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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND LEADERSHIP: A FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores how the ethical principles of the *Franciscan Economic Tradition* and the *Economy of Francesco* can guide the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into business leadership. Emphasizing leadership as service, this paper advocates for participatory and ethically grounded decision-making that prioritizes human dignity and intrinsic motivations. The study first contrasts two dominant leadership models, then examines Francis of Assisi's vision of authority, its influence on Pope Francis's economic thought, and finally, the impact of AI on contemporary leadership practices.

**KEYWORDS:** Leadership – Francis of Assisi – Economy of Francesco – Economics – Artificial intelligence

**SOMMARIO:** Questo articolo analizza come i principi etici della tradizione economica francescana e dell'*Economia di Francesco* possano orientare l'integrazione dell'Intelligenza Artificiale (IA) nella leadership aziendale. Sottolineando una leadership intesa come servizio, si promuove un processo decisionale partecipativo, fondato sull'etica e sulla centralità della dignità umana, che valorizzi le motivazioni intrinseche. Lo studio confronta due modelli principali di leadership, esamina poi la visione che Francesco d'Assisi aveva dell'autorità e la sua influenza sul pensiero economico di Papa Francesco, per concludere con una riflessione sull'impatto crescente dell'IA nell'esercizio della leadership aziendale.

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** Leadership – Francesco d'Assisi – Economia di Francesco – Economia – Intelligenza artificiale

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This article examines how the ethical principles of the *Franciscan Economic Tradition* and the *Economy of Francesco* can guide the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into business leadership. Emphasizing leadership as service, it advocates for participatory and ethically grounded governance that prioritizes human dignity and intrinsic motivations. It is essential to ensure that the increasing automation of decision-making processes does not lead to depersonalization or the erosion of intrinsic motivations.

Instead of purely instrumental relationships focused on material gain and selfish interests, business leaders must promote autonomy, human development, and the intrinsic motivations of employees so that they assume the social function of the company. By automating repetitive activities, AI affords leaders the opportunity to concentrate more fully on those relational aspects of leadership that require “discernment and excellence.”

Echoing Christ’s words: “Let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant” (Lk 22:26), the Church affirms a model of leadership inspired by the Son of Man, who “did not come to be served but to serve” (Mt 20:28). Within this framework, Christian social thought envisions the firm as a “community of persons”<sup>1</sup> in which everyone is “responsible for all”<sup>2</sup>.

Leaders are not only those with titles, but also those who exercise influence for the good of the other. From company CEOs and members of boards of directors to team leaders to people with informal influence (*Vat-Leader* 5).

The Church does not deny the importance of economic profit but subordinates it to higher social and relational values. Specifically, it promotes the dignity of the person, the common good<sup>3</sup>, and sustainability above mere material profit.

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, “*Centesimus annus*. Encyclical letter.” (May 1, 1991), [CA], 35, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 83 (1991) 793-867. “The etymology of the words ‘company’ and ‘companions’—cum (with), and panis (bread)—suggests ‘breaking bread together’. The etymology of the word ‘corporation’—the Latin corpus (body)—suggests a group of people ‘united in one body.’” *Vat-Leader* 61.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, “*Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Encyclical letter,” (Dec. 30, 1987), [SRS], 38, in *AAS* 80 (1988) 513-586.

<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council defines the common good as “the sum of those conditions of the social life whereby men, families and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection”. Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et spes*. Pastoral Constitution” (Dec. 7, 1965), 26, in *AAS* 58 (1966) 1025-1120. “Businesses are therefore essential to the common good of every society” *Vat-Leader* 37.

The Church acknowledges the legitimate role of profit as an indication that a business is functioning well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied. But profitability is not the only indicator of a firm's condition (CA 35).

The opening section of this article outlines two fundamental models of business leadership, emphasizing the need to foster intrinsic motivations. The subsequent section examines Francis of Assisi's understanding of authority and leadership, insights that Pope Francis has taken up to formulate his proposal for a new economy (Part 3). Finally, drawing on these reflections, part 4 examines the growing influence of artificial intelligence on the exercise of business leadership.

## I. BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATIONS

In our efficiency-driven society, priority is given to quarterly profits, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and stock performance while harm to the ecosystem, social inequalities, and respect for human dignity are often ignored.

Shareholder value has become virtually the sole metric by which business leaders determine their performance and their worth. In the current climate, the call to 'maximise shareholder wealth' remains dominant and is the leading theory taught in many business schools (*Vat-Leader* 23).

Efficiency prevails over ethics. In this utilitarian mindset, "Values are seen as relative, measured by their contribution to individual preferences and business gains." (*Vat-Leader* 26).

There is, however, another economic approach that connects with the contribution of the Franciscans in this field. In this humanistic conception of the economy, commonly referred to as *Civil Economy*<sup>4</sup>, the main actor is neither the selfish individual (capitalism) nor the paternalistic State (collectivism), but civil society itself. The economic system will be efficient if it achieves public happiness, fostering mutual assistance, reciprocal trust, and relational goods.

We will now examine two models of business leadership, transactional and transformational, that may be associated with these two types of economy, though other approaches are also possible.

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<sup>4</sup> This line of economic thought connects with "Economics and Happiness." Cf. Stefano Bartolini, *Manifesto per la felicità. Come passare dalla società del ben-avere a quella del benessere*, Roma 2010; Daniel Kahneman – Angus Deaton, *High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being*, in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107/38 (2010) 16489-16493.