dilemmas and work compassion. This paper aims to examine whether SL, through fostering experiences of compassion at work, leads followers to share knowledge prosocially in the workplace.

Design/methodology/approach - We conceptualise KS as a social dilemma that leads followers to share knowledge rather than selfishly succumbing to the temptation to withhold it for short-term benefits. We hypothesise that SL cultivates experiences of compassion at work, which acts as a mediator that explains how and why SL encourages KS. We propose a model that includes a unique higher-order construct of SL assessed using Fry’s 17-item scale. Data were collected from a sample of 384 leaders and their followers from 14 manufacturing and service companies in India and analysed using structural equation modelling.

Findings - The results revealed significant relationships between SL, KS, and compassion at work. Notably, compassion mediated the relationship between SL and KS. Findings suggest that SL encourages employees to engage KS, cultivating a compassionate work environment. This discourages them from succumbing to the selfish, individualistic, or uncooperative temptations to withhold knowledge for short-term benefits.

Originality/value - This study demonstrates a novel relationship between SL and compassion, as well as a relationship between SL and prosocial KS in which compassion at work acts as a mediator.

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Does Spiritual Leadership Foster Pro-Social Knowledge Sharing in the Workplace? A Social Dilemma Perspective

Purpose: The current challenges to traditional business practices increasingly involve spirituality. However, existing literature on spiritual leadership (SL) has not been used to date for obtaining a better understanding of why and how knowledge sharing (KS) occurs in organisations, particularly from the perspective of social dilemmas and work compassion. This paper aims to examine whether SL, through fostering experiences of compassion at work, leads followers to share knowledge prosocially in the workplace.

Design/Methodology/Approach: We conceptualise KS action as the result of a social dilemma whereby followers decide to share knowledge rather than selfishly succumb to the temptation to withhold it for short-term gain. We hypothesise that SL cultivates experiences of compassion at work, which acts as a mediator that explains how and why SL encourages KS. We propose a model that includes a unique higher-order construct of SL assessed using Fry’s 17-item scale. Data were collected from a sample of 384 leaders and their followers from 14 manufacturing and service companies in India and analysed using structural equation modelling.

Findings: The results revealed significant relationships between SL, KS, and compassion at work. Notably, compassion mediated the relationship between SL and KS. Findings suggest that SL encourages employees to engage KS, cultivating a compassionate work environment. This discourages them from succumbing to the selfish, individualistic, or uncooperative temptations to withhold knowledge for short-term benefits.

Originality/Value: This study demonstrates a novel relationship between SL and compassion, as well as a relationship between SL and prosocial KS in which compassion at work acts as a mediator.

“All that is not shared is lost,” from Rigveda (Sanskrit: “The Knowledge of Verses”), a spiritual book of Hinduism composed around 1500 BCE.

Introduction

In the 21st century, technological advances and economic shifts have rendered traditional socioeconomic paradigms insufficient for meeting basic human needs. This situation extends beyond financial considerations. Increasingly, individuals are finding traditional paradigms rooted in societal consumerist principles (Tennent, 2006) inadequate for achieving inner peace and life satisfaction, even in the face of substantial business remuneration (Mehta & Joshi, 2000). Consequently, workplaces are turning to spirituality (from the Latin “Spiritus”: courage, encouragement, and energy) as a source of psychological relief for employees and a way of better understanding their motivation at work (Pargament & Exline, 2021).

One theory that aligns with these challenges is Fry’s (2003) Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT). This theory seeks to transform organisations by promoting green creativity, psychological safety, and innovative work behaviour (Hussain et al., 2023; Yasin et al., 2023; Usmanova et al., 2018) through ethical values, interpersonal connections, as well as a deeper sense of purpose in the workplace. It posits that effective leaders must consider not only the practical and emotional aspects of their followers but also their spiritual dimensions.

Knowledge sharing (KS) among employees is a crucial area where spiritual leadership (SL) can manifest as helpful in organisations (Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar, 2016; Carmeli et al., 2011).

Emerging as a key topic for maximising knowledge utilisation, KS processes make “knowledge available to others within the organisation” (Ipe, 2003, p. 341), thus enhancing agency and organisational productivity. It also enables organisations to gain new advantages and increased capacity for action (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Carmeli et al., 2011).

However, due to the intangible nature of knowledge (Desouza, 2003; Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001), traditional business practices driven by obligation and extrinsic rewards may struggle to connect with the increasingly selfless nature of KS (Thomas & Gupta, 2022). Employees are required to participate in KS not solely for personal interest but for the benefit of their peers and the organisation (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Sun et al., 2020; Thomas & Gupta, 2022).

Thus, it is necessary to know whether SL is a strategy capable of encouraging employees to engage in KS from a prosocial standpoint, and, if so, why. Despite previous research (Mishra & Pandey, 2019; Vedula & Agrawal, 2023) highlighting the critical role of leader-follower interactions in fostering KS in the workplace, no study has largely ignored the relationship between SL and KS (Wang et al., 2019). In fact, previous research has only modelled SL and KS together, with KS performing as a mediator (Yasin et al., 2023; Usmanova et al., 2023; Jain, 2023). Furthermore, it is necessary to know the mechanisms that could potentially lead SL to engage in KS from a prosocial perspective. We suggest that compassion, deeply rooted in human spirituality, could play a key role in the SL impact on KS from a prosocial perspective, which is unknown to date. Therefore, we aim to examine if SL truly connects to KS, offering a spiritual solution to the obstacles to employee involvement in KS, and whether workplace compassion explains this connection. To address this gap, this paper constructs an empirical model that portrays employee KS as a dilemma—balancing short-term personal gains against long-term uncertainties. We posit that SL, with its emphasis on interconnectedness and unity, fosters prosocial knowledge sharing rooted in the concept of a social dilemma. As prioritising others and their needs are clear indicators that SL can align with the prosocial nature of KS, we anticipate that compassion at work mediates this SL-KS relationship, thus explaining why SL is able to lead employees to overcome social dilemmas' barriers to KS.

To sum up, we posit the existence of a link between SL and KS by suggesting that SL guides employees towards KS by presenting them with a social dilemma that compels employees to choose between withholding knowledge in order to obtain short-term personal gains or opting for KS for long-term collective benefits, despite the inherent uncertainty in this choice. We also propose that compassion plays a mediating role in the SL-KS relationship. We will examine whether experiences of compassion at work are integral to the mechanisms

underpinning the hypothesised association between SL and KS. Finally, the study explores the theoretical and practical implications, offering a fresh perspective on contemporary KS dynamics.

Literature review and hypotheses

Human Spirituality and the Social Dilemma of Knowledge Sharing

Human spirituality is based on two pillars of self-concept: Ego and Being. Sigmund Freud (1923–1990) described the Ego as a component of the self-concept that develops since young children face challenges in their environment to try protecting themselves. Being is posited as the ontological essence of individuals, and Ego acts as an imaginary psychological shield. As Ken Wilber (1993) wrote, humans tend to substitute and falsely identify themselves with a purely mental or psychic representation of themselves, that is, with their Ego. Maharaj (2008) illustrates Ego liberation by pointing out that if in the face of whatever one perceives when one sees one's reflection in front of a mirror, one cannot really say "I am," one is freed from Ego and what it entails. Unlike the Ego, which fosters 'I', 'me', and 'mine' attitudes of discord in an aim to protect individuals from the environment, often making them to apart, Being ('we' 'our' attitudes) is concerned with recovering unity with others. In fact, various cultures and religious traditions often perceive the Ego as the embodiment of evil, symbolized by the 'devil' (from Latin: 'diabolus,' accuser, slanderer). This paper suggests that this egoic consciousness is the driving force behind employees' promotion of 'me' and 'mine' attitudes, leading them to view knowledge as a personal asset and causing them to face a social dilemma when it comes time to share it. It addresses human selfishness and encourages a shift in KS conception, moving away from Ego-centric patterns to spirituality. In other words, facilitating a state of de-identification with the Ego, Being or their authentic 'I' will guide

individuals to live in increased harmony with peers. This paper thus suggests that spirituality, as it can offer a way to break free from the Ego, may also lead employees to appreciate and wish for the significance of KS for the collective good. In fact, in his philosophy, Aristotle certainly viewed Being as the pursuit of virtue for the good of others. Deep in this social dilemma, therefore, employees can see spirituality as allowing them to recover unity with others and sharing KS as an internal path to awareness of ontological essence (Being) for the greater good.

Fry and Nisiewicz (2020) describe SL as Being-centred leadership that leads followers to supersede their Ego dictatorship through a journey of different levels of knowing and Being. In addition to instilling in them doing (e.g., delivering help) or having (e.g., showing a positive affect), SL fosters the followers to ascend to Level II-Knowing, where they can act from their Being. Fry and Kriger (2009) assimilate this Level II-Knowing with ‘unification’ (Christian Gnosticism), ‘alya vijnana’ or overcoming notions of self vs. non-self (Buddhist), and ‘wu wu’ or ‘keeping The One’ (Taoism) (see also, Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020). At this Level II-Knowing ‘ascent,’ the leader and followers prompt themselves to be spiritual beings that begin to “[...] have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others” and to experience a calling (meeting the meaning of life in serving others), thus putting the focus on “producing a sense of membership [be understood and appreciated]” (Fry, 2003, p. 695). As Meng (2016, p. 411) notes, “[spiritual leaders] may foster cooperation, trust, mutual care, and commitment by developing inspiring vision and mission statements.” Therefore, drawing on Fry’s SLT (2003, 2005, 2008), we hypothesise that the reflection onto followers of the attitudes, values, and behaviours of their spiritual leaders (vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith) creates favourable conditions in the workplace for followers to experience work compassion, and more particularly compassion from their leaders and peers. We argue that, while the Ego leads individuals to be reluctant to engage in KS, by eliciting negative beliefs and discouraging

information sharing, SL may instead introduce prosocial dynamics into individual KS by highlighting the collective ‘Self’. KS can be defined as the exchange of information, ideas, and skills crucial for daily tasks that allow problem-solving and innovation (Ahmad & Karim, 2019; Wang & Noe, 2010).

Various dilemmas hinder KS in organisations (Casimir et al., 2012; Wilkesmann et al., 2009).

The theory of social dilemmas (SD) suggests that in conflicts of interest, employees prioritise individual goals, potentially leading to undesirable long-term consequences for the group (Shank et al., 2015; Škerlavaj et al., 2018; Shultz & Holbrook, 1999). According to this theory, "members of a social group [employees] face options in which selfish, individualistic, or uncooperative decisions [e.g., withholding knowledge] produce undesirable long-term consequences for the group as a whole [e.g., knowledge loss]" (Shultz & Holbrook, 1999, p. 228 [text added]). Employees engaged in KS may view knowledge as a shared resource at risk of loss, grappling with concerns about their knowledge's exclusivity and facing challenges like job security issues and diminished advantages. In this context, KS becomes a SD, forcing employees to opt for individual or collective benefits (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002).

The Role of Spiritual Leadership in Resolving the Knowledge Sharing Dilemma

This paper suggests that SL will favourably resolve the dilemma of whether to share knowledge or not (KS). While there are leadership theories that already emphasise the benefits of fuelling positive social interaction among followers (Xue et al., 2022), SL delves especially into the fundamental reasons for human selfishness. It promotes a lasting transformation towards a new conception of KS, discarding outdated leadership patterns rooted in the narcissism of the Ego (‘me’, and ‘mine’) (Ancona et al., 1999; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020; Moxley, 2000). Therefore, by instilling in followers other-focused beliefs (Göçen & Şen,

2021) and encouraging the prioritisation of collective interests over individual ones, SL could foster prosocial KS behaviour. It is expected that SL prevent employees from neglecting the KS by seeking self-interest (defective behaviour). It is expected that SL will instil beliefs in employees, such as "if we all seek to benefit from knowledge, we will find that each person's benefit is greater" or "even though I may lose knowledge, deciding on KS is the best option." Thus, even at the risk of losing immediate and more certain individual benefits, we hypothesise that SL will instead lead followers to prioritise the common over the individual benefit and, hence, to seek for everyone to enjoy knowledge (cooperative behaviour) by engaging in KS (see Figure 1).

Thus,

Hypothesis 1: Spiritual leaders lead followers to share knowledge to a greater extent.

Spiritual Leadership and the Experience of Compassion at Work

As we have argued in this paper, a workplace embracing SL can lead employees to reach a sense of meaning and purpose at work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Sandra & Nandram, 2020). This spiritual step forward influences daily interactions and decision-making processes, shaping community and promoting mutual support. SL can help transcend individual egos and foster a cooperative and compassionate work environment (Fry, 2003; Meng, 2016). This SL connection can influence daily interactions and decision-making processes, promoting compassionate experiences of mutual support.

Previous research indicates a positive correlation between SL and compassion in the workplace. For example, a study by Sandra & Nandram (2020) found that spiritual leadership was positively related to employee well-being, which could lead to more compassionate

behaviour at work. Another study by Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2005) found that employee interactions and ethically informed business decisions translate into empathetic concern for the workplace. Empathetic concern is a key aspect of compassion at work, which can indicate the existence of a SL-compassion relationship.

Thus,

Hypothesis 2: Spiritual leadership is positively related to compassion at work.

The Mediating Role of Experiencing Compassion at Work

We propose that compassion at work mediates the relationship between SL and KS. We argue, drawing on SLT, that SL expresses KS in a prosocial manner through a compassion-based mechanism. Compassion is often conceptualised as a multi-step process. Kanov et al. (2004) describe a widely used three-step compassion process (noticing, feeling, and responding). For example, a team member involved in a complex project under the guidance of a spiritual leader may experience the impact of their spirituality, which in turn, enhances their ability to perceive and understand the project's obstacles, and motivates them to take action out of compassion to propel the project forward.

Compassion, therefore, involves noticing someone's need, feeling or empathising with their situation, and responding in supportive and helpful ways. By deflating the followers' Egos (Fry, 2003, 2005, 2008; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020), SL allows employees to more easily notice, feel, and respond to the knowledge needs of their peers (Clark, 1997; Frost et al., 2000). For example, a leader may notice that a team member is struggling with a task and empathise with their situation. The leader and their team may ultimately respond by sharing their knowledge and experiences, thereby engaging in Knowledge Sharing (KS) from a

compassionate perspective. This may be because SL enables the leader and their followers to act primarily from Being (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020), thus bringing mindfulness and empathetic concern to the mind, two fundamental pillars that the Being manages to free from the Ego dictatorship. Indeed, employees focused on Being are postulated to be more mindfully engaged (Bishop et al., 2004; Batson, 1994) and, therefore, more capable of noticing the need for KS among their peers. This is because, as Mayer (2000) analyses, spirituality in leadership raises consciousness and awareness. This should lead leaders to be more capable of feeling empathetically concerned and their followers to respond with KS, thus completing Kanov et al.'s (2004) three-step compassion process. Mindfulness, defined as acting "in the present moment and without judging" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 4), plays a fundamental role in the process of compassion, not only in the awareness of the collective need for KS (noticing) but also in the subsequent feeling and responding steps.

Not only does SL facilitate noticing, but it also plays a crucial role in bringing followers to the attention of a deficiency in knowledge and skills among their peers. As a result, it opens the door to responding out of empathetic concern. Certainly, empathetic concern not only involves feeling but responding out of "emotional responses oriented to others, provoked by others, and congruent with the perceived well-being of a person in need" (Batson & Ahmad, 2009, p. 6). According to Gotsis & Grimani (2017), mindfulness plays a crucial role in empathetic concern by facilitating other-oriented emotional responses. For example, an employee might notice that a peer is new to a project and needs help understanding it. The employee, acting from Being, can more easily develop feelings of empathy for the peer's situation and respond by sharing their own knowledge and experience about it.

Because SL is empathically noticing and feeling KS's actions not as business matters but as collective knowledge needs at work, SL may be facilitating followers to complete the compassionate process of Kanov et al. (2004). Therefore, we hypothesise that SL is leading to

KS because compassion at work is acting as a mediator that is making it possible for KS to be performed in a prosocial manner.

Therefore,

Hypothesis 3: Compassion at work mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and knowledge sharing.

Fig. 1

Materials and method

Procedure and sample characteristics

A sample of 384 respondents, consisting of leaders and followers (192 dyads) from 14 manufacturing and service companies across various sectors, provided the data. They comprise employees from India, where spirituality is especially abundant and prevalent in all sectors. Initially, we emailed 742 different English questionnaires to 246 leaders and 496 followers, returning 542 (from 233 leaders and 415 followers) before rejecting 94 (from 13 leaders and 81 followers) as incoherent or incomplete. Before the leaders suggested full-time direct followers as potential respondents, we contacted the followers via email. Because participant disengagement (e.g., careless reading of the guidelines or items) can be a drawback of online data collection, we introduced one trap item in the questionnaires as an attention filter (Ward & Pond, 2015) ("Please choose '7' for this item"). Involvement in the survey was voluntary, and there were no incentives to respond. We assigned an identification code to the leader and follower questionnaires. On that basis, we built paired leader-follower dyads. We scrutinized

the matches to ensure that no followers paired with more than one leader, and no leaders remained unpaired. Ultimately, we collected 192 valid paired dyads for subsequent analysis. We couldn't estimate the response rate because we didn't know how many followers had opened the invitation email.

79.7% of followers were male employees, and 20.3% were female employees, of whom 2.1% were aged 54 or older and 48.4% were aged 25 or under. Furthermore, in terms of sector, firm, and position tenure, 51% of followers had more than two years in the sector, 48% were working in their current firm, and 25.5% were still working in their present position. 76.6% of the respondents had an undergraduate-level education. Regarding the leaders, 1.6% were aged 54 or above, while 12% were aged 25 or under, and all of them worked full time. In addition, 81.2% were male, 18.8% were female, and 53.6% had a doctorate or a master's degree or MBA. The leader respondents' tenure experiences revealed that 63% had spent more than five years in the sector, 58.3% were working in their current organisation, and 12.3% were still in their present position. Lastly, 26.7% of the leaders had an undergraduate-level education.

Measures

Table 1 presents the items that formed part of the seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) used to score levels of SL and compassion. Only the items used for KS behaviour were scored from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Self-reported SL was measured using Fry's (2005) 17-item scale, which was expected to yield three dimensions: vision, hope/faith and altruistic love. Items included: "I understand and am committed to my organisation's vision", "I have faith in my organisation" and "I am willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that it accomplishes its mission". In addition, self-reported compassion experienced by job followers, supervisors and co-workers was measured with separate items from the Lilius *et al.* (2008) scale. KS was measured for items based on the six-item scale

developed by Srivastava *et al.* (2006). A sample item is “I help others in developing relevant strategies”. Lastly, we used gender (1=male, 2=female) and age (1=up to 25 years old; 2=between 25 and 34; 3=between 35 and 44; 4=between 45 and 55; and 5=over 55 years old) as control variables since prior research reported correlations with compassion (Ipe, 2003; López *et al.*, 2018).

The presence of common method variance (CMV) was assessed using post hoc statistical techniques (Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, 2009). In the CFA model, we introduced an unmeasured common factor with a variance of 1, onto which all manifest indicators were loaded. All regression weights were constrained to be equal, resulting in a value of .51. A comparison of the original standardised regression weight estimates with those obtained after the introduction of the unmeasured common factor revealed lower values in the latter. This implies the presence of CMV in our data. However, as the rule of thumb deems differences less than 0.2 tolerable and only two SL items (.272 and .219) exceeded this value, CMV was not a significant issue for the data.

Table 1

Results

Statistical analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS v.24 and AMOS v.22 to conduct structural equation modelling (SEM). Initially, SEM was employed for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table 1 displays the CFA results, wherein the item “My organisation does not punish honest mistakes,” assessing SL (altruistic love), was excluded due to a factor loading below .5. The CFA model with the remaining items exhibited a good fit ($C_{min}=468.396$; $df=342$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.370$; $CFI=.958$; $SRMR=.051$; $RMSEA=.044$), indicating a CFI (comparative-fit

index) above .90, with RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) and SRMR (standardised root mean square residual) indices below .05 and .08, respectively, as recommended (Hair *et al.*, 2019). This supported the uniqueness of the five variables under study (Table 1). Composite reliabilities, ranging from .899 to .762, were well above the standard of .60 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Cronbach’s alphas, ranging from .898 to .761, also surpassed or approached the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978), supporting construct reliability. For convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs ranged from .509 to .639, exceeding the .50 benchmark, as recommended (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Regarding discriminant validity, we ensured that the square roots of the AVE for each variable were higher than its intercorrelations; Table 2 confirms this condition was met, supporting discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

To further support our proposed CFA model, we re-evaluated the previous CFA model, considering the three latent factors of SL (vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love) as indicators of a single higher-order SL construct (see Table 1). Covariances between this resulting higher-order SL, compassion, and KS were included. This higher-order CFA model ($C_{min}=477.973$; $df=346$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.381$; $CFI=.956$; $SRMR=.054$; $RMSEA=.045$) was then compared with the previous lower-order CFA factor model ($C_{min}=468.396$; $df=342$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.370$; $CFI=.958$; $SRMR=.051$; $RMSEA=.044$). Statistical results indicated that the change in fit ($\Delta C_{mind}(4)=9.755$, $p<.135$) was insignificant, supporting the feasibility of a higher-order SL assessment for measuring SL and the entire model. The values of Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha=.913$), composite reliability (.876), and the AVE (.512) also supported the convergent and discriminant validity of the single higher-order SL construct.

Table 2

Table 2 confirms that compassion, KS, and the majority of the SL variables were significantly intercorrelated, as expected. To test the hypotheses, SEM was used (Fig. 2 and 3).

Initially, the SEM model in Fig. 2 demonstrated the main effects of SL on KS ($C_{min}=387,069$; $df=273$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.418$; $CFI=.959$; $SRMR=.051$; $RMSEA=.047$). Given that SL is significantly positively related to KS ($B=.278$; $p<.001$), the results supported H1. A second SEM model in Fig. 3 ($C_{min}=477.973$; $df=346$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.381$; $CFI=.956$; $SRMR=.054$; $RMSEA=.045$) was proposed to examine H2 (compassion's relationship to KS) and H3 (the mediating role of compassion between SL and KS). This second SEM model proposed paths from SL to compassion and from compassion to KS, as the criterion variable, as well as a direct path from SL to KS (Fig. 3). As Fig. 3 shows, H2 was indeed supported ($B=.291$; $p<.001$). Concerning H3 (the mediating role of compassion), the beta of SL's main effects on KS (Fig. 2) was compared to the beta of the direct path linking SL and KS ($B=.278$; $p<.001$), as displayed in Fig. 3. As the beta of the SL–KS direct relationship ($B=.278$; $p<.001$) in Fig. 2 decreased to no longer being significant ($B=.136$; n.s.) in Fig. 3 when compassion was included, compassion was supported as a full mediator in the SL–KS relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Fig. 2 and 3

Furthermore, following Anderson & Gerbing's (1988) guidelines, we explored a nested model comparison between these two models using the sequential chi-square difference test (SCDT). Our hypothesised model with no SL–KS direct path ($C_{min}=478.857$; $df=347$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.379$; $CFI=.957$; $SRMR=.054$; $RMSEA=.045$) was compared with the alternative, less-constrained model ($C_{min}=477.973$; $df=346$; $p<.001$; $C_{min}/df=1.381$; $CFI=.956$; $SRMR=.054$; $RMSEA=.045$) in Fig. 3, with the SL–KS direct path added ($B=.136$; p ns). A fit comparison between these two models revealed that our hypothesised model (without direct paths) had a significantly better fit ($\Delta C_{min}=2.884$; $df_d=1$; $p=.0894$) at $p<0.10$. Thus, Hypothesis H4 receives additional support.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study offers a novel exploration of how SL navigates social dilemmas in KS by activating compassionate mechanisms. It investigates whether SL influences employees to participate in KS despite the dilemma of short-term individual benefits versus long-term uncertainty. The findings suggest that SL, through compassion, enhances awareness and empathy, leading employees to engage in pro-social KS.

Theoretical Implications

Despite criticism for being subjective, vague, manipulative, and exclusionary (see Vedula & Agrawal, 2024), this study supports Fry's (2003) SLT model. We argue that the model captures the depth of genuine spiritual leadership for several reasons. First, compassion, a core aspect of human spirituality, supports the model's essence (Puchlasky, 2006; Ramachandran *et al.*, 2023). This study finds that Fry's SL (2003) affects compassion, which supports and validates the model and its 17-item scale. Second, compassion mediates the impact of SL on prosocial behaviour such as KS, which also validates the model as spiritual. This is consistent with Clark *et al.* (2003), who found that spirituality in hospitals is credible when it leads to actions that meet the staff's emotional and spiritual needs.

Moreover, we also modelled mindfulness and empathic concern theoretically as key parts of our hypotheses. Clark *et al.* (2003) linked these themes to spirituality in meeting the staff's needs, despite their lack of empirical support. These themes connect to compassion, mindfulness, and empathic concern, thereby enhancing the validity of Fry's (2003) SL theory. As such, studies have linked mindfulness to spirituality in leadership, including heightened awareness (Mayer, 2000) and spiritual intelligence (Wigglesworth, 2006), while Stewart *et al.* (2019) found a correlation between empathic concern and workplace spirituality. Since empathic concern is essential for compassion (Kanov *et al.*, 2004) and compassion mediates

SL and KS in our study, we believe that some of the support for compassion involves empathic concern, which gives credence to Fry's (2003) SL construct.

In addition, previous studies also saw SL as manipulative and exclusionary, arguing that leaders might use spiritual language and concepts to influence followers without sincerity. This would cause followers to alienate from leaders and peers who differ in beliefs or values (see Vedula & Agrawal, 2024). We believe these criticisms fail to adequately distinguish between spirituality and religiosity, nor do they highlight the universal and inclusive nature of spirituality, thereby invalidating the negative perception of SL. While religions may promote dogmas, rituals, and doctrines that can be seen as manipulative and exclusive (Low & Ayoko, 2020), even aiming at social control (Raven, 1999; Simpson, 1998; Stark & Bainbridge, 1996), spirituality seeks Being in life (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020), fostering harmony and universality, and preventing discord among employees (Piotrowski & Żemojtel-Piotrowska, 2020). Notably, Saslow et al. (2013) conducted an empirical study that found that while spirituality is associated with increased compassion and altruism, religiosity does not exhibit the same effect.

Finally, we mapped our findings on the significant impact of spiritual leadership on KS. Our research is consistent with previous studies that have shown a connection between KS and other leadership theories, such as Bavik et al. (2018), Gerpott et al. (2020), and Karakas and Sarigollu (2013). Our paper emphasizes the unique ability of spiritual leadership to predict KS by fostering compassion in the workplace. Wang et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between spiritual leadership and KS, but only by modeling KS as a measure of employee effectiveness. Other studies have proposed models that incorporate spiritual leadership and KS, yet they only position KS as a mediator (Usmanova et al., 2023; Yasin et al., 2023; Jain, 2023). Notably, previous work has suggested that spirituality and servant leadership are mutually reinforcing. This implies that as leaders develop spiritually, they exhibit increased characteristics of servant leadership, and vice versa (Samarasinghe et al., 2022; Zada et al.,

2022). Despite these indications, no systematic investigation of this connection has taken place to date. Tuan (2016) is the only researcher to have found a relationship between servant leadership and KS. However, like spiritual leadership, the remaining studies have only examined servant leadership in conjunction with KS as a mediator (Tripathi et al., 2021).

Practical implications

The current times are turbulent and disrupt ways of managing and conducting business (George, 2014). Kasser et al. (2007, p. 3) suggest that the current economic system is evolving into “a set of values rooted in self-interest, a strong desire for financial success, high levels of consumption, and interpersonal styles based on competition [which] often work against the aims of helpfulness, intimacy, and personal freedom.” Although this paper focuses on SL and compassion at an individual level, organizationally, it can expand the understanding of the influence of SL in successfully managing KS in business settings.

Because person–organization (P–O) value fit is closely attached to workplace spirituality (e.g., Afsar, & Rehman, 2015; Palframan & Lancaster, 2019), spiritual leaders can foster KS by communicating support and value for followers’ efforts to bring co-workers back from social marginalization caused, for instance, by physical isolation. Leaders might also tackle narrow-minded followers’ exclusionary activities toward others by creating lines of action that allow. Becuase SL creates value congruency and vision at the levels of the individual, team, and organization (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020; Milliman et al., 2017), spiritual leaders should set an example by demonstrating their ‘altruistic love’ toward their followers. By doing so, they can initiate the compassion-based mechanisms that promote the benefits of activating the SL–KS link. Education and training actions inspired by a spiritual leader strengthen habits of compassion in followers (Goldman-Schuyler, 2010), such as those enabling a culture that

adopts a wider 'world view, 'which may be helpful to combat adversing issues for KS derived from a cultural diversity (Bryson & Crosby, 1992). Actions of this type might enable a selfless compassionate culture, which has been found to endure even after compassionate employees quit the organization (Mihelič & Culiberg, 2019). In this endeavour, Fry and Nisiewicz (2020) note that mindfulness is an essential spiritual practice for the inner life of spiritual leaders that must be taught to followers. In self-disclosure histories, for instance, it has been found that leaders' language can increase particular mindfulness skills in employees (Moore & Brody, 2009). Moreover, by highlighting mindfulness over other aims (see Katz-Navon et al., 2005), that is, what they expect, incentivize, and support in employees, leaders' mindfulness can create a mindful context (Ray et al., 2011).

Concerning self-regulatory strategies based on intrinsic motivation, findings appear to posit spirituality and compassion at work as key variables that intrinsically motivate the occurrence of KS. Organisations should recognise the universal and inclusive nature of spirituality and avoid confusing it with non-secularized religiosity, which is always respectable. Direct actions on the SL increased KS through compassion at work. They are ways of acting in favour of KS based on positive emotions and feelings. For example, emphasising SL can promote harmony and altruism among employees, which contributes to a positive workplace culture that intrinsically motivates followers to break barriers to KS. The mediating role of compassion at work between SL and KS behaviour also enables a significant practical contribution. Effectively, while direct actions on the SL increase KS via compassion, by activating compassion at work, we trigger the mechanisms leading the SL to increase KS. In this regard, trust, well-being, team satisfaction, and reduced job strain are also found to contribute to predicting compassion (Donaldson, Lee, & Donaldson, 2019). Education and training actions, such as loving-kindness meditation (LKM; Hofmann et al., 2011), can also strengthen habits in followers of compassion (Goldman-Schuyler, 2010).

Concerning mixed strategies, they combine deterrent and self-regulatory strategies, both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated, respectively. The first impulse of employees is basically to curb or facilitate KS out of self-interest (Miller, 1999). While KS is crucial for everybody, KS is not always perceived as beneficial for sharers (e.g., facing KS can produce employee anxiety about their job security) (Carmeli et al., 2011). Employees can be concerned about those peers who are not contributing to the spreading of knowledge, but they are “unduly” benefiting from KS. They often conduct a cost-benefit balance that is likely to result in self-interested reluctance towards KS. To break down these SD barriers to KS in the right direction, deterrent strategies based on extrinsic motivations such as control, rules, and competition are suggested, but in combination with leaders’ mindfulness, which can emphasise care and compassion over other individualistic goals (see Katz-Navon et al., 2005). Mindfulness encourages, predicts, and shapes a realistic vision of each situation, favouring being compassionately patient when these short-term urgencies are faced (Ray et al., 2011). Leader mindfulness can turn the egocentric view of KS into a subject for a collective and compassionate vision (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Viera-Armas, 2019) (i.e., “I share knowledge with everyone, even if it is lost to me”).

Future research and limitations

We acknowledge that this study has its weaknesses. First, the cross-sectional method emphasizes the need for caution in the interpretation of the results. Second, the present study only focused on employees from India, which has certain work conditions inherent to its specific culture that can affect the performance of the variables and their implications in other countries. For example, spirituality is more abundant and prevalent in India than in other societies. Lastly, because the data stems from a limited sample universe, there is a need for caution in generalising the findings.

Various unanswered questions in this paper may form the basis for future research. Academics and professionals characterise the 21st century as a time of transition towards new ways of doing business (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Rotatori et al., 2021). Thus, we should consider the possibility that anomic feelings (from the Greek an-: absence, and -nomos: law) weaken the meaning and vitality of life, and they may play a mediating role in the relationship between SL and KS. Temporary staff, compared to permanent staff, may reinforce anomic feelings, leading them to fear cooperating more than competing, potentially refraining from engaging in KS, and exhibiting less empathy and compassion (Gilbert, 2019). In addition, because servant leadership and spiritual leadership share spirituality, this connection justifies a possible study model including spiritual leadership, servant leadership, and KS. Lastly, we believe that we should consider replicating the model proposed in this paper, modelling knowledge hiding (KH) as an outcome of SL.

Conclusion

Knowledge's intangible nature, as well as a significant portion of manufacturing work, has historically failed to motivate KS workers through obligations and extrinsic rewards. Ignoring the increasingly selfless nature of KS and current work in general, traditional manufacturing work has led employees to feel dissatisfied with the management paradigms used until now based on the consumerist postulates of society. Ironically, these paradigms have encouraged employees to only focus on Having – and not Being – becoming "emotional beggars" that seek spirituality at work more than extrinsic obligations and rewards. This paper discovered that spirituality and human selfishness are among the fundamental factors that favourably resolve the dilemma of whether to share knowledge or not, being compassion a critical element in influencing employees to make the spiritual decision to participate in KS as a prosocial

behaviour. These study results advise organisations to emphasise spiritual leadership to help create a workplace that adapts to these new times and incorporates new ways of doing business, facilitating a full understanding of the role of universality in how leadership impacts the exchange of ideas and knowledge.

The paper helps to recognise the universal and inclusive nature of spirituality, avoiding overlaps with religiosity, and supports spiritual leadership as playing a key role in inspiring the KS in today's knowledge-based economy by focusing on the sharing of values rather than obligations and extrinsic rewards. Because win-loss situations are increasingly called into question because they can undermine the common good, employees who participate in KS in a prosocial way seem to contribute towards a more KS process, helping the manufacturing industry to be in consonance with the current times.

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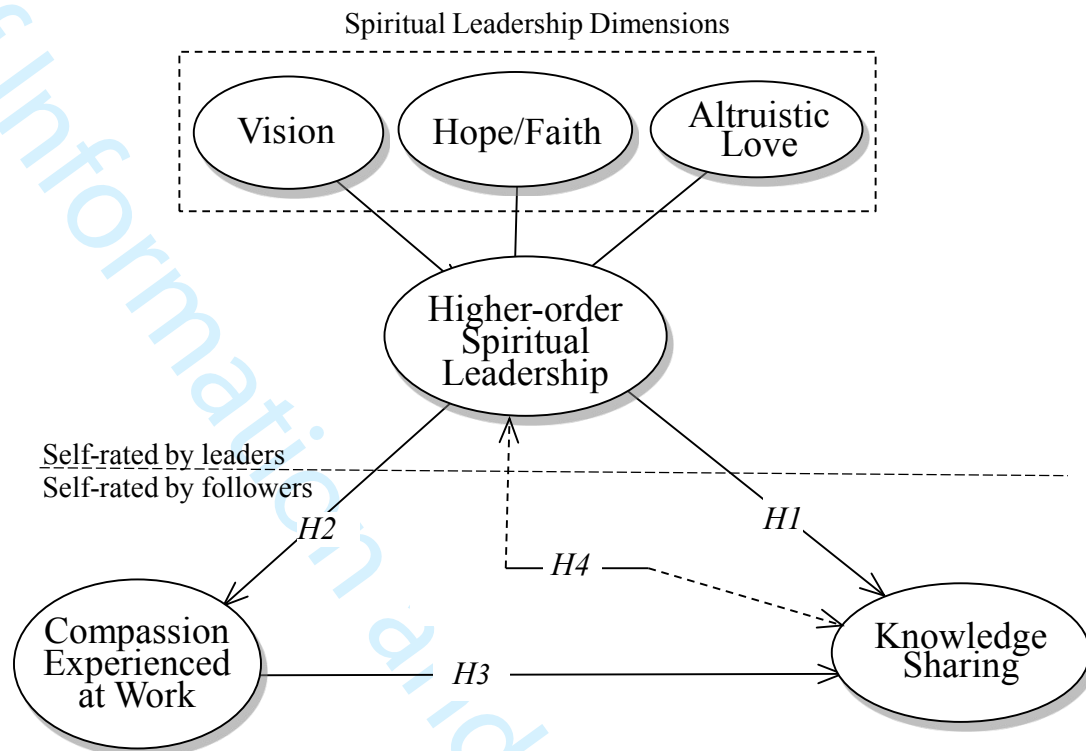
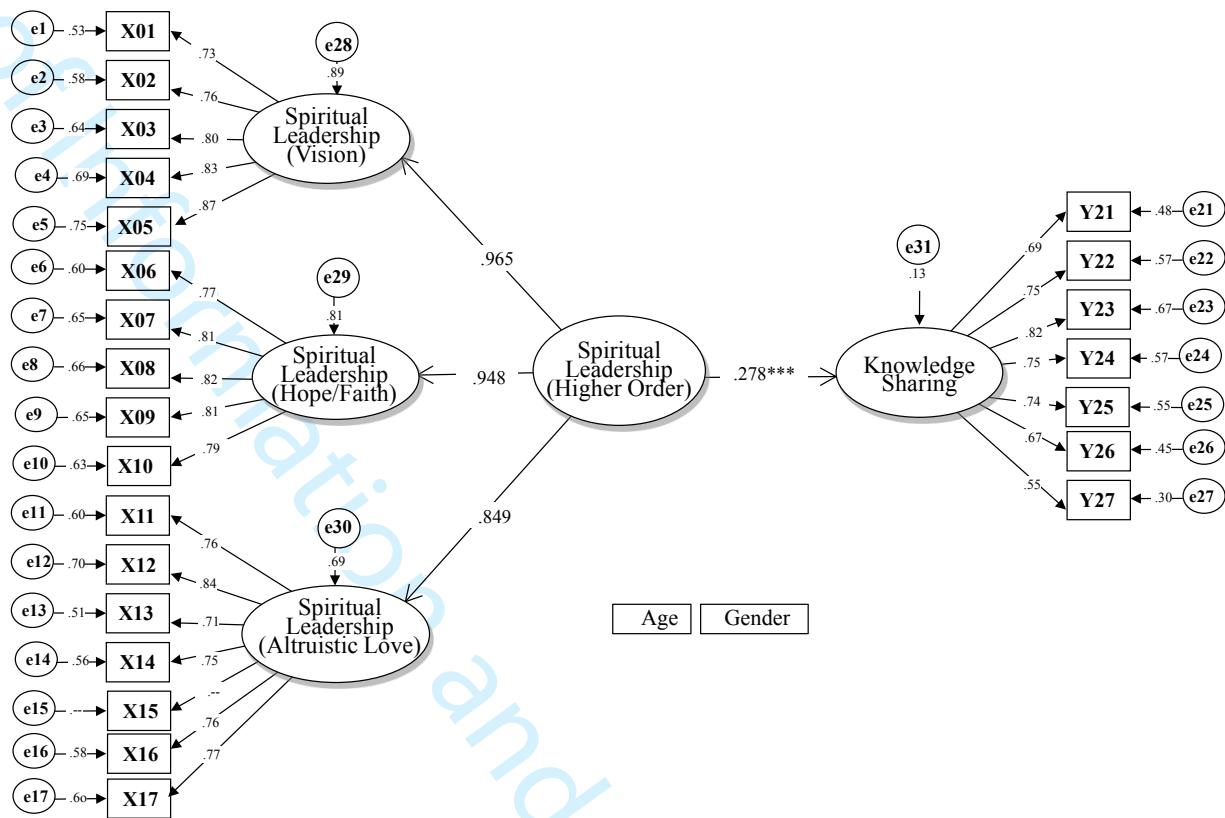


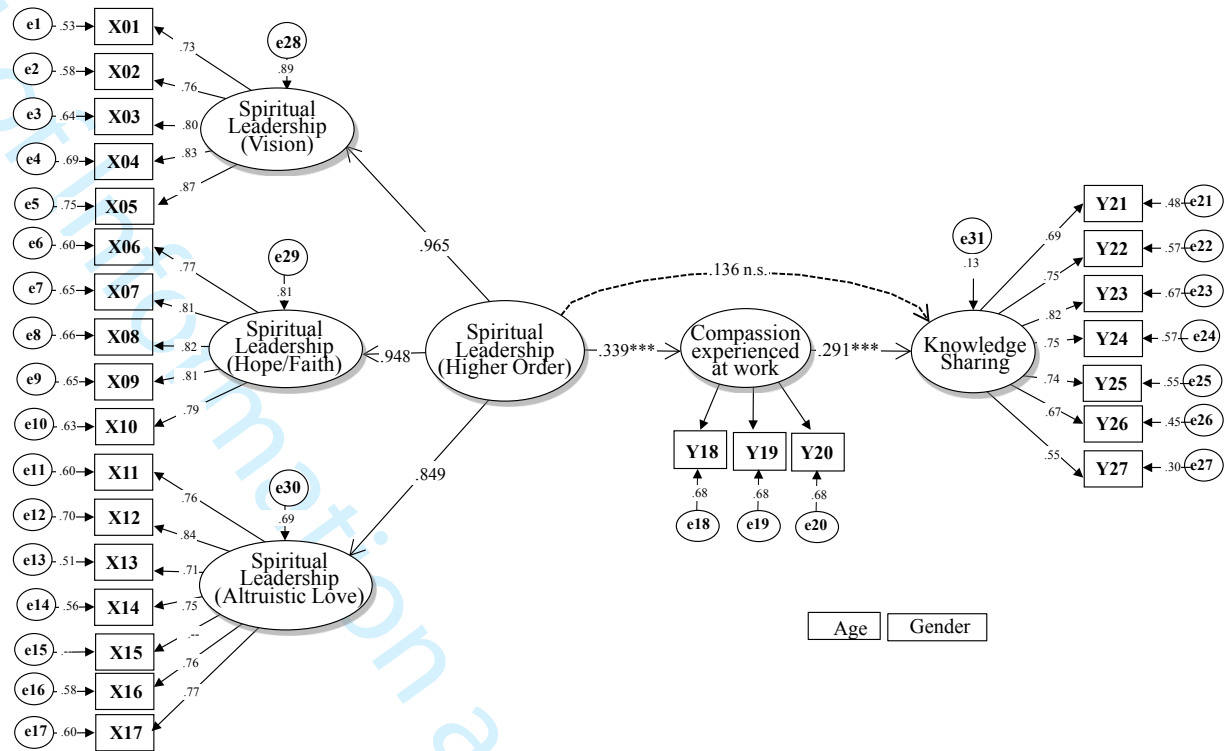
Fig. 1. Hypothesised model (figure by authors)

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Cmin=387,069; df=273; p<.001; Cmin/df=1.418; CFI=.959; SRMR=.051; RMSEA=.047

Fig. 2. Tested main effects model (figure by authors)



Cmin=477.973; df=346; $p < .001$; Cmin/df=1.381; CFI=.956; SRMR=.054; RMSEA=.045

Fig. 3. Tested model (figure by authors)

Table 1

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

	Lower-order factor loading	Higher-order factor loading	SMC	Composite reliability	AVE
<i>(F1) SL (Vision) ($\alpha=.896$)</i>			.638	.898	.639
X01... I understand and am committed to my organisation's vision	.731	----			
X02... My workgroup has a vision statement that brings out the best in me	.762	----			
X03... My organisation's vision inspires my best performance	.798	----			
X04... I have faith in my organisation's vision for its employees	.826	----			
X05... My organisation's vision is clear and compelling to me	.870	----			
<i>(F2) SL (Hope/Faith) ($\alpha=.898$)</i>			.639	.899	.638
X06... I have faith in my organisation and I am willing to "do whatever it takes" to ensure that it accomplishes its mission	.791	----			
X07... I persevere and exert extra effort to help my organisation succeed because I have faith in what it stands for	.809	----			
X08... I always do my best in my work because I have faith in my organisation and its leaders	.815	----			
X09... I set challenging goals for my work because I have faith in my organisation and want us to succeed	.807	----			
X10... I demonstrate my faith in my organisation and its mission by doing everything I can to help us succeed	.773	----			
<i>(F3) SL (Altruistic Love) ($\alpha=.879$)</i>			.596	.897	.592
X11... My organisation really cares about its people	.777	----			
X12... My organisation is kind and considerate towards its workers, and when they are suffering wants to do something about it	.842	----			
X13... The leaders in my organisation "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk"	.715	----			
X14... My organisation is trustworthy and loyal to its employees	.749	----			
X15... My organisation does not punish honest mistakes(*)	----	----			
X16... The leaders in my organisation are honest and without false pride	.759	----			
X17... The leaders in my organisation have the courage to stand up for their people	.770	----			
<i>(F4) Compassion experienced at work ($\alpha=.761$)</i>			.518	.762	.519
<i>How frequently you experienced...</i>					
Y18... compassion on the job	.806	.801			
Y19... compassion from your supervisor	.717	.721			
Y20... compassion from your co-workers	.626	.627			
<i>(F5) Knowledge-sharing behaviour ($\alpha=.875$)</i>			.512	.891	.509
Y21... I share my special knowledge and expertise with others	.689	.689			
Y22... If I have some special knowledge about how to perform the task, I am likely to tell others	.754	.754			
Y23... I exchange information, knowledge, and sharing of skills with my co-workers	.825	.820			
Y24... I freely provide other members with hard-to-find knowledge or specialised skills	.748	.752			
Y25... I help others in developing relevant strategies	.747	.748			
Y26... I share lot of information with others	.668	.670			
Y27... I offer lots of suggestions to others	.547	.546			
<i>Higher-order SL ($\alpha=.913$)</i>			.624	.876	.512
(F1).. Vision ($\alpha=.896$)	----	.965			
(F2).. Hope/Faith ($\alpha=.898$)	----	.948			
(F2).. Altruistic Love ($\alpha=.879$)	----	.849			

Note. (*) Item deleted because it loaded less than .5. SMC=Squared multiple correlation; AVE=Average variance extracted.

Lower-order model fit: Cmin=468.396; df=342; p<.001; Cmin/df=1.370; CFI=.958; SRMR=.051; RMSEA=.044.

Higher-order model fit: Cmin=477.973; df=346; p<.001; Cmin/df=1.381; CFI=.956; SRMR=.054; RMSEA=.045.

(Table by authors)

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	----	----	----							
2. Age	----	----	----	----						
3. SL (vision)	5.87	.92	.056	-.034	(.799)					
4. SL (hope/faith)	5.83	.91	.016	-.025	.850***	(.798)				
5. SL (altruistic love)	5.68	.92	.061	-.068	.757***	.729***	(.769)			
6. SL (higher-order)	5.78	.83	.050	-.051	.910***	.903***	.912***	(.715)		
7. Compassion	5.35	.99	.077	.150*	.277***	.206**	.190**	.239**	(.713)	
8. Knowledge Sharing	5.67	.89	.070	-.060	.268***	.200**	.119	.215**	.368***	(.706)

(Table by authors)

Note 1. Gender (1=male, 2=female) and age (1=up to 25 years; 2 between 26 and 40; 3=between 41 and 55; 4=between 56 and 70; 5=71 or older). N=280. * p< .05; **p< .01; *** p< .001.

Note 2. Square root of the AVE in the diagonal

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