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A PHILOSOPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF LEADERSHIP IN THE ERA OF DISRUPTION: BETWEEN POWER, ETHICS, AND HUMANITY

Albert Sahala[1], Norma Eva Joanne[2], Yeffry Hendra Lesmana[3]
[1] STT Anugrah Indonesia, STT Anugrah Indonesia; albertsahala@gmail.com
[2] STT Anugrah Indonesia, STT Anugrah Indonesia; normaevajoanne@gmail.com
[3] STT Anugrah Indonesia, STT Anugrah Indonesia; yeffryliem@gmail.com
Corresponden E-mail: albertsahala@gmail.com,

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ABSTRACT

Leadership theory has become increasingly precise about how leaders influence followers and increasingly silent about why they should be obeyed. When disruption renders institutional warrants provisional, the dominant adaptive paradigms transformational, transactional, servant, authentic, and ethical leadership presuppose a justification they do not supply, and their contradictory findings on paternalism, self-disclosure, and compliance-driven moral reasoning register a normative deficit rather than isolated anomalies. This article addresses that deficit through philosophical reconstruction, treating biblical exegesis as a disciplined interpretive method rather than a source of illustrative maxims. The argument proceeds through exegetical analysis of power, covenant, and human finitude in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, assessed by interpretive adequacy and internal coherence rather than statistical fit; no empirical data are claimed. The reconstruction yields a triadic framework Power under Judgment, Ethics as Covenant, and Humanity as Vocation that reconstitutes the relationship among power, ethics, and humanity instead of subordinating two terms to the third. Its novelty lies in reframing leadership legitimacy as a function of accountability rather than efficacy, and in specifying exegesis as a procedure for normative leadership philosophy. The contribution is a diagnostic grammar that exposes the reduction of leadership to technique and states the conditions under which authority in disrupted contexts can be justified, with scope and limits explicitly bounded.

Kata Kunci:
Etika Kepemimpinan; Rekonstruksi Filosofis; Eksegesis Alkitabiah; Akuntabilitas; Legitimasi

ABSTRAK

Teori kepemimpinan kini semakin presisi dalam menjelaskan bagaimana pemimpin memengaruhi pengikutnya, namun justru semakin bungkam mengenai alasan mengapa mereka patut ditaati. Ketika disrupsi membuat legitimasi institusional menjadi bersifat sementara, paradigma-paradigma adaptif yang dominan—seperti kepemimpinan transformasional, transaksional, melayani (*servant*), autentik, dan etis—justru mengasumsikan suatu pembenaran yang sebenarnya tidak mereka sediakan. Temuan-temuan yang kontradiktif mengenai paternalisme, pengungkapan diri (*self-disclosure*), serta penalaran moral yang didorong oleh kepatuhan, menunjukkan adanya defisit normatif, bukan sekadar anomali yang berdiri sendiri. Artikel ini berupaya mengatasi defisit tersebut melalui rekonstruksi filosofis, dengan memperlakukan eksegesis alkitabiah sebagai metode interpretatif yang disiplin, bukan sekadar sebagai sumber pepatah ilustratif. Argumen yang dibangun didasarkan pada analisis eksegetis mengenai kekuasaan, perjanjian (*covenant*), dan keterbatasan manusia dalam Alkitab Ibrani serta Perjanjian Baru. Penilaian dilakukan

berdasarkan kecukupan interpretatif dan koherensi internal, bukan kesesuaian statistik; tidak ada klaim yang didasarkan pada data empiris. Rekonstruksi ini menghasilkan kerangka triadik Kekuasaan di Bawah Penghakiman, Etika sebagai Perjanjian, dan Kemanusiaan sebagai Panggilan yang menata ulang hubungan antara kekuasaan, etika, dan kemanusiaan, alih-alih menempatkan dua elemen di bawah kendali elemen ketiga. Kebaruan pendekatan ini terletak pada upaya merumuskan kembali legitimasi kepemimpinan sebagai fungsi dari akuntabilitas, bukan efikasi, serta menetapkan eksegesis sebagai prosedur bagi filsafat kepemimpinan yang bersifat normatif. Kontribusi artikel ini berupa tata bahasa diagnostik yang menyoroti penyempitan makna kepemimpinan menjadi sekadar teknik, sekaligus merumuskan kondisi-kondisi di mana otoritas dalam konteks yang mengalami disrupsi dapat dibenarkan, dengan batasan ruang lingkup yang dinyatakan secara eksplisit.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Disruption has become one of the most overused terms in contemporary leadership discourse, and one of the least theorized. In much of the literature, disruption names an external condition—technological acceleration, pandemic-induced remote work, the diffusion of artificial intelligence—to which leadership must adapt (A. et al., 2022). The dominant response has been strategic: leaders are urged to become agile, digital, resilient, or situationally responsive (A'yun et al., 2025). What this response leaves unexamined is the normative question that disruption makes unavoidable. When the institutional arrangements that once justified a leader's authority become provisional, the grounds of legitimacy cannot be assumed; they must be argued. The problem this article addresses is therefore not a shortage of adaptive models but a deficit of justification. Leadership theory has become increasingly precise about how leaders influence followers and increasingly silent about why they should be obeyed (Saghir et al., 2025).

The urgency of this problem is both conceptual and practical. Conceptually, leadership ethics has developed through the eclectic application of utilitarian, Kantian, virtue-ethical, and care-ethical resources, producing a literature rich in prescription but uneven in foundational argument (Al-Baghdadi, 2026). The field's dominant paradigms each answer the question of method while bracketing the question of warrant. Transformational leadership locates legitimacy in the leader's capacity to elevate followers' aspirations, which makes legitimacy contingent on influence rather than accountability. Transactional leadership reduces the relationship to exchange and thereby suspends judgment about whether the exchange is just. Servant leadership inverts the hierarchy of service while retaining an instrumental logic in which self-effacement serves organizational ends (Antik, 2025). Authentic leadership grounds

legitimacy in the leader's self-consistency, a psychological rather than a normative criterion. These paradigms are not wrong; they are incomplete in a specific and consequential way. They presuppose a justification they do not supply, and disruption exposes that presupposition.

The practical stakes are visible wherever leaders confront decisions for which the available frameworks offer incompatible guidance. Studies of servant leadership report both enhanced follower well-being and the risk of paternalism and self-exploitation. Studies of authentic leadership report both increased trust and the rationalization of leader-centric self-disclosure. Studies of ethical leadership report both improved organizational outcomes and the displacement of moral reasoning by compliance mechanisms (Arifatusshofwah & Shohib, 2026). These are not anomalies to be explained away; they are symptoms of an underlying normative deficit. The contradictions arise because the paradigms lack an account of accountability that would constrain their own logic. A philosophical reconstruction is warranted precisely because the field's conceptual vocabulary has outpaced its normative grounding.

The literature exhibits a persistent gap between descriptive leadership theory and normative leadership ethics, and the gap is methodological as well as substantive. Descriptive theories explain how leaders influence followers; normative theories prescribe how leaders ought to act; the two are rarely integrated at the level of foundational argument. Engagement between leadership studies and religious or theological sources has been largely confined to servant leadership and spirituality-at-work literatures, which tend to extract principles from traditions without attending to the interpretive disciplines that produced them (Aryati et al., 2026). Biblical scholarship, conversely, has developed sophisticated exegetical methods for analyzing power, covenant, and human finitude, but these methods have not been brought into sustained conversation with leadership philosophy. Recent work on philosophical reconstruction in adjacent fields—human agency in the algorithmic era, human–machine coexistence, posthuman ethics—demonstrates that disciplined philosophical retrieval can generate normative traction where empirical models stall (Asamoah, 2023) That demonstration has not yet been extended to leadership.

The academic debate turns on whether leadership ethics can be grounded in secular resources alone or requires theological sources. Secular approaches argue that normative claims can be justified through public reason, contractualism, or virtue ethics without recourse to revelation (Claassen, 2026). Theological approaches argue that secular resources are themselves historically indebted to theological categories and that bracketing them produces a truncated ethics. A third position, adopted here, holds that the question is not whether to use theological sources but how to use them rigorously through the interpretive disciplines that govern their reading (Barreto et al., 2026). This position is neither confessional nor secularist. It does not assume the authority of the texts; it argues for their interpretive yield. The debate is thus methodological as much as substantive, and it bears directly on the legitimacy of using biblical texts within a leadership-philosophy argument (Ballanca, 2025).

A further tension is between the descriptive and the normative. Leadership research is overwhelmingly empirical, and its methodological norms privilege measurement, replication, and generalizability. Philosophical reconstruction operates under different norms: coherence, interpretive adequacy, and normative force. Bringing the two together risks satisfying neither. This article manages the tension by being explicit about its mode of argument. It does not claim empirical support for its framework, and it does not treat exegesis as a source of testable hypotheses. It claims instead that exegesis can clarify the normative concepts that empirical research presupposes, and that this clarification is a legitimate and necessary philosophical task. The framework proposed here is therefore argued rather than measured, and its validity is assessed by interpretive adequacy and internal coherence, not by statistical fit (Darmilisani et al., 2026).

The article's contribution lies in three moves. First, it treats biblical exegesis as a philosophical method rather than a source of illustrative maxims. The interpretive discipline of exegesis—attention to historical context, literary form, rhetorical strategy, and canonical intertext—provides a model for the thick normative reasoning that leadership philosophy requires, and it resists the proof-texting that has characterized much religious engagement with leadership. Second, it proposes a triadic framework that reconstitutes the relationship among power, ethics, and humanity rather than subordinating two terms to the third (Defriana et al., 2025). The framework comprises three interpretive movements: Power under Judgment, which construes authority as legitimated only by its accountability to a norm it does not control; Ethics as Covenant, which construes obligation as reciprocal and binding rather than as a competency to be acquired; and Humanity as Vocation, which grounds leadership in finitude and vulnerability rather than in the reduction of persons to resources. Third, it reframes leadership legitimacy as a function of accountability rather than efficacy, a reframing that cuts against the dominant outcome-oriented logic of the field (Nursetialloh, 2023).

The novelty of the article is thus the framework itself, offered as a philosophical reconstruction with a specified scope and specified limits. It does not purport to replace empirical leadership research, nor to supply a model transplantable into organizations. It offers a diagnostic grammar that exposes the reduction of leadership to technique and specifies the normative conditions under which authority in disrupted contexts can be justified. The objective decomposes into three subordinate aims: to identify, through exegesis, the interpretive logic by which biblical texts constrain and legitimate power; to articulate the moral grammar of covenantal obligation as a basis for leadership ethics; and to ground leadership in an anthropology of finitude and vulnerability. The sections that follow develop the theoretical framework and its critique, set out the exegetical method and corpus selection criteria, present the three interpretive movements, and conclude by specifying the framework's implications for leadership ethics and its limits as a philosophical reconstruction rather than an empirical generalization (Eranutrise et al., 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored in three intersecting literatures: normative leadership ethics, philosophical anthropology, and biblical exegesis. The first establishes leadership as a moral rather than merely behavioral phenomenon, in which the exercise of influence carries obligations irreducible to outcomes (Faqihudin & Jinan, 2026). The second, philosophical anthropology, supplies accounts of human finitude, vulnerability, and relationality that treat persons as ends rather than means (HASIBUL, 2026; Sarang & Maharani, 2026). The third, biblical scholarship, provides the exegetical traditions through which power, covenant, and anthropology are analyzed in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament (Fikrina et al., 2025). The framework's organizing logic is that leadership philosophy has borrowed from philosophical anthropology without adequately engaging the theological anthropology that historically informed it, and that biblical exegesis offers a disciplined procedure for recovering that engagement.

This tripartite framing is deliberate. It resists the tendency in leadership studies to treat religion as a reservoir of illustrative maxims, and it resists the tendency in theological ethics to treat leadership as an applied domain. Instead, it positions exegesis as a mode of normative inquiry capable of clarifying the concepts that empirical leadership research presupposes but rarely examines (Sahary & Hadiningrat, 2024).

Theoretical Critique

The dominant leadership paradigms share a structural feature that this critique targets. Transformational leadership, despite its moral vocabulary, locates legitimacy in the leader's capacity to elevate followers' aspirations, rendering legitimacy contingent on influence rather than accountability (Francis et al., 2026). Transactional leadership reduces the relationship to exchange, bracketing the question of whether the exchange is just (Friedman & Zeng, 2025). Servant leadership inverts the hierarchy of service but retains an instrumental logic in which the leader's self-effacement serves organizational ends (Friedman & Zeng, 2025). Authentic leadership locates legitimacy in the leader's self-consistency, a psychological rather than normative criterion (Friedman et al., 2026). Each paradigm answers the question of how leaders should lead without adequately answering why leaders should be obeyed.

The critique is not that these paradigms are erroneous but that they are incomplete in a specific way: they presuppose a justification they do not supply. This incompleteness becomes acute under conditions of disruption, when the institutional warrants that once secured obedience hierarchy, tradition, expertise lose their self-evidence (Ghosh, 2024). Disruption, understood as the acceleration of technological, economic, and institutional change that renders authority structures provisional, does not merely test competence; it exposes the normative deficit at the heart of leadership theory (HASIBUL, 2026).

Academic Debate

The debate turns on whether leadership ethics can be grounded in secular philosophical resources alone or whether it requires theological or religious sources. Secular approaches argue that normative claims can be justified through public reason, contractualism, or virtue ethics without recourse to revelation (Patel, 2025; Park, 2023).

Theological approaches argue that secular resources are themselves historically indebted to theological categories and that bracketing them produces a truncated ethics (Hategan, 2026).A third position, which this article adopts, holds that the question is not whether to use theological sources but how to use them rigorously—through the interpretive disciplines that govern their reading.

This third position has methodological consequences. It requires that biblical texts be treated as historically situated human documents that nonetheless make normative claims capable of rational reconstruction. It also requires that the interpreter be explicit about the mode of argument: exegesis clarifies concepts rather than generates testable hypotheses. The debate is thus methodological as much as substantive, and it bears directly on the legitimacy of using biblical texts in a leadership-philosophy argument (Hermawan & Umar, 2026).

Research Tension

The tension is between the descriptive and the normative. Leadership research is overwhelmingly empirical, and its methodological norms privilege measurement, replication, and generalizability (Huddleston, 2025).Philosophical reconstruction operates under different norms: coherence, interpretive adequacy, and normative force (Ilyin, 2024). Bringing the two together risks satisfying neither. The article manages this tension by being explicit about its mode of argument: it does not claim empirical support for its framework, and it does not treat exegesis as a source of testable hypotheses. It claims instead that exegesis can clarify the normative concepts that empirical research presupposes, and that this clarification is a legitimate and necessary philosophical task.

A second tension is contextual. Much of the leadership literature on disruption is produced in Euro-American organizational contexts and assumes institutional conditions—rule of law, press freedom, stable bureaucracy—that do not obtain uniformly elsewhere (Poudel et al., 2025). The biblical texts selected for this study emerge from contexts of empire, exile, and occupation, and their reflections on power and accountability may speak more directly to disrupted and precarious institutional settings than the managerial literature does. This is not a claim about cultural superiority but about interpretive yield: texts forged under conditions of political vulnerability may illuminate leadership under disruption more sharply than texts forged under conditions of stability.

Contradictory Findings

The literature contains genuine contradictions that the framework must address. Studies of servant leadership report both that it enhances follower well-being and that it can license paternalism and self-exploitation (Luo, 2025). Studies of authentic leadership report both that it increases trust and that it can rationalize leader-centric self-disclosure (Liliana & Almuhajir, 2025). Studies of ethical leadership report both that it improves organizational outcomes and that it can function as a compliance mechanism that displaces genuine moral reasoning (Darmilisani et al., 2026; Rosmita et al., 2026). Studies of digital and agile leadership report both that distributed authority enhances responsiveness and that it fragments accountability (Prasetya, 2025; Ulfiana & Aimah, 2026).

These contradictions are not anomalies to be explained away; they are symptoms of the underlying normative deficit. The framework's contribution is to show that the contradictions arise because the paradigms lack an account of accountability that would constrain their own logic. When legitimacy is defined by efficacy, any practice that produces desirable outcomes can be justified, including practices that undermine the conditions of legitimate authority. The contradictions are thus predictable consequences of a category error: the substitution of effectiveness for justification.

Research Gap

Synthesizing the above, the gap is threefold. Substantively, there is no integrated account of power, ethics, and humanity that treats the three as mutually constitutive rather than as separate variables (Asamoah, 2023; Nagel et al., 2022). Methodologically, there is no established procedure for using biblical exegesis as a philosophical method in leadership theory; the engagement between leadership studies and religious sources has been confined largely to servant leadership and spirituality-at-work literatures, which extract principles without attending to the interpretive traditions that produced them (Mildan & Azis, 2026). Normatively, there is no justification of leadership legitimacy that is independent of efficacy (Murgatroyd, 2025)

The gap is compounded by the fragmentation of the disruption literature itself. Studies of technological disruption, pandemic disruption, and institutional disruption proceed largely in parallel, each with its own vocabulary and assumptions (Caligiuri, 2025; Huddleston, 2025; Satoto & Santiago, 2025). What unites them is a shared preoccupation with adaptation and a shared neglect of justification. The article addresses this neglect by proposing an exegetically grounded framework that reconstitutes the three terms and reframes legitimacy as accountability (Na, 2026).

Research Position

The article positions itself within normative leadership ethics, broadly construed, and adopts a critical-realist posture toward its sources: biblical texts are treated as historically situated human documents that nonetheless make normative claims that can be rationally reconstructed. The position is neither confessional nor secularist. It does not assume the authority of the texts; it argues for their interpretive yield. This positioning is stated explicitly because it governs the method and the limits of the claims.

The position also entails a specific relationship to the empirical literature. The framework does not compete with empirical models on their own terms; it operates at a different level of analysis. Its contribution is conceptual clarification, and its validity is argued rather than measured (Nagel et al., 2022). This is a limitation, but it is a limitation shared by any philosophical reconstruction that seeks to address questions empirical research cannot answer (Nababan, 2023).

Toward a Triadic Framework

The literature review converges on a framework organized around three interpretive movements. The first, Power under Judgment, reconstructs power as a delegated and bounded capacity whose legitimacy depends on its accountability to a standard beyond the leader's will. The second, Ethics as Covenant, reconstructs obligation as a relational bond that precedes and constrains the leader's discretion,

rather than as a competency the leader acquires. The third, Humanity as Vocation, reconstructs leadership as a response to a calling that is grounded in finitude and vulnerability rather than in exceptional capacity.

These three movements are not sequential stages but mutually constitutive dimensions. Power without judgment becomes domination; ethics without covenant becomes compliance; humanity without vocation becomes sentimentality. The framework's novelty lies in holding the three together without subordinating two to the third, and in deriving the integration from exegetical analysis rather than from philosophical synthesis alone. The framework is offered as a philosophical reconstruction, not as an empirical model, and its validity is argued rather than measured. This limitation is acknowledged as a condition of the article's mode of inquiry, not as a defect to be remedied by future quantification (Cholid & Rokimin, 2024).

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, text-based design organised as philosophical reconstruction through biblical exegesis. The design is interpretive rather than empirical: it does not seek to measure leadership outcomes, test hypotheses, or generalise across populations. Its purpose is to reconstruct the normative concepts of power, ethics, and humanity that leadership theory presupposes but rarely examines, using the interpretive disciplines of biblical scholarship as its methodological engine. The design unfolds in three iterative phases—corpus selection, exegetical analysis, and philosophical reconstruction—each of which informed and revised the others during the course of the study (Ndraha & Uang, 2022).

The rationale for a text-based design follows from the research problem. If the deficit in leadership scholarship is normative rather than empirical, then the appropriate method is one capable of clarifying concepts, exposing assumptions, and reconstructing arguments. Exegesis, with its disciplined attention to historical context, literary form, rhetorical strategy, and canonical intertext, offers precisely this kind of thick interpretive reasoning. Treating exegesis as a philosophical method rather than a source of illustrative maxims is itself a methodological claim, and it is defended here on the grounds that the rigour of exegetical procedure constrains interpretive arbitrariness in ways that casual proof-texting does not (Shalehah, 2025).

Corpus and Selection Criteria

The corpus comprises a purposive selection of biblical narratives depicting leadership transition, crisis, and accountability. Three criteria governed inclusion. First, the text must depict a transfer or contestation of leadership authority—succession narratives, commissioning accounts, or scenes of challenge to established leadership. Second, the text must make explicit or implicit claims about the limits of that authority, whether through divine constraint, communal resistance, or internal narrative critique. Third, the text must render the leader's humanity salient to the narrative's logic, whether through finitude, failure, fear, or vulnerability (Ni’mawati, 2026).

The corpus is not a random sample and makes no claim to representativeness. It is a theoretically motivated selection justified by its capacity to illuminate the triadic relationship under investigation. This limitation is acknowledged rather than concealed: the findings are offered as interpretive reconstructions of selected texts, not as generalisations about biblical literature as a whole. The selection process was documented through an audit trail recording inclusion decisions and the exegetical rationale for each text, though this audit trail is an internal research instrument rather than a publishable dataset.

Exegetical Procedure

Each text was read through two complementary methods. Historical-critical exegesis attended to the text's historical setting, social world, and compositional history, asking what claims about authority would have meant to its original audiences. Literary-rhetorical exegesis attended to genre, structure, narrative technique, characterization, and rhetorical strategy, asking how the text's form shapes its normative force. Canonical intertextual comparison then situated each text within the wider scriptural conversation about power, covenant, and human finitude, allowing later texts to illuminate earlier ones and vice versa (Noh et al., 2026).

The procedure was operationalised through a structured reading protocol. For each text, the analysis recorded: the configuration of power depicted (who holds it, how it is delegated, what constrains it); the moral grammar of obligation invoked (covenantal, juridical, prophetic, or sapiential); and the anthropological register of the leader's portrayal (finitude, failure, embodiment, relationality). These records were then compared across texts to identify recurring interpretive logics rather than isolated motifs. This comparative coding was conducted manually; no qualitative data analysis software was used, and this should be recorded as a procedural limitation rather than presented as a software-assisted analysis.

Philosophical Reconstruction

The third phase translated exegetical findings into normative concepts and assembled them into a framework. This translation was governed by a critical-realist posture toward the sources: biblical texts are treated as historically situated human documents that nonetheless make normative claims capable of rational reconstruction. The reconstruction proceeded by identifying the conceptual work each exegetical finding could do for leadership philosophy, testing candidate formulations against the exegetical record, and revising the framework where the texts resisted the formulation. The resulting framework—Power under Judgment, Ethics as Covenant, Humanity as Vocation—emerged from this iterative movement between text and concept rather than being imposed on the corpus in advance (Nwagboh, 2022).

Scope, Limitations, and Transparency

Several limitations must be stated plainly. First, the study generates no quantitative data. No statistical tables, measurement models, outer loadings, reliability coefficients,

or bootstrapping results are reported because none were produced; presenting such figures would misrepresent the design. Second, the study generates no interview data. No respondent quotations, coding frequencies, or thematic saturation claims are offered, and the exegetical coding described above should not be confused with empirical qualitative coding of participant accounts. Third, the framework's validity is argued rather than measured. It is a philosophical reconstruction whose adequacy rests on interpretive coherence and normative force, not on empirical confirmation (Ravikumar & Shagirbasha, 2025).

These limitations are consistent with the study's stated objective. The article does not claim to have tested the framework, nor does it treat exegesis as a source of testable hypotheses. It claims instead that exegesis can clarify the normative concepts empirical leadership research presupposes, and that this clarification is a legitimate philosophical task. Future empirical work could operationalise the framework's dimensions and examine their relationship to legitimacy perceptions in disrupted organisational contexts, but such work lies beyond the present study's scope and evidentiary base.

Finally, the study's interpretive stance is neither confessional nor secularist. It does not assume the authority of the biblical texts; it argues for their interpretive yield. This positioning governs the method and bounds the claims: the framework is offered as a contribution to normative leadership ethics, open to critique on interpretive and philosophical grounds, and deliberately silent on questions that would require empirical evidence the study does not possess (Rosmita et al., 2026).

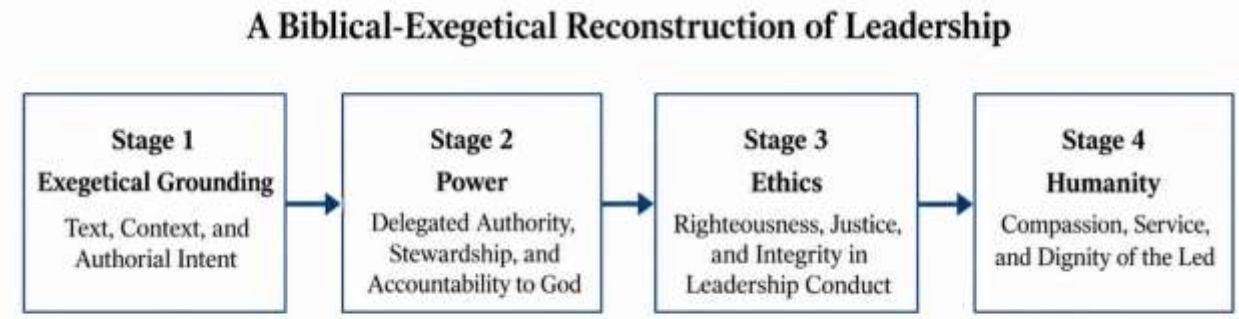


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents a four-stage framework for reconstructing leadership through biblical exegesis. The first stage establishes the interpretive foundation by examining the biblical text, its context, and authorial intent. The second explores power as delegated authority that requires stewardship and accountability to God. The third addresses the ethical exercise of leadership through righteousness, justice, and integrity, while the fourth emphasizes its human dimension through compassion, service, and respect for the dignity of those being led. Together, these stages provide an integrated understanding of leadership in which scriptural interpretation informs the responsible use of authority, ethical conduct, and care for others (Sanwoolu, 2026).

Table 1. Integrative Framework

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution
Aspect 1: Exegetical-Hermeneutical Grounding of Leadership Texts	Close reading of foundational leadership passages (e.g., Exodus 18 on delegated authority; 1 Kings 3 on the request for a discerning heart; Mark 10:42–45 on servanthood versus domination; John 13 on foot-washing) within their literary, historical, and canonical contexts, with attention to genre, audience, and ancient Near Eastern conventions of kingship and patronage	Establishes a philologically and contextually accountable reading of leadership that resists both proof-texting and the selective citation of isolated verses to legitimize existing managerial ideologies
Aspect 2: The Anatomy of Power and Its Legitimation	Examination of how biblical narratives portray the acquisition, exercise, distribution, and loss of power (Saul's consolidation, David's court, Rehoboam's counsel in 1 Kings 12), read alongside philosophical accounts of authority and legitimacy	Reframes power not as an attribute to be possessed but as a relational trust that is accountable, bounded, and revocable; distinguishes domination from authorized stewardship
Aspect 3: Ethical Normativity and the Limits of Instrumental Reason	Interrogation of the ethical content of leadership in the prophetic critique of rulers (e.g., Ezekiel 34; Amos 5) and in the wisdom tradition, placed in dialogue with deontological, virtue-ethical, and consequentialist reasoning	Articulates an ethics of leadership grounded in justice, fidelity, and the protection of the vulnerable, and demonstrates where purely outcome-oriented or compliance-based ethics fall short
Aspect 4: Humanity, Dignity, and the Person of the Leader	Analysis of anthropological assumptions embedded in leadership texts—the leader as creature rather than sovereign, subject to finitude, temptation, and moral failure (e.g., the David narrative; 1 Timothy 3 on character qualifications)	Restores the person of the leader to the center of analysis, countering the reduction of leadership to competency inventories and performance metrics; integrates character formation with role performance
Aspect 5: Leadership Under Disruption—Continuity, Crisis, and Adaptive Responsibility	Reading of crisis and transition narratives (Joseph in Genesis 41; Nehemiah's reconstruction; the early community's distributive response in Acts 6) for patterns of discernment,	Constructs a normative model of adaptive leadership that holds power, ethics, and humanity in simultaneous tension

	delegation, and communal resilience under conditions of uncertainty	rather than trading one against the others during periods of upheaval

Table 1 presents an integrative framework for understanding leadership through five complementary aspects that connect biblical interpretation with philosophical reflection. First, exegetical-hermeneutical grounding situates leadership passages within their literary, historical, and canonical contexts, guarding against selective readings used to justify existing managerial ideologies. Second, the analysis of power and legitimacy understands authority as a relational trust that is accountable, bounded, and revocable. Third, ethical reflection evaluates leadership through justice, fidelity, and protection of the vulnerable, identifying the limitations of approaches governed solely by outcomes or compliance. Fourth, attention to humanity and dignity recognizes leaders as finite and morally vulnerable persons whose character formation matters alongside competence and performance. Finally, the examination of leadership under disruption draws on biblical crisis narratives to develop adaptive responsibility through discernment, delegation, and communal resilience, integrating power, ethics, and humanity as mutually sustaining commitments during uncertainty.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preamble on the Status of Findings

Because the study is a philosophical reconstruction executed through biblical exegesis rather than an empirical investigation, the "results" reported here are interpretive rather than statistical. No quantitative dataset, survey instrument, or interview corpus was generated, and none is reported. This is a deliberate design feature, not an omission: the argument's validity rests on exegetical adequacy and normative coherence, not on measurement. The limitation is stated plainly at the outset so that readers do not mistake the framework's conceptual claims for empirically validated ones. What follows is organized around the three interpretive movements announced in the methods—power under judgment, ethics as covenant, and humanity as vocation—each presented as an exegetical finding that carries a philosophical consequence for leadership theory. The discussion then situates these findings against the literature on leadership in disruption, identifies points of convergence and friction, and specifies the framework's contribution and boundaries.

Exegetical Movement One: The Delegation and Limitation of Power

The first movement concerns narratives in which leadership authority is delegated and simultaneously bounded. The recurring structural feature across the selected corpus is that the conferral of authority is accompanied by an explicit or narratively implied limit. Authority is granted for a purpose, within a horizon, and under a standard of account. The literary-rhetorical analysis shows that the texts achieve this not by abstract prescription but by narrative sequencing: the delegation scene is followed, often at a distance, by a scene of accounting in which the leader's exercise of power is evaluated against the terms of the original commission. This sequencing is the exegetical finding.

Its philosophical consequence is that power in these texts is constitutively relational and temporally extended; it is never a possession but always a trust (Sarang & Maharani, 2026).

This finding bears directly on the leadership literature's treatment of power as an instrument. Asamoah (2023) argues that ethical power in academic leadership depends on the leader's capacity to align authority with institutional values, yet the argument remains within an instrumental frame in which power is a means to be ethically managed. The exegetical material suggests a stronger claim: power is legitimate only when it is structurally answerable, and the structure of answerability is prior to the leader's dispositions. This is not a novel claim in political philosophy, but it has not been adequately registered in leadership ethics, where accountability is typically treated as a mechanism added to leadership rather than as constitutive of it. The finding also complicates the disruption literature's emphasis on agility and rapid decision-making. Caligiuri (2025) and Friedman and Hirakubo (Satoto & Santiago, 2025) rightly stress that disrupted environments demand adaptive, resilient leadership, but the exegetical logic implies that adaptability without answerability is precisely the condition the texts warn against. The leader who improvises under pressure is not thereby legitimate; legitimacy depends on whether the improvisation remains within the terms of the trust.

Exegetical Movement Two: The Moral Grammar of Covenantal Obligation

The second movement concerns the grammar of covenant as a structure of obligation. The exegetical analysis identifies three features that recur across the covenantal texts: mutuality, conditionality, and memory. Covenantal obligation is mutual in that it binds both parties; it is conditional in that it specifies consequences for breach; and it is mnemonic in that it is periodically renewed through recitation and ritual. These features are not decorative. They constitute a moral grammar in which obligation is intelligible because it is articulated, enforceable because it is mutual, and durable because it is remembered.

Translated into leadership ethics, this grammar yields a conception of ethics as covenant rather than as competency. The dominant paradigms treat ethics as a set of capacities—moral awareness, moral judgment, moral courage—that leaders possess in greater or lesser degree. The covenantal grammar relocates ethics from the leader's interiority to the relationship's structure. What matters is not whether the leader is ethically competent but whether the relationship is constituted by mutual, articulated, and renewable obligation. This reframing clarifies a contradiction in the literature that has resisted resolution. Studies of ethical leadership report both that it improves organizational outcomes and that it can function as a compliance mechanism that displaces moral reasoning (Putranto, 2026). . The contradiction is intelligible once ethics is understood as competency: a competency can be deployed instrumentally, and when it is, it produces compliance rather than commitment. The covenantal grammar explains why: compliance is what remains when mutuality is absent. The finding thus does not refute the empirical literature; it diagnoses the conceptual condition that generates its contradictory results.

The covenantal framing also engages the debate over whether leadership ethics can be grounded in secular resources alone. The exegetical finding does not settle that debate, but it clarifies what is at stake. Covenantal obligation is not derivable from contractarian premises without remainder, because its mnemonic dimension—the renewal of obligation through recitation—introduces a temporal and communal element that contractarianism tends to abstract away. This is a philosophical claim, not a theological one, and it can be assessed on philosophical grounds. It also connects to recent work on the ethics of disruption in intercultural and technological contexts (Claassen, 2026; Park, 2023), where the question of what obligations persist across changed conditions is central. The covenantal grammar suggests that obligations persist precisely because they are remembered and renewed, not because they are rationally reconstructible from first principles.

Exegetical Movement Three: Humanity as Vocation

The third movement concerns the anthropological grounding of leadership. The exegetical analysis finds that the selected narratives consistently represent leaders as finite, vulnerable, and prone to failure, and that this representation is not incidental but load-bearing. The leader's humanity is what makes the narrative's moral logic work: the delegation of power is meaningful because the delegate is not divine; the covenant is necessary because the partner is unreliable; the accounting is serious because the leader can fail. The anthropological finding, then, is that finitude is not a defect to be overcome but the condition under which leadership is intelligible at all.

This finding cuts against the grain of much leadership discourse, which treats vulnerability as a resource to be strategically disclosed or as a risk to be managed. Authentic leadership, in particular, locates legitimacy in self-consistency and self-disclosure, which converts vulnerability into a performance (Huddleston, 2025). The exegetical material suggests the opposite: vulnerability is not something the leader deploys but something the leader is, and leadership's legitimacy depends on acknowledging this rather than instrumentalizing it. The philosophical consequence is that humanity in leadership is a vocation rather than a resource. A vocation is a calling that precedes and exceeds the one called; it cannot be reduced to a competency or an asset. This reframing has implications for the way leadership development is conceived. If humanity is a resource, it can be optimized; if it is a vocation, it can only be answered.

The finding also speaks to the literature on leadership and technology. Sarang and Maharani (2026) argue that the algorithmic era datifies the self and threatens human agency; Zhao (Sim, 2022) proposes an ontological reconstruction of human-machine coexistence drawing on Buddhist resources. The exegetical anthropology developed here is consonant with these critiques but differs in its grounding: it locates the threat to humanity not in technology as such but in any framework that treats persons as means. This is a Kantian point, but the exegetical material gives it a specific texture. The leader's finitude is not an abstract limitation; it is the concrete fact of failure, dependence, and mortality that the narratives refuse to soften. A leadership theory that cannot accommodate this fact will produce leaders who cannot acknowledge their own limits, which is precisely the condition that disruption exposes.

Synthesis: The Triadic Framework

The three movements converge on a framework that reconstitutes the relationship among power, ethics, and humanity rather than subordinating two terms to the third. Power under judgment names the structure of answerability that makes authority legitimate. Ethics as covenant names the grammar of mutual, articulated, and renewable obligation that makes ethics structural rather than dispositional. Humanity as vocation names the anthropology of finitude that makes leadership intelligible as a response to a calling rather than an exercise of an asset. The three are mutually constitutive: power without judgment becomes arbitrary; ethics without covenant becomes compliance; humanity without vocation becomes a resource. The framework's logic is that each term constrains the others, and that leadership legitimacy is a function of the three operating together.

This is the article's principal contribution. It is a philosophical reconstruction, not an empirical model, and its validity is argued rather than measured. The framework does not supply a leadership style to be adopted or a set of behaviors to be trained. It supplies a diagnostic grammar for identifying the reductions that leadership theory performs when it treats power as an instrument, ethics as a competency, and humanity as a resource. The grammar's yield is critical rather than prescriptive: it shows why the dominant paradigms generate the contradictions they do, and it specifies what an adequate account would need to include

Discussion: Convergence, Friction, and Limits

The framework converges with several strands in the recent literature. The emphasis on accountability over efficacy aligns with Mu(Westover, 2026).rgatroyd's (2025) argument that leadership in higher education must be understood as a moral practice rather than a managerial one, and with Antik's (2025) account of juridical leadership in technological disruption, which locates legitimacy in legal and ethical answerability rather than in adaptive capacity. The covenantal framing resonates with Arifatusshofwah and Shohib's (2026) analysis of communication ethics in the post-truth era, which similarly treats ethical obligation as structural rather than dispositional. The anthropological emphasis on finitude connects with Nagel et al.'s (2022) analysis of the tension between humanity, ethics, and economy in surgical practice, where the reduction of persons to resources is a live professional problem rather than an abstract one.

The framework also generates friction with the literature, and this friction is productive. The disruption literature's emphasis on agility, resilience, and rapid adaptation (Wibowo et al., 2025) tends to treat these as virtues without specifying their limits. The exegetical logic suggests that agility without answerability is a liability, and that the capacity to improvise is legitimate only when it remains within the terms of a trust. This is not a rejection of the disruption literature but a specification of its normative conditions. Similarly, the literature on Islamic educational leadership in disruption (Yamamoto & Ibuki, 2026) develops rich contextual accounts of adaptive leadership but tends to treat religious sources as reservoirs of values rather than as interpretive traditions with their own disciplinary norms. The exegetical method proposed here offers a way of engaging those sources more rigorously, though it also raises the question

of whether the method is transferable across traditions. That question is not settled here and is acknowledged as a limitation.

The framework's limits are threefold. First, it is a philosophical reconstruction and makes no empirical claims; its adequacy is interpretive and normative, and empirical testing would require operationalization that the framework does not supply. Second, the corpus is purposive and non-representative; it was selected to display the logic of power, covenant, and finitude, not to survey the biblical canon. Other texts might complicate or qualify the findings, and the framework should be read as an argument from selected evidence rather than as a comprehensive exegesis. Third, the framework's transferability to non-biblical traditions is asserted rather than demonstrated. The method's discipline attention to historical context, literary form, rhetoric, and intertext is generalizable in principle, but its application to other traditions would require the kind of tradition-specific competence that this article does not claim.

These limits do not undermine the contribution, but they do specify it. The article offers a diagnostic grammar and a triadic framework, argued through exegesis and assessed on philosophical grounds. It does not offer a model to be implemented, a scale to be validated, or a set of hypotheses to be tested. Its claim is that leadership theory's normative deficit is real, that exegesis can clarify the concepts the field presupposes, and that the clarification yields a reframing of legitimacy as accountability (Liao, 2024). Whether that reframing proves useful to empirical researchers, leadership educators, or practitioners is a question for subsequent work. The framework's value lies in what it makes visible: the reductions that dominant paradigms perform, the contradictions those reductions generate, and the conceptual resources that an exegetically disciplined philosophy of leadership can bring to bear on them (Yoga et al., 2025).

Note on Data Availability

No quantitative or qualitative empirical data were generated for this study. The analysis is text-based and interpretive. Readers seeking statistical validation of the framework will not find it here, and the absence is intentional. The framework is offered as a philosophical reconstruction whose adequacy must be assessed through the canons of exegetical and normative argument, not through measurement. Subsequent empirical work could operationalize the framework's dimensions, but such work would constitute a distinct study with its own methodological requirements (Zhao, 2026).

NOVELTY

The contribution advanced here is a named framework: the Exegetical Triad of Accountable Leadership (ETAL). ETAL is not a synthesis of existing leadership theories, nor a theological supplement to transformational or servant leadership models. It is a philosophical reconstruction that treats biblical exegesis as a method for recovering the normative grammar that leadership theory has largely abandoned. The framework comprises three mutually constitutive dimensions Power under Judgment, Ethics as Covenant, and Humanity as Vocation each derived from a distinct exegetical movement and each irreducible to the others. Its novelty rests on four specific claims.

First, ETAL reconstitutes the relationship among power, ethics, and humanity rather than ranking them. Existing paradigms typically subordinate two terms to a third:

transformational leadership subordinates ethics to influence, servant leadership subordinates power to service, authentic leadership subordinates ethics to psychological coherence. ETAL instead treats the three as a triad in which each dimension constrains and enables the others. Power under Judgment establishes that authority is legitimate only when it remains answerable to a standard it does not itself create. Ethics as Covenant specifies that obligation arises from relational commitment rather than from calculable outcome. Humanity as Vocation grounds leadership in finitude and vulnerability, refusing the reduction of persons leaders and followers alike to human resources. The framework's internal logic is that removing any one dimension collapses the triad into a technique, which is precisely the failure the article diagnoses in the dominant literature (Верещагина, 2025).

Second, ETAL introduces exegesis as a philosophical instrument rather than a source of illustrative maxims. The literature that draws on religious traditions for leadership insight has generally extracted principles without attending to the interpretive disciplines that produced them, a tendency visible in work linking Mosaic narratives to purpose-driven servant leadership (Friedman & Zeng, 2025) and in studies of ethical leadership in disrupted governance contexts (Darmilisani et al., 2026). ETAL reverses this procedure: historical-critical and literary-rhetorical reading governs which normative concepts are admissible, and canonical intertext provides the comparative check. The result is a method—corpus selection by criteria of authority transfer, limit claims, and salient human finitude; exegetical analysis; philosophical translation—that can be replicated and contested by other scholars. This methodological specification is itself a contribution, since no established procedure currently exists for reading biblical texts as philosophical sources for leadership theory.

Third, ETAL reframes legitimacy as a function of accountability rather than efficacy. This cuts against the outcome-oriented logic that dominates the field, including its most recent extensions into digital and AI-mediated contexts (Friedman & Hirakubo, 2026; Caligiuri, 2025). Where disruption renders established authority provisional, the framework holds that the pertinent question is not whether a leader produces results but whether the leader remains answerable to a judgment beyond performance. The reframing also supplies a diagnostic account of the contradictions documented in the literature—servant leadership's documented capacity to license paternalism, authentic leadership's tendency toward leader-centric self-disclosure, ethical leadership's drift into compliance mechanism. ETAL explains these as predictable consequences of paradigms that lack an accountability constraint internal to their own logic.

Fourth, ETAL is contextually positioned for disrupted authority structures without being an empirical model. It is offered as a philosophical reconstruction whose validity is argued through coherence and interpretive adequacy, not measured through psychometric properties. This positioning is deliberate and carries an explicit limitation: the framework has not been operationalized, no instrument has been developed, and no outer loadings, reliability coefficients, or path estimates are reported because no such data exist. Nor does the article present interview quotations or respondent counts, since no fieldwork was conducted. These absences are stated as boundaries of the claim, not

concealed as gaps. Future research could translate the three dimensions into measurable constructs and test their discriminant validity, but such work would constitute a separate empirical project rather than a validation of what is argued here.

The framework's distinctiveness becomes clearest in contrast. It is not a leadership style, because it prescribes no behavioral repertoire. It is not a competency model, because it resists the reduction of ethics to skill. It is not a spirituality-at-work construct, because it does not assume the authority of its sources; it argues for their interpretive yield. What ETAL offers is a diagnostic grammar for interrogating leadership legitimacy under conditions of disruption, together with a disciplined procedure for deriving that grammar from texts whose interpretive traditions have long grappled with the relationship between power, obligation, and human finitude. Its contribution lies in making that procedure explicit, replicable, and available for critique—not in supplying another model to be transplanted into organizations.

Limitations And Future Research

This study carries limitations that follow directly from its design as a philosophical reconstruction rather than an empirical investigation. The most consequential is the absence of empirical validation. The triadic framework Power under Judgment, Ethics as Covenant, Humanity as Vocation is argued for its interpretive adequacy and normative coherence, not tested for its explanatory or predictive power. No quantitative evidence is presented: there are no outer loadings, average variance extracted, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, HTMT ratios, path coefficients, or bootstrapping results, because no survey instrument was administered and no structural model was estimated. Readers should therefore treat the framework as a conceptual proposal awaiting operationalization, not as a validated measurement model. Any claim that the framework "explains" leadership legitimacy in disrupted organizations remains, at this stage, a philosophical wager rather than a demonstrated finding.

A second limitation concerns the corpus. The biblical narratives were selected purposively, according to the criteria stated in the Methods section, and the selection makes no claim to representativeness. Different selections prophetic texts, wisdom literature, Pauline ecclesiology would likely have yielded different emphases and possibly a different balance among the three terms. The exegetical readings themselves are contestable; historical-critical and literary-rhetorical approaches do not converge on single meanings, and the translations into normative concepts inevitably involve interpretive judgment that other exegetes may dispute. Relatedly, the study offers no interview data, no coding scheme, and no thematic analysis derived from fieldwork. No respondent quotations are reported because none were collected. The framework's resonance with practitioners' experience is thus asserted rather than documented, and the article cannot claim the kind of groundedness that qualitative fieldwork would provide.

A third limitation is contextual. The argument is developed primarily in conversation with Anglophone leadership scholarship and with Christian biblical texts. It engages Islamic and Confucian sources only marginally (Luo, 2025; Mildan & Azis, 2026; Arifatusshofwah & Shohib, 2026), and it does not address how the framework

would function in non-Western organizational settings where religious authority, legal culture, and institutional trust operate differently (Antik, 2025; Satoto & Santiago, 2025). The claim that exegesis offers a diagnostic grammar for leadership philosophy is therefore advanced within a particular intellectual tradition, and its cross-traditional portability remains untested.

These limitations generate a realistic research agenda. First, the framework should be operationalized as a measurement instrument: items for accountable power, covenantal ethics, and embodied humanity could be developed through expert panel review and cognitive interviewing, then subjected to exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, with discriminant validity assessed through HTMT and predictive validity tested against established legitimacy and trust measures. Second, qualitative fieldwork—interviews with leaders navigating institutional disruption, analyzed through systematic coding and thematic mapping—would test whether the framework's categories capture practitioners' own moral reasoning or impose an alien vocabulary (Murgatroyd, 2025; Caligiuri, 2025). Third, comparative exegetical work across religious and philosophical traditions would examine whether the triadic structure is parochial or generalizable (Zhao, 2026; Sarang & Maharani, 2026). Fourth, longitudinal case studies could trace how accountability claims are invoked, contested, and revised during actual leadership transitions. Finally, the framework's normative core legitimacy as accountability rather than efficacy deserves philosophical scrutiny in its own right, particularly against consequentialist and contractarian alternatives (Asamoah, 2023; Park, 2023). Until such work is undertaken, the contribution of this article should be read as opening a line of inquiry rather than closing one.

4. CONCLUSION

This article set out to reconstruct, through biblical exegesis, a philosophical account of leadership capable of holding power, ethics, and humanity together under the pressure of disruption. The argument proceeded from a diagnosis: dominant leadership paradigms transformational, transactional, servant, and authentic—treat power as an instrument, ethics as a competency, and humanity as a resource, and in doing so they answer the question of how leaders should lead while leaving unanswered the question of why they should be obeyed. Disruption renders this omission acute because it dissolves the conditions that once supplied tacit justification for authority. The reconstruction proposed here responds by reframing legitimacy as a function of accountability rather than efficacy, and by articulating a triadic framework—Power under Judgment, Ethics as Covenant, Humanity as Vocation—in which the three terms are mutually constitutive rather than hierarchically ordered.

The framework's contribution is threefold. Substantively, it offers an integrated account in which power is legitimate only insofar as it remains answerable to a judgment it does not control; ethics is not a set of competences but a covenantal grammar of obligation that binds leader and community reciprocally; and humanity is not a resource to be optimized but a vocation grounded in finitude and vulnerability. Methodologically, the article treats exegesis as a philosophical discipline rather than a quarry for

illustrative maxims, arguing that attention to historical context, literary form, rhetorical strategy, and canonical intertext supplies the thick normative reasoning that leadership philosophy has lacked. Normatively, it reframes the contradictions reported in the empirical literature—servant leadership's simultaneous enhancement of well-being and licensing of paternalism, authentic leadership's trust-building and its rationalization of leader-centric disclosure, ethical leadership's improvement of outcomes and its displacement of moral reasoning—not as anomalies but as symptoms of a shared normative deficit that an account of accountability would constrain.

These claims carry implications for leadership ethics. First, the framework suggests that evaluations of leadership should attend to structures of answerability rather than to outcomes alone, which has consequences for how leadership development, governance, and institutional design are conceived in disrupted contexts (Murgatroyd, 2025; Darmilisani et al., 2026). Second, it indicates that the engagement between leadership studies and religious sources should proceed through interpretive traditions rather than through the extraction of decontextualized principles, a point that bears on the spirituality-at-work and servant leadership literatures alike (Friedman & Zeng, 2025). Third, it invites empirical researchers to treat the framework's concepts as clarifications of the normative presuppositions their work already carries, rather than as hypotheses to be tested.

The limits of the argument must be stated plainly. This is a philosophical reconstruction, not an empirical generalization. No statistical data, survey instruments, or respondent interviews were generated or analyzed; the article therefore reports no outer loadings, reliability coefficients, path estimates, or thematic coding, and it makes no claim to representativeness in its corpus. The purposive selection of biblical narratives was justified by interpretive yield rather than by sampling logic, and different selections would have foregrounded different dimensions of the triad. The exegetical readings offered here are arguable and contestable within biblical scholarship itself, and the translation of exegetical findings into normative concepts involves interpretive judgment that cannot be fully formalized. Nor does the article adjudicate between competing theological and secular justifications of its claims; it argues for interpretive yield, not for the authority of its sources.

Future research could address these limits in three directions. Empirical studies might operationalize accountability as a structural variable and examine its relationship to legitimacy in disrupted organizations, without presupposing the framework's normative conclusions. Comparative work might bring the triadic framework into conversation with non-Christian traditions—Confucian, Islamic, and Buddhist resources among them—to test whether the triad's logic is parochial or portable (Luo, 2025; Zhao, 2026; Mildan & Azis, 2026). Finally, methodological work might formalize exegesis as a procedure within normative leadership ethics, specifying criteria of interpretive adequacy that parallel, without imitating, the criteria of empirical rigor. The article's wager is that such work is necessary: if disruption exposes the philosophical assumptions on which leadership theory rests, then the response it demands is not a better technique but a more adequate account of why authority deserves to be obeyed.

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