

METHODS TO ENHANCE THE MORAL LEADERSHIP OF COLLEGE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Moral leadership is an intangible form of leadership that differs from conventional methods of regulating or restricting human behavior through administrative means, such as systems or clauses. Moral leadership uses exemplary behavior from a group to guide and inspire other members, which can lead to imitation and learning among organizational members. Starting from this, the essence of morality can be internalized into one's own behavioral character, achieving a subtle and silent education of morality. As an important stage in carrying out the work of cultivating students' moral character and nurturing talents, college teachers shoulder the responsibility of cultivating qualified and high-quality talents for society. They should also improve their moral character and comprehensive quality to be consistent in both appearance and substance. Based on literature review, the methods for improving the moral leadership of college teachers can be divided into three dimensions: shaping moral character, participating in moral practice, and providing institutional support. These three dimensions are progressive from the inside out and play a crucial role in enhancing the moral leadership of college teachers.

Keywords: College Teachers; Moral Leadership; Self-Management; Moral Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Moral leadership is the ability to self manage through ethical means, actively constraining and guiding one's own behavior through moral self-discipline and internal moral standards. Kant proposed, "Self discipline is the core of morality." College teachers bear the responsibility of cultivating talents for society and the mission of cultivating morality and nurturing people. Unlike previous education stages, college students are closest to society, and their minds and thoughts are relatively mature compared to previous education stages. College teachers should not only have profound knowledge, but also noble moral sentiments to educate and guide college students. Only in this way can college students be convinced and respect college teachers from the bottom of their hearts. Through behavior demonstrations, college students can reflect on themselves and continuously strengthen their moral character from imitation behavior, thereby improving their comprehensive quality. In the process of ideological and political education for college students, the role played by college teachers is fundamental, and their ability to educate students plays a crucial role. So, it is necessary to improve the moral character of college teachers themselves, and the process of improvement should be from the inside out. Through shaping moral character, participating in moral practice, and providing institutional guarantees, the moral ability of college teachers can be independently improved step by step from the inside out.

THE CULTIVATION LAYER OF MORAL CHARACTER

After literature review, there are three factors that influence the moral conduct of college teachers in forming the foundation of moral leadership, namely value construction, intrinsic motivation stimulation, and emotional care composition. For how to shape the moral leadership of college teachers, the first step is to cultivate their recognition of values. Only by first recognizing the use of moral methods to enhance their own character, can college teachers accept the influence of moral leadership on transforming themselves. As for the profound and lasting changes that morality brings to people through imperceptible influence, Mr. Luo Guojie believes that "the functions of morality include regulation, education, cognition, evaluation order, guidance, incentive, communication, prediction, etc., among which regulation, education and cognition (reflection) are the basic functions of morality." (Luo Guojie 1989) The Moral Society will cultivate people's sense of responsibility and rational ability to distinguish right from wrong, regulate people's behavior, and avoid serious mistakes in people's behavior by means of public order and good customs, inner restraint, social public opinion, communication and guidance, education and influence. Morality guides people's behavior, guiding members of society to abide by social norms through the value system and value pursuit recognized by society, so that members of society know which behaviors are correct, should be done and advocated, and which behaviors are wrong, cannot be done and explicitly prohibited. When people deviate from socially recognized behavior, the subject of moral regulation is relatively broad, including both social organizations and individuals or groups. The ways and timing of moral regulation are flexible. When behavior does not conform to social order and good customs or human values, morality can regulate human behavior through the above means. Meanwhile, morality provides value guidance for other regulatory means based on fundamental value standards and foundations. Regarding how to enhance one's moral leadership by constructing values, Xu Ping believes that "using ethics, beliefs, symbolic norms, and other forms to guide and influence organizations, groups, and individuals refers to a leadership model that achieves value rationality under certain conditions." In universities, when teachers can consciously construct their own values through ethics and beliefs, their spiritual realm and pursuit have surpassed the requirements of the hierarchical system for human behavior commands. People independently manage their words and actions, making their behavior reasonable and appropriate under the premise of legality. This also achieves the ultimate pursuit of moral leadership. "Leadership is for not leading," and leadership itself is not an end. Teachers use moral leadership to achieve

this. self-management, When teachers have the ability and awareness to manage themselves, the ultimate goal of moral leadership is achieved. The process of constructing values is important in inspiring teachers' recognition of moral leadership. Only by accepting it from the heart can teachers think about themselves and their relationship with the objective world in a moral way. Therefore, stimulating teachers' moral passion is crucial for improving their moral abilities. Dezhou et al (2026) found through empirical research that the impact of moral leadership on job engagement is entirely mediated by professional identity (efficacy, belonging, value). Neves, M. L. G. (2025) found a significant positive correlation between moral leadership and teachers' intrinsic motivation, with commitment playing a mediating role. Therefore, the role played by internal factors is crucial in the process of enhancing the moral leadership of college teachers. At the same time, an important factor affecting the formation of moral character among college teachers is also emotional care for them. How emotional care variables affect the formation of moral leadership among college teachers? Ahmad and other organizational behavior scholars have empirically found that moral leadership reduces turnover intention through the mediating effect of emotional well-being. The helpfulness and supportive forms of ethical leaders are key to enhancing employee well-being. (Ahmad et al. 2018) Moral leaders are different from administrative leaders in that they are not necessarily the ones standing at the top of the pyramid in the organization. However, their own moral qualities and external behavior are significant. Their moral level is usually higher than that of other members in the organization. In the organization, they are consistent in their words and deeds, complete their job duties with high quality, hold themselves to high standards, and treat their colleagues well, providing more empathy and emotional support to those around them. When colleagues are not proficient in their work or face difficulties in life, ethical leaders can provide sincere and selfless help; When personal interests conflict with the interests of others or the collective, sacrificing personal interests in exchange for the progress of others is prominent and comparative in the organization. Moral leaders can be understood as the "opinion leaders" of organizational members, who can arouse the respect of organizational members from the bottom of their hearts. Therefore, their words also have a heavy weight in the organization. Even administrative leaders usually listen to their opinions when making decisions. Moral leaders do not prioritize the ultimate achievement of organizational goals, but focus more on the comfort and happiness of organizational members in their work, as well as whether they have achieved comprehensive quality improvement and moral level enhancement. Moral leaders consciously care about human development, which is consistent with the educational mission of college teachers. Unlike teachers in other academic stages, the educational target of college teachers is college students who are about to enter society after completing their college learning tasks. The workers required by society are not only those who excel in their studies, have outstanding majors, and are skilled in their skills, but more importantly, whether the comprehensive qualities of college students can meet the needs of their positions. What is more crucial is the examination of their moral qualities. Moral qualities are an important factor reflecting a person's character and behavioral stability. Moral defects can disrupt team balance, disrupt team order, hinder team development, and even cause legal disputes. Therefore, the losses caused by not examining character are enormous. Therefore, focusing on improving the moral ability of college students is the top priority of the work tasks of college teachers. College teachers should exert their moral leadership, awaken students' moral consciousness, and enable them to improve their moral cognition, enhance their moral thinking, enrich their moral emotions, shape their moral will, and make mature moral behaviors through important methods such as moral practice during critical periods of thinking maturity and life transition. By using moral leadership, college teachers can complete the moral shaping of college students, enhance their moral qualities, and help to achieve the stage tasks of college education and the reasonable matching of social requirements for college students.(Li Chundi 2022)

THE ACTION LAYER OF MORAL PRACTICE

After literature review, there are three factors that influence the formation of moral leadership foundations among college teachers: moral practice, moral authority, and organizational culture composition. The formation of moral consciousness in the minds of college teachers is the foundation, and the key is action. In real life, they practice moral ways and reflect moral attributes through moral behavior. The important role played by moral practice in influencing the generation of moral leadership is stated by the founder of the theory of moral leadership, Sergiovanni, in his works such as "Moral Leadership: Touching the Core of School Improvement," which states that "moral practice refers to the practice centered on purpose, values, and beliefs." Through this discourse, it can be seen that moral practice itself has specific directionality, and teachers combine their ideas and understanding of morality in their minds to outline a plan for moral practice, and to turn moral concepts into moral reality in teaching and life. The difference between practical activities and the general sense is to do things right, while moral practice focuses more on doing the right things. The former focuses on outcome attributes, while the latter emphasizes target attributes. The result attribute ignores whether the process of doing things is reasonable, and whether the feelings and interests of collaborators are taken into account in the actions of interacting with people, only highlighting whether the right is done correctly. And the target attribute emphasizes that under the guidance of correct values and moral character, it not only takes into account the feelings of students and teachers in the process of doing things, but also achieves good educational goals and the correct way of doing things. Under the guidance of values, doing things correctly has a more valuable, crucial, and meaningful impact on all aspects of the parties involved. Sergiovanni constructed the reality of moral practice as a moral community with value attributes, whose essence lies in the community norms condensed from the correct values foundation. These community norms are contracts and guidelines that everyone voluntarily abides by, which Sergiovanni called the "substitute of leadership". Moral leadership requires building a moral community in schools to implement ideas into practice. In a community, people will form certain social connections with each other. The purpose of educating leaders to establish a moral community is to consciously unite the members of the community on the basis of shared values. Under the influence of moral leadership, they strictly demand themselves with moral standards, set development goals, and have their own consciousness of self-restraint, so as to manage themselves. This self-management through moral leadership is based on moral motivation, and fully considers the interests of other members who have formed social relationships with them on the basis of achieving self-development. In this way, the moral community constructed in universities, with the addition of moral principles in relationships, enables teachers to be harmonious and unified with each other, teachers with leaders, teachers with students, and teachers with parents, developing from "I" as the foundation to "we" as the foundation. On the basis of pursuing common values, individual members gradually coalesce into an organic community through identification and interaction. In this community, although there are differences of opinion, due to shared moral beliefs and cultural foundations, members are usually able to resolve differences in a rational and inclusive manner to the smallest extent possible. The moral consensus within the community not only provides emotional bonds and behavioral norms, but also constitutes a centripetal force that enables members to develop collaboratively while recognizing common goals. This relationship is reflected in the interlocking structure of 'you have me, I have you', which is different from the individualistic relationship model based on utilitarianism. The development of individuals not only relies on the support of the community, but also feeds back to the collective through their own contributions, thus achieving dynamic symbiosis and value integration between "me" and "us".

Meanwhile, moral authority is an important variable that influences the moral leadership of college teachers. Moral authority can provide role models and behavioral references for college

teachers in their behavior. Authority, when implemented within a group, refers to individuals who have discourse power and influence within the group. For example, professional authority among teachers represents individuals in the teaching industry who possess outstanding knowledge and abilities in their respective fields, and can represent their academic level and have a discourse system and influence in their professional field. Unlike professional competence as the standard, moral authority in the teaching community refers to individuals with noble moral character who are willing to contribute to their peers and the education industry with their own moral attributes. The practical actions of moral authority can arouse recognition, respect, and imitation from everyone, and truly understand, accept, and practice moral attributes starting from imitative behavior. Regarding the impact of moral authority on a group, Xu Ping believes that "moral authority means that authority comes from a broad range of shared values, ideas, responsibilities, and commitments to the community. When leadership practices are based on moral authority, teachers can be expected to work hard because of their commitment to the school community and their interdependence with community members." (Xu Ping, 2009) Cai Yi believes that "in the school leadership system, moral authority constitutes its core authority form. To achieve a high sense of responsibility and excellent performance for educational missions among organizational members, it is urgent to rely on a leadership style derived from moral beliefs. This type of leadership is not based on coercive orders or interest driven approaches, but rather on the recognition of shared school values and the internalization of cultural contracts, enabling members to consciously transform moral motivations into behavioral drivers in educational practice." (Cai Yi, 2009) Moral authority comes from values and a sense of responsibility towards the education worker community. By using responsibility and belief to inspire emotions, people are motivated to work hard towards the goal of cultivating talent with firm beliefs. In the process of establishing moral authority, moral leaders should set a moral example for faculty and staff, and set an example for educators in their daily lives. This example not only provides a model for teacher behavior, but also follows the school's educational philosophy, and can make educators consciously engage in their work, stimulate teachers' work motivation. This irrational emotional factor has a more lasting effect on people.

The final key factor influencing moral practice is the influence of organizational culture on university teachers, which is the spiritual bond that connects internal members. In organizations, the key to the conscious acceptance of ethical leadership by members lies in the fundamental transformation of leadership styles. Unlike traditional leadership that relies on control and command, ethical leadership emphasizes the extension of influence through the power of organizational culture. Leaders guide members to internalize organizational values through the transmission of beliefs and the stimulation of goals, thus forming a subtle, profound, and lasting guiding effect. This leadership style based on cultural identity establishes a dynamic, interactive, and constantly evolving relationship between leaders and organizational members. With continuous communication and feedback from both parties, not only can the moral level, moral awareness, and sense of social responsibility of organizational members be improved. Therefore, moral leadership is a two-way process that not only shapes the character and behavior of organizational members, but also encourages moral leaders to constantly improve themselves and achieve mutual growth in morality. Using the power of culture to achieve leadership, combined with the cultural foundation existing in the school, the subtle cultural foundation is condensed into a self-consistent structural organizational spiritual support, guiding people to consciously devote themselves to the school's cause, so that teachers and staff can set development goals that are suitable for themselves based on clarifying the relationship between school development and themselves, and achieve self-management. On this basis, we will build a moral community in schools, so that members of various organizations in schools can rely on each other and develop together on the basis of shared values. Thus, in the process of returning

to human nature, they help educators achieve the unity of self-management and high-quality school development through moral leadership.

THE BOTTOM LAYER OF INSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE

After literature review, there are two factors that affect the institutional guarantee for the formation of moral leadership foundation among college teachers, namely institutional design and goal design.

The cultivation of moral leadership among college teachers is naturally the key, and it also depends on the attention of society and schools. Building the improvement of teachers' moral abilities within the framework of the system can make teachers' moral education work normalized and long-term. In recent years, the Party and the state have paid great attention to the work of teacher ethics and style among college teachers, Ministry of Education (2019)said that multiple measures are taken simultaneously, including education and training, standardized behavior, institutional construction, and selection of typical cases, making moral education practice more comprehensive. Office of the Ministry of Education said that we will strengthen the use of teacher ethics assessment results, strictly implement the "one vote veto system" for teacher ethics performance, and include the construction of teacher ethics and professional conduct in the important content of the provincial party committee's inspection of college, implement regulatory responsibilities, and continue to follow up on supervision.

From this, it can be seen that promoting the institutionalization of teacher ethics and conduct in universities plays a guarantee role in improving the moral leadership ability of college teachers. The Teacher Education Development Center, Personnel Department, Organization Department and other departments involved in the management of college teachers should formulate relevant institutional norms related to teachers' moral abilities based on the actual development of the school, and put the standards related to teachers' professional ethics and conduct in a prominent position in the assessment of college teachers, and implement a one vote veto system for teacher ethics and conduct. Teacher ethics factors should be placed in the primary position of teacher evaluation, promotion and performance assessment, so that teachers urgently realize the importance of professional ethics and conduct for their own interests, and place misconduct in the system to form a deterrent effect.

In addition, the development goals set by schools are also related to the formation of moral leadership among university teachers. In the process of building school development goals and cultivating moral leadership among university teachers, the actual situation of the subject should be considered. Compared to other professions, university teachers have profound theoretical literacy and relatively independent critical abilities. They tend to reject simple theoretical preaching. In building development goals involving teachers' moral qualities, schools should not rely solely on value indoctrination, but should pay more attention to the value transformation of theoretical goals. By relying on situational target scenarios, teachers should be guided to consciously use their knowledge background and ability structure to participate in the process of building school goals. Through narrative co construction, value clarification, and ethical dilemma exploration strategies, university teachers can actively explore their moral abilities and participate in school development. Through teachers' situational participation, their enthusiasm can be stimulated, and they can actively participate in the generation logic and evolution of school development goals, Respecting the subjectivity of teachers while organically integrating organizational development vision with teacher development consensus, the development goals that teachers participate in and reach consensus on will be understood and supported by teachers, enhancing their moral abilities.

CONCLUSION

Based on literature analysis, it is found that there are three main problems in existing literature research. Firstly, literature on moral leadership mainly comes from the West, with insufficient attention paid to its applicability and transformation in China. Therefore, research on innovative development should be based on the essence of moral leadership and applied to the actual situation of higher education in China. Secondly, the research topic is mostly applied to the administrative leadership of universities, while the actual educational topic, namely college teachers, has not been reviewed to a large extent. Thirdly, there are more theoretical descriptions of moral leadership than empirical research. The use of data to validate ethical leadership models is still relatively lacking, making the conclusions difficult to convince.

A study on the moral leadership of college teachers found that the person who pioneered the theory of moral leadership was Western scholar **Sergiovanni**. Moral leadership is different from conventional leadership systems, as it does not rely on hierarchical management and regulation by subordinates to superiors. Moral leadership focuses on cultural soft power and, under its influence, forms stable values within the organization, forms a moral community, and demonstrates to organizational members under the guidance of moral authority, inspiring the internal sense of responsibility of college teachers to achieve effective leadership. The idea of moral leadership, under the influence of values, mobilizes teachers' subjective factors to form a consensus of beliefs and responsibilities, which has certain positive significance. However, it is worth considering whether the constructed moral community is suitable for the actual development of higher education in China. The management of Chinese universities is a form of coexistence of administrative system and democratic participation. The administrative system is a hierarchical administrative hierarchy, and democratic participation allows teachers to propose their own development suggestions to the school through fixed institutions such as teaching representative conferences and trade union representative conferences. This management form is difficult to be compatible with the moral community spontaneously formed by values. To find Western moral leadership ideas that are suitable for the development of Chinese higher education, it is necessary to adapt and adjust them to the existing education management system and cultural traditions in China. Adapting the values of the moral community to reality through creative transformation, forming the fundamental task of cultivating morality and nurturing people, softening the rigidity of administration with morality, promoting democratic decision-making through dialogue and consultation, and easily forming consensus. Without setting a unified moral community standard, establish a moral community in representative group organizations in universities, such as grassroots model posts or party member vanguard posts, where there are noble values. Under their influence, observe the development and progress of members within the organization, and gradually promote the development model of moral leadership from imagination to reality through pilot projects combined with reality.

The research on the moral leadership of college teachers in foreign countries started earlier than in China, and the research is relatively rich and comprehensive. The focus of research on this issue in China is to explore **Sergiovanni**'s ideas on teacher moral leadership, and the related research is mainly qualitative analysis. Although it is universal, the relevant discussions are also general and lack in-depth analysis based on the actual situation of a certain region or college. There is a lack of quantitative research, empirical evidence, and persuasive theoretical explanations. Therefore, researchers studying the moral leadership of college teachers should be combined with the actual situation of a specific region or college, using comprehensive methods such as quantitative research and qualitative analysis. A stratified sampling method should be adopted to conduct a questionnaire survey of teachers from different levels of universities in a certain province, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) should be used to test the rationality of the model structure by combining CFI, RMSEA and other fitting indicators. Based on this, teachers and leaders from different disciplinary backgrounds and professional identities in

universities should be invited for interviews, and grounded theory research and coding analysis should be conducted on the interviews to draw persuasive conclusions. This can provide a validated framework for improving the moral leadership of college teachers in a certain province, and provide corresponding results based on the actual situation of other provinces. The revelation.

At the same time, research on improving the moral leadership of schools usually focuses on enhancing the moral leadership of administrative leaders, especially principals. There are not many studies on improving the moral leadership of ordinary teachers, and the research focus has not been considered. Ordinary teachers are the vast majority of college education workers, who affect the overall development and construction of the school, and are the people who communicate the most with students' daily learning and life. Only by improving the moral leadership ability of this group of people can we effectively promote students' progress and drive the development of the school through their progress. The requirements of the "Ten Code of Professional Conduct for College Teachers" issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2018. All teachers are responsible for their moral behavior, not just those in leadership positions. Teacher moral leadership is the micro foundation of professional ethics development. Attention should be paid to the need for all college teachers to participate in the recognition mechanism together, in order to promote the role of teachers' moral leadership. By utilizing educational activities and living environments to form moral goals and consensus for common growth, actively creating a communication environment for moral coexistence, and promoting an effective evaluation system for teachers' moral leadership. This article divides the influence of moral leadership on college teachers into three layers: cultivation, practice, and system. These three layers progress layer by layer. Firstly, moral leadership awareness is cultivated through constructing values, stimulating moral motivation, and emotional care. Then, through moral practice, organizational cultural influence, and learning of moral authority, real moral behavior ability is formed. Finally, institutional design and goal construction are used to ensure the formation of moral leadership among college teachers. The cultivation layer focuses on strengthening the formation of personal moral consciousness, while the action layer focuses on implementing moral consciousness into real life through practice in practical work, while institutional arrangements and goal building provide support for moral action.(Li Chundi 2022) Overall, this study provides an analytical perspective on how the moral leadership of college teachers is formed, developed, and sustained.

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