



Moral Leadership and Knowledge Sharing: A Social Learning Perspective on the Roles of Prosocial Motivation and Benevolent Leadership

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Keywords

Moral Leadership,
Knowledge Sharing,
Prosocial Motivation,
Benevolent Leadership,
Social Learning Theory

Abstract

This study examines how moral leadership influences employees' knowledge-sharing behavior from a social learning perspective. Drawing on social learning theory, we propose that moral leadership encourages knowledge sharing through prosocial motivation and that benevolent leadership strengthens this motivational process. Survey data were collected from 276 school teachers in Taiwan. The results show that moral leadership is positively related to knowledge sharing and that prosocial motivation mediates this relationship. In addition, benevolent leadership strengthens the positive relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation and enhances the indirect effect of moral leadership on knowledge sharing through prosocial motivation. These findings extend research on leadership and knowledge sharing by highlighting the role of moral leadership and identifying prosocial motivation as a key mechanism underlying knowledge-sharing behavior.

1. Introduction

In knowledge-intensive organizations, professionals must continuously update their expertise and adapt their practices to maintain performance effectiveness (Chiu & Hsiao, 2019). Professional development therefore increasingly relies on collaborative interactions among organizational members (Feng, Tseng, & Chen, 2020). Knowledge sharing plays a crucial role in this process by facilitating the exchange of experience-based insights, problem-solving strategies, and tacit knowledge (Chen & Chen, 2013). When individuals are reluctant to share knowledge, collective learning may be constrained, thereby undermining organizational effectiveness. Understanding the factors that encourage employees to engage in knowledge sharing has therefore become an important research issue.

Prior research has identified several antecedents of knowledge sharing, including organizational context, leadership, and individual characteristics (Wang & Noe, 2010; Al-Kurdi

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et al., 2018). Among these factors, leadership has received particular scholarly attention because it can shape followers' attitudes, motivations, and behavioral tendencies. Accordingly, a growing body of research has examined how different leadership styles influence knowledge-sharing behavior (e.g., Wu & Lee, 2017; Lee et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020). Empirical studies generally suggest that constructive leadership styles promote knowledge sharing, whereas destructive leadership tends to inhibit such behaviors (Wu & Lee, 2017; Park & Kim, 2018). For example, authentic leadership has been shown to positively relate to employees' knowledge-sharing practices (Zhang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025).

Recent scholarship has increasingly conceptualized knowledge sharing as a morally relevant behavior rather than merely a discretionary work activity (Lin, 2007; Bavik et al., 2018). Because knowledge is often collectively created and embedded within organizational contexts, withholding knowledge may undermine collective functioning and shared goals. From this perspective, knowledge sharing reflects concern for others and commitment to the collective. Building on this moral perspective, scholars have begun to examine how leaders' moral characteristics influence followers' knowledge-sharing behaviors. In particular, ethical leadership has attracted growing attention, as leaders who model and promote ethical conduct can encourage employees to share knowledge (Bavik et al., 2018; Le & Lei, 2018; Liu et al., 2020).

Despite growing interest in the relationship between moral-oriented leadership and knowledge sharing, two important limitations remain. First, existing research has largely examined moral-oriented leadership through the lens of ethical leadership. Although ethical leadership has generated substantial theoretical and empirical insights, its emphasis on moral management through rewards and disciplinary mechanisms (Brown et al., 2005) may not fully capture alternative expressions of moral leadership that emphasize personal virtue and moral exemplification (Gu et al., 2015; Bao & Li, 2019). Examining moral leadership within the paternalistic leadership framework may therefore broaden current understanding of how leaders' moral qualities influence knowledge-sharing behavior across cultural contexts.

Second, limited attention has been devoted to the psychological mechanisms linking moral-oriented leadership to knowledge sharing. Motivation has been consistently identified as a proximal determinant of knowledge-sharing behavior (Gagné et al., 2019; Xia & Yang, 2020), yet the processes through which moral leadership influences followers' motivational states remain underexplored. Leaders' moral attributes may shape followers' internalized values and behavioral standards (Ouakouak et al., 2020), which in turn may encourage knowledge sharing. However, empirical research has rarely examined motivation as an explicit mediating mechanism in this relationship. Addressing this gap may provide a more process-oriented explanation of how moral-oriented leadership fosters knowledge sharing.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) as a unifying framework to explain how moral leadership influences employees' knowledge-sharing behavior. Specifically, we distinguish two learning mechanisms through which moral leadership may shape knowledge sharing: behavioral modeling and value internalization. First, we focus on moral leadership as conceptualized within the paternalistic leadership framework, which comprises authoritarian, benevolent, and moral leadership (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Cheng et al., 2004). Among these dimensions, moral leadership emphasizes leaders' personal integrity, self-discipline, and moral exemplification. Rather than relying on formal enforcement

mechanisms, moral leaders influence followers primarily through ethical role modeling. From a social learning perspective, moral leaders serve as salient role models whose behaviors signal appropriate standards within the organization. Through observational learning processes, followers may adopt similar behavioral patterns, including discretionary knowledge-sharing behavior. Accordingly, we propose that moral leadership is positively related to knowledge sharing.

Second, we examine the psychological mechanism underlying this relationship. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) suggests that individuals may internalize behavioral standards by observing credible and attractive role models. When leaders consistently demonstrate moral integrity and selflessness, followers may internalize prosocial values that guide discretionary behaviors. We therefore focus on prosocial motivation—defined as the desire to exert effort to benefit others (Grant, 2008)—as a key mediating mechanism. Because knowledge sharing is inherently other-oriented and discretionary in nature, prosocial motivation is likely to translate moral modeling into knowledge-sharing behavior (Xia & Yang, 2020). Accordingly, we propose that prosocial motivation mediates the relationship between moral leadership and knowledge sharing.

Finally, we consider the interactive role of benevolent leadership. Within the paternalistic leadership framework, moral and benevolent leadership are theorized to function synergistically (Niu et al., 2009). Benevolent leadership reflects individualized concern for followers' well-being. From a social learning perspective, such benevolence enhances the attractiveness and credibility of the leader as a role model (Bandura, 1986), thereby strengthening followers' identification with the leader and facilitating the internalization of moral standards. Consequently, we propose that benevolent leadership strengthens the positive relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation. In summary, Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of this study.

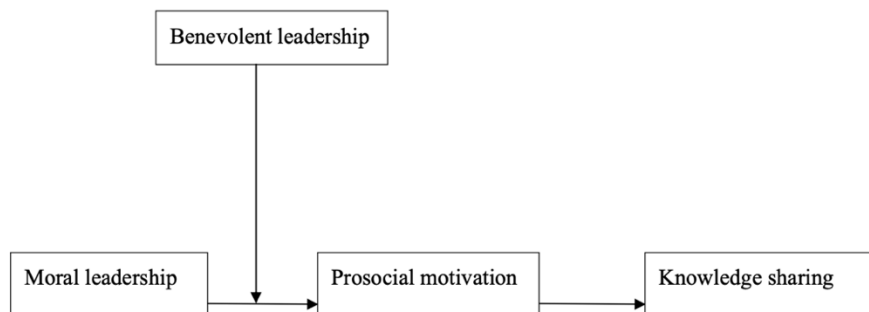


Figure 1 *Theoretical Framework*

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it extends research on moral-oriented leadership and knowledge sharing by moving beyond the dominant focus on ethical leadership. By examining moral leadership within the paternalistic leadership framework, this study broadens the conceptualization of moral-oriented leadership and highlights alternative ways in which leaders' moral attributes influence employee behavior across cultural contexts.

Second, this study provides a process-oriented explanation of how moral leadership influences knowledge sharing. Drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), we identify prosocial motivation as a key psychological mechanism through which moral modeling translates into discretionary knowledge-sharing behavior. By incorporating motivational and internalization processes, this research deepens understanding of how leadership shapes employee behavior.

Third, this study contributes to paternalistic leadership research by examining the joint effects of moral and benevolent leadership. Although prior studies suggest that different dimensions of paternalistic leadership may operate synergistically, empirical evidence on their interactive mechanisms remains limited. By demonstrating that benevolent leadership strengthens the internalization process associated with moral leadership, this study offers a more integrated explanation of how leadership dimensions jointly influence knowledge-sharing behavior.

2. Literature review

2.1 Moral leadership and knowledge sharing

Moral leadership represents a core dimension of paternalistic leadership (Cheng et al., 2004). Unlike authoritarian and benevolent leadership, which emphasize authority or individualized care, moral leadership centers on leaders' personal integrity, self-discipline, and moral exemplification. Through consistent ethical conduct, moral leaders serve as role models whose behaviors signal appropriate norms and standards within the organization.

Although moral leadership and ethical leadership both emphasize leaders' moral character, they differ in their primary mechanisms of influence. Ethical leadership highlights both the moral person and the moral manager, emphasizing not only leaders' integrity but also their active reinforcement of ethical standards through rewards and disciplinary actions (Brown et al., 2005). In contrast, moral leadership within the paternalistic leadership framework focuses primarily on virtue, self-discipline, and behavioral exemplification (Cheng et al., 2004). Rather than relying on formal control mechanisms, moral leaders influence followers mainly through moral modeling and indirect influence (Gu et al., 2015; Bao & Li, 2019). Because of this emphasis on moral exemplification, moral leadership is particularly consistent with the modeling processes highlighted in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

Social learning theory suggests that individuals acquire behavioral standards by observing credible and salient role models. In organizational contexts, leaders function as highly visible models whose actions signal appropriate norms and expectations. When leaders consistently demonstrate integrity, selflessness, and commitment to collective interests, followers may adopt similar behavioral patterns through observational learning processes. Knowledge sharing, as a discretionary and other-oriented behavior, can be influenced by such modeling. By demonstrating concern for collective welfare and moral responsibility, moral leaders signal that sharing knowledge with others is valued and appropriate within the organization. Consequently, followers are more likely to engage in knowledge-sharing behavior. Moreover, observational learning does not always require complete value internalization prior to behavioral enactment; individuals may imitate salient behaviors based on observed cues and consequences. Thus, moral leadership may also directly encourage knowledge-sharing behavior through behavioral modeling.

Hypothesis 1: Moral leadership is positively related to knowledge sharing.

2.2 The mediating effect of prosocial motivation

Prosocial motivation refers to an individual's desire to exert effort to benefit others or contribute to collective outcomes (Grant, 2007, 2008). In organizational contexts, prosocial motivation shapes employees' willingness to engage in discretionary behaviors that support colleagues and the broader organization. Prior research suggests that leadership can play an important role in cultivating prosocial motivation by signaling valued norms and standards (Grant & Berg, 2012).

Drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), leaders influence followers not only through direct guidance but also through behavioral modeling and value transmission. When leaders consistently demonstrate moral integrity, selflessness, and commitment to collective interests, they function as salient role models whose behaviors communicate socially appropriate standards. Through observational learning and internalization processes, followers may adopt similar prosocial values. In this sense, prosocial motivation reflects the activation of internalized prosocial standards shaped by moral modeling. Moral leadership, characterized by personal virtue and ethical exemplification, highlights concern for others and responsibility toward the collective (Lin et al., 2014). Such modeling can strengthen followers' prosocial orientation (Fehr et al., 2015). As followers internalize these values, they become more motivated to act in ways that benefit others (Batson et al., 2008). Accordingly, moral leadership is expected to enhance followers' prosocial motivation.

Hypothesis 2: Moral leadership is positively related to prosocial motivation.

In organizational contexts, knowledge sharing is typically considered a discretionary behavior rather than a formally prescribed task. Consequently, employees' motivational states play an important role in determining whether they voluntarily share knowledge. Prosocial motivation has been associated with various extra-role and citizenship behaviors (Grant & Mayer, 2009; Eva et al., 2020). Individuals with high prosocial motivation prioritize others' welfare and are therefore more willing to engage in behaviors that support colleagues and the broader organization.

Knowledge sharing inherently involves contributing time, effort, and expertise to benefit others. Prosocially motivated individuals are therefore more likely to perceive knowledge sharing as consistent with their internalized values and goals. Moreover, their outward focus increases sensitivity to situations in which their knowledge may assist others. Consistent with this reasoning, prior research has found a positive relationship between prosocial motivation and knowledge sharing (Xia & Yang, 2020). Integrating this argument with Hypothesis 2, we propose that moral leadership enhances prosocial motivation through value internalization processes, which in turn promotes discretionary knowledge-sharing behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Prosocial motivation mediates the relationship between moral leadership and knowledge sharing.

2.3 The moderating effect of benevolent leadership

Benevolent leadership represents another positive dimension of paternalistic leadership and is characterized by individualized and holistic concern for followers' well-being (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Prior research suggests that moral and benevolent leadership may operate synergistically

(Niu et al., 2009; Wu, 2012). The present study interprets this interaction from a social learning perspective. Social learning theory suggests that the effectiveness of observational learning depends on attentional and motivational processes influenced by model characteristics (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Benevolent leadership, through the demonstration of care and concern, may enhance followers' emotional attachment and trust toward the leader. Such qualities increase the leader's attractiveness as a role model and strengthen followers' identification with the leader. When benevolent leadership is high, followers are more likely to attend to and internalize the moral standards exemplified by the leader. Consequently, benevolent leadership strengthens the internalization process through which moral leadership fosters prosocial motivation. In contrast, when benevolent leadership is low, followers may be less receptive to the leader's moral modeling. Accordingly, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Benevolent leadership positively moderates the relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation, such that the relationship is stronger when benevolent leadership is high rather than low.

Building on this moderated relationship, we further propose a conditional indirect effect on knowledge sharing.

Hypothesis 5: Benevolent leadership moderates the indirect effect of moral leadership on knowledge sharing through prosocial motivation, such that the indirect effect is stronger when benevolent leadership is high rather than low.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and data collection

Data for this study were collected from elementary school teachers in Taiwan. Teachers provide an appropriate context for examining knowledge sharing because teaching is a knowledge-intensive profession that involves frequent exchange of instructional strategies, pedagogical experiences, and teaching materials among colleagues. In addition, leadership in educational organizations is often associated with strong moral expectations, as school principals are expected to serve as moral role models who influence teachers through personal integrity and ethical example.

Data were obtained from teachers working in 16 elementary schools. Prior to data collection, school personnel were contacted to explain the purpose of the study and obtain permission to conduct the survey. Paper-based questionnaires were then distributed to teachers in each school with the assistance of a designated coordinator responsible for collecting the completed surveys. A total of 329 questionnaires were distributed, and 276 valid responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 83.9%.

Among the respondents, 74.3% were female and 75.4% were married. The average age was 42.21 years ($SD = 7.08$). Participants reported an average teaching tenure of 12.32 years ($SD = 7.31$) and an average total work experience of 16.7 years ($SD = 7.50$). Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

3.2 Measures

All variables were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). The original English items were translated into Chinese and then back-translated into English using the standard translation-back translation procedure to ensure linguistic equivalence.

Moral leadership. Moral leadership was measured using the six-item scale developed by Cheng et al. (2004). Respondents evaluated the extent to which their school supervisor demonstrated integrity, fairness, and self-discipline. Sample items include “My supervisor employs people according to their virtues and does not envy others’ abilities and virtues” and “My supervisor does not take advantage of me for personal gain.” Cronbach’s α for this scale was .87.

Benevolent leadership. Benevolent leadership was measured using the eleven-item benevolence dimension of the paternalistic leadership scale developed by Cheng et al. (2004). Sample items include “Beyond work relations, my supervisor expresses concern about my daily life” and “My supervisor ordinarily shows a kind concern for my comfort.” Cronbach’s α for this scale was .97.

Knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing was assessed using the three-item scale developed by Huang et al. (2014). Sample items include “I always provide my know-where or know-whom at the request of other coworkers” and “I share my expertise from my education or training with other coworkers.” Cronbach’s α for this scale was .84.

Prosocial motivation. Prosocial motivation was measured using the four-item scale developed by Grant (2008). Sample items include “Because I care about benefiting others through my work” and “Because I want to have a positive impact on others.” Cronbach’s α for this scale was .93.

Control variables. Intrinsic motivation was included as a control variable because employees may engage in discretionary behaviors due to their inherent enjoyment of the work itself. Intrinsic motivation was measured using the four-item scale developed by Grant (2008). Sample items include “Because I enjoy the work itself” and “Because it’s fun.” Cronbach’s α for this scale was .92. In addition, demographic variables including age and organizational tenure were controlled.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the measurement model for the key constructs: moral leadership, prosocial motivation, knowledge sharing, and benevolent leadership. To maintain sufficient degrees of freedom, item parceling was applied in the CFA model (Bandalos, 2002). The results indicated that the four-factor model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data (GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.86, CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.95). In addition, composite reliability values for all constructs exceeded 0.85, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.65, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was supported, as the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs. To reduce potential common method bias, several procedural remedies were implemented. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, thereby reducing evaluation apprehension and social desirability concerns. In addition,

established scales from prior studies were used to enhance measurement validity. Statistically, a confirmatory factor analysis indicated satisfactory discriminant validity among the focal constructs. We also conducted Harman's single-factor test, and the first unrotated factor accounted for 46.05% of the total variance, which is below the 50% threshold suggested in prior research (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Furthermore, the significant interaction effect observed in this study is less likely to be fully attributable to common method variance. Nevertheless, because all variables were self-reported by the same respondents, common method bias cannot be completely ruled out.

4. Results

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables used in this study.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	42.21	7.08					
2. Organizational tenure	12.32	7.31	.54***				
3. Moral leadership	5.25	1.20	.00	-.04			
4. Benevolent leadership	4.44	1.31	.05	-.02	.60***		
5. Prosocial motivation	6.00	.79	-.01	-.07	.28***	.26***	
6. Knowledge sharing	5.70	.84	.13*	.03	.26***	.36***	.51***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that moral leadership is positively related to knowledge sharing. As shown in Model 1 of Table 2, moral leadership was positively and significantly related to knowledge sharing ($b = .14$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 predicts that moral leadership is positively related to prosocial motivation. Model 2 of Table 2 shows that moral leadership was positively related to prosocial motivation ($b = .12$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 proposes that prosocial motivation mediates the relationship between moral leadership and knowledge sharing. Model 3 indicates that prosocial motivation was positively related to knowledge sharing ($b = .43$, $p < .001$). In addition, the coefficient for moral leadership decreased from .14 ($p < .001$) in Model 1 to .09 ($p < .05$) after prosocial motivation was included in the model, suggesting a potential mediating effect. To formally test the mediation, PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples was used (Hayes, 2013). The results showed that the indirect effect of moral leadership on knowledge sharing through prosocial motivation was .05, and the 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero ($CI = [.0197, .0900]$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 2 *Result of Regression Analyses*

	Knowledge sharing	Prosocial motivation	Knowledge sharing	Prosocial motivation
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Variables				
Age	.01	-.01	.01	-.01
Organizational tenure	.00	.00	.00	.00
Intrinsic motivation	.27***	.41***	.10	.41***
Moral leadership (ML)	.14***	.12***	.09*	.12**
Prosocial motivation			.43***	
Benevolent leadership (BL)				.01
ML X BL				.06**
R ²	.19	.34	.30	.36
F	15.82***	35.41***	22.91***	25.17***

Coefficients are unstandardized. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that benevolent leadership moderates the relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation. As shown in Model 4 of Table 2, the interaction term between moral leadership and benevolent leadership was positive and significant ($b = .06$, $p < .01$), indicating that benevolent leadership strengthens the positive relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. To further illustrate the moderating effect, the interaction was plotted following the procedure recommended by Aiken and West (1991). As shown in Figure 2, the positive relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation is stronger when benevolent leadership is high (+1 SD) than when it is low (−1 SD).

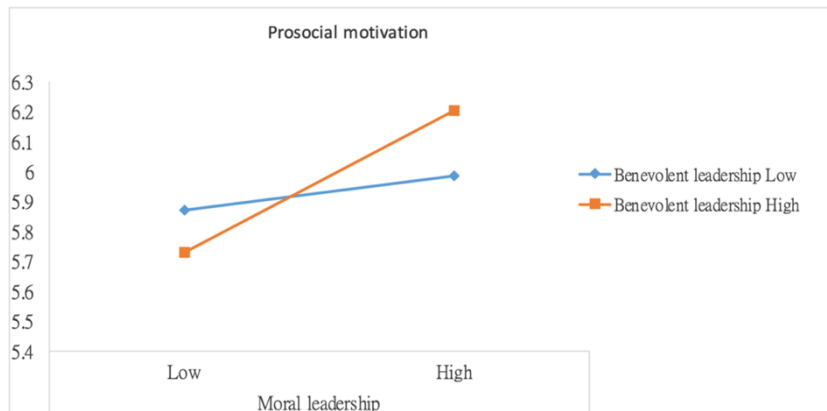


Figure 2 *Moderating Effect of Benevolent Leadership on the Relationship between Moral Leadership and Prosocial Motivation*

Hypothesis 5 predicts that benevolent leadership moderates the indirect effect of moral leadership on knowledge sharing through prosocial motivation. To test this hypothesis, PROCESS Model 7 with 5,000 bootstrap samples was employed (Hayes, 2013). The results showed that the conditional indirect effect of moral leadership on knowledge sharing through

prosocial motivation varied across levels of benevolent leadership. When benevolent leadership was low (-1 SD), the indirect effect was not significant (effect = .0203, 95% CI $[-.0253, .0597]$). When benevolent leadership was at the mean level, the indirect effect was significant (effect = .0527, 95% CI $[.0190, .0923]$). When benevolent leadership was high ($+1$ SD), the indirect effect was larger and significant (effect = .0851, 95% CI $[.0399, .1430]$). Furthermore, the index of moderated mediation was significant (index = .025, 95% CI $[.0072, .0509]$), indicating that the indirect effect of moral leadership on knowledge sharing through prosocial motivation was moderated by benevolent leadership. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

5. Discussion

Drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), this study examined how moral leadership influences employees' knowledge-sharing behavior. The findings indicate that moral leadership is positively related to knowledge sharing, suggesting that leaders' moral exemplification can encourage followers to engage in discretionary knowledge-sharing behavior. This finding is consistent with prior studies suggesting that leaders' ethical conduct can promote knowledge sharing (Bavik et al., 2018; Le & Lei, 2018; Liu et al., 2020). The results further show that moral leadership enhances employees' prosocial motivation, which in turn promotes knowledge sharing. This finding supports prior research indicating that leaders can influence followers' motivational orientations through value transmission and role modeling (Grant & Berg, 2012; Eva et al., 2020). Because knowledge sharing is inherently other-oriented, employees who are motivated to benefit others are more likely to contribute their expertise and experiences to colleagues (Xia & Yang, 2020). In addition, the results reveal that benevolent leadership strengthens the relationship between moral leadership and prosocial motivation. This finding supports previous arguments that different dimensions of paternalistic leadership may operate synergistically (Niu et al., 2009; Wu, 2012). When leaders demonstrate both moral integrity and benevolence toward followers, employees are more likely to identify with the leader and internalize the values conveyed through moral exemplification.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the present research extends existing studies on leadership and knowledge sharing by examining moral leadership within the paternalistic leadership framework. Most prior research investigating the moral foundations of leadership has focused on ethical leadership (Bavik et al., 2018; Le & Lei, 2018). Although ethical leadership has generated important insights, it emphasizes both moral person and moral manager roles (Brown et al., 2005). In contrast, moral leadership highlights leaders' personal virtue and moral exemplification (Cheng et al., 2004). By examining moral leadership as a distinct construct, this study broadens the conceptualization of moral-oriented leadership and highlights alternative mechanisms through which leaders' moral attributes influence employee behavior.

Second, this study contributes to the knowledge-sharing literature by providing a process-oriented explanation of how moral leadership influences knowledge sharing. Prior research has identified motivation as an important determinant of knowledge-sharing behavior (Gagné et al., 2019). Although previous studies have begun to examine the motivational mechanisms linking ethical leadership to knowledge sharing (e.g., Xia & Yang, 2020), relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how moral leadership within the paternalistic leadership

framework shapes employees' prosocial motivation and subsequent knowledge-sharing behavior. Drawing on social learning theory, this study demonstrates that prosocial motivation serves as a key mediating mechanism through which moral leadership fosters knowledge sharing. These findings highlight the importance of value internalization processes in translating leadership behaviors into employee discretionary actions.

Third, this study contributes to paternalistic leadership research by examining the joint influence of moral and benevolent leadership. Previous studies suggest that these leadership dimensions may interact to influence follower attitudes and behaviors (Niu et al., 2009; Wu, 2012). However, empirical evidence explaining how these dimensions jointly operate remains limited. By demonstrating that benevolent leadership strengthens the internalization process through which moral leadership enhances prosocial motivation, this study provides new insights into the synergistic mechanisms of paternalistic leadership.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for organizations and educational institutions. First, the results suggest that leaders' moral exemplification can serve as an effective means of promoting knowledge sharing. When leaders consistently demonstrate integrity, fairness, and concern for collective interests, employees are more likely to perceive knowledge sharing as an appropriate and valued behavior within the organization. Rather than relying solely on formal incentives or knowledge management systems, organizations may therefore encourage knowledge sharing by fostering moral leadership among supervisors. Leadership development programs may incorporate training components that emphasize ethical decision-making, integrity, and responsibility toward collective goals.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of cultivating employees' prosocial motivation. Because knowledge sharing often involves voluntary effort and may not produce immediate personal benefits, employees' willingness to share knowledge depends largely on their motivation to contribute to others. Organizations may encourage prosocial motivation by promoting a collaborative climate, emphasizing collective achievements, and recognizing behaviors that benefit colleagues and the broader organization.

Third, the results indicate that benevolent leadership enhances the effectiveness of moral leadership. Leaders who demonstrate genuine concern for followers' well-being may strengthen employees' trust and identification with the leader, thereby increasing their receptiveness to moral role modeling. This finding suggests that leadership development programs should emphasize not only moral integrity but also benevolence and individualized consideration for followers. By combining moral exemplification with benevolent concern, leaders may more effectively foster employees' willingness to engage in knowledge-sharing behaviors.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, data were collected from elementary school teachers in Taiwan, which may limit generalizability across occupational and cultural contexts, particularly settings where paternalistic leadership is less culturally embedded. Future research should replicate the model in other industries and lower-power-distance cultures. Second, the cross-sectional, single-source design limits causal inference and may be vulnerable to common method bias. Longitudinal, experimental, multi-source, or time-lagged designs could better establish temporal ordering and reduce this concern. Third, this study examined only prosocial

motivation as the mediating mechanism. Future research could test alternative motivational and identity-based mechanisms, such as moral self-regard, consistency with internalized moral standards, and identification with the leader or organization.

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(Received March 2026; accepted August 2026)