

# CULTIVATING MORAL LEADERSHIP AMONG UNIVERSITY FACULTY IN CHINA

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## ABSTRACT

The moral leadership of higher education administrators is the positive guidance of teachers' inner expression and emotional experience through ethical methods. Education administrators should help them shape values that are in line with the essence of education in their worldview, establish positive value orientations, and enable them to achieve self-management. Cultivating moral leadership in universities can balance the relationship between individuals and organizations, effectively resolving conflicts and disputes between departments and teachers caused by conflicts of interest in universities. Using ethical methods for educational leadership, shaping people's values, and aligning individual value pursuits with the development goals of the school. Using the power of culture to achieve leadership, combining the cultural foundation existing in the school, integrating the subtle cultural influence into a self-consistent structural organization, becoming the spiritual support of the organization, guiding people to consciously devote themselves to the school's cause, enabling faculty and staff to set development goals that are suitable for themselves while clarifying the relationship between school development and themselves, and achieving 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. In this way, moral leadership can help educators achieve the unity of self-management and high-quality school development.

**Keywords:** Moral leadership, Values, Culture, Moral community

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## INTRODUCTION

What is moral leadership and what is moral leadership in universities is a relatively specific research category formed by the intervention of moral leadership theory in the field of universities. In the author's opinion, moral leadership in universities is not only the leadership of education administrative department heads or university leaders over educators, but also includes the ability of faculty and staff to manage themselves on the basis of receiving moral leadership. The ideal state of leadership management is to not lead. The statement 'Leadership is for not leading' may seem contradictory, but it is actually a rejection of leadership itself based on dialectical unity. The most ideal way of leadership is for an organization to develop in a positive manner without a leader. When the moral leadership in universities is effective, university educators truly accept the moral leadership style from the bottom of their hearts and begin to demand themselves with moral norms, rather than just obeying administrative orders from superiors and following institutional regulations to restrain their behavior. The leadership style becomes self-management, and through internal cultivation of self-management, the effect of moral leadership is achieved. This form of self leadership is also known as the "leader's substitute" in moral leadership theory. The representative figure of moral leadership theory, Sachiwani, believes that "after accepting moral leadership, people are not only driven by interests, but their emotions and values will also dominate their behavior. These emotions and values will make humans consciously engage in moral practice beyond the drive of interests." (Sachiwani 2023) "The substitute of leadership" is a state of autonomous management of moral leadership.

Management is mostly related to ethical issues. Management regulates the relationships between people in reality, which is basically the same as the moral emphasis on behavioral norms in human society. Moral pursuit is fairness and justice. Workers engaged in management theory are increasingly discovering that neglecting and caring for people in organizational life makes it difficult to achieve management goals. Moreover, "the norms and constraints of any management system have certain scope limitations, and the system cannot regulate all the behavioral norms of people as social roles. It is unrealistic to expect to design a perfect social system. Therefore, while managing people, the system must also be regulated and guided by moral values." (Luo Zhiye, 2018) As a key place that undertakes the mission of educating people, universities should combine moral methods to educate and guide faculty and staff in universities.

### **1. The Practical Problem of Building Moral Leadership in Colleges and Universities**

In today's era, people are increasingly valuing the role of education in social development, with higher education playing a more prominent role as a crucial transitional period for students to enter society. Therefore, faculty and staff engaged in higher education have received attention from all sectors of society, and various events that occur in universities will become the focus of public opinion. People expect universities to manage well, as this is closely related to students' future and the happiness of their families behind them. In the process of building high-quality schools, even with the investment of high funds, high-energy equipment, and excellent talents, problems are still common. Issues such as teacher ethics and style, represented by the abnormal relationship between mentors and students, embezzlement of benefits from operators in the process of building buildings or school construction projects, plagiarism or plagiarism of other people's achievements in scientific research integrity often occur. These problems cannot help but amaze people. As representatives of the advanced class and intellectuals in society, university teachers have

rich cultural knowledge reserves. Why do such problems still occur? These issues have had a negative impact on the enrollment, development, construction, and social evaluation of universities, leading to a decrease in enrollment and a decline in social reputation. These negative events have prompted university education managers to consider: what methods can be used to improve teacher education management? Is it feasible to rely solely on systems and norms to constrain people? As Sachiawani pointed out, "In places where management is paramount, school administrators are forced to do rather than decide, to implement rather than lead, resulting in 'training incompetence' that leaves teachers without the ability to think or act beyond their designated roles. " (Sergiovanni 2023)

### **1.1 Environmental challenges**

From an environmental perspective, " efficiency, functionality, technology, and economic principles have become the dominant values pursued by schools. " ( Cai Yi 2019) . The competition for admission between schools is very fierce, therefore, most schools regard admission rate as the core goal of school management; the work of principals is very utilitarian, they are busy establishing authority, balancing relationships, and using great experience to engage in social interaction and raise education funds. "(Chen Yukun, 2016) Some teachers fabricate a large number of papers in order to obtain professional titles and honors. Education management personnel and business owners use each other to enrich themselves in procurement, bidding, project management, and other aspects, which has led to corruption and bribery. In today's rapidly growing economy, 'trust shortage' seems to have become a serious problem for all sectors of society. This logic can be extrapolated to the education sector, which is the practice of 'taking shortcuts' in school management activities, not attaching importance to the sustainable development of education and the construction of school moral values. "(Li Chundi, 2020) Graduate supervisors often neglect the construction of teacher ethics and conduct during their guidance of graduate students, fail to maintain personal integrity, and are sued by graduate students. The reasons for these problems cannot all be attributed to society. Even if the environment has more or less influenced people's behavior, the most direct cause is the deviation of moral cognition among educational management personnel. In the specific process of moral practice, moral behavior deviates from their original intention as educational management personnel.

### **1.2 Challenges of the system**

From a systemic perspective, the leadership style of schools is dominated by a hierarchical authoritative structure, where administrative orders are conveyed through the hierarchical structure of the organization. Lower level employees obey the administrative orders of their superiors and the administrative arrangements in the hierarchical system, which is the leadership style of the hierarchical authoritative leadership system. Their behavior must comply with the written rules and standardized processes of the organization. Organizational members are basically executors of the organization, with a focus on acting according to administrative rules. In the educational environment, this leadership style improves work efficiency, but leaders control organizational members through the authority of their positions in the hierarchical system. The obedience of organizational members to superiors and administrative orders is derived from the obedience of power rather than internal factors. agree, The authority granted by the bureaucratic system is a 'secular authority' that people obey, usually associated with utilitarian purposes. If this authority is taken as the center, it will make teachers and students fall into monotony and boredom, treating them like machine parts, 'lifeless'. "(Chen Guisheng, 2016)

### **1.3 Organizational challenges**

From the perspective of internal organizational challenges, there exists a dilemma within schools where teachers' spiritual support is insufficient due to cultural deficiencies. For most teachers in most schools, teaching is indeed a lonely profession. "(Li Hongxiu, 2020)" With so many people fulfilling such a common mission in such a crowded space and time, perhaps the greatest irony - and also the greatest tragedy of teaching - people have to endure so much self imposed and professional punishment like loneliness. The difficulty of forming team spirit among teachers is indeed the same everywhere. In the booming process of teacher professionalization in China, almost every primary and secondary school is focusing on teacher professionalization, but it seems that team spirit is difficult to truly form. "(Zhou Jianwen, Li Xiuli, 2020))

## **2. The constituent elements of moral leadership in universities**

The moral leadership advocated by Sachiawani seeks to expand traditional management theory and leadership practice into a dimension that includes moral dimensions, and points out that leadership, as a strong medicine, is only a good medicine when used appropriately.

### **2.1 Leading through values**

American educational management scholar Sachiiovanni believes that " in the effort to improve schools, leadership's attention must shift to more sophisticated, implicit, and higher focus points, expanding the value structure and authority foundation of leadership. " ( Sergioiovanni 2023) Moral leadership theory highlights the exploration of teachers' implicit values, focusing on people's moral and belief motivations through the transformation of leadership styles. Leaders can establish a regular communication mechanism with teachers, guiding them to think about what values are correct through dialogue, and at the same time selecting a group of excellent teacher models that appear in daily life. These models cannot be unilaterally selected from teachers with profound academic achievements and strong scientific research capabilities, but are good at discovering teachers who are unknown, willing to contribute, and have consistent evaluations and recognition from teachers and students in educational work. Through communication and dialogue, setting an example can help teachers improve their sensitivity to moral issues, awaken their moral conscience, and establish correct moral motivations. This leadership style is different from administrative orders, which are then inspected and supervised. SaGiovanni defines it as "moral authority". Sachiawani summarized that there are five sources of leadership authority, namely " disciplinary authority, psychological authority, technical rational authority, professional authority, and moral authority." ( Fan Yongkun 2023) Moral authority is different from the other four authorities in that it is formed on the basis of helping teachers establish values. Combining with the theme of this article, the values here refer to the support of leaders' moral behavior, which conforms to the values of educational essence, and transmits these values to teachers in schools. Teachers form a complete moral cognition, establish correct moral conscience, and can voluntarily trust and actively work with other members of the school.

### **2.2 Realizing leadership through the power of culture**

Leaders should not only help teachers establish correct moral motivations, but also create a positive cultural atmosphere in schools, internalize moral influence in teachers' hearts with the power of culture, further help teachers improve their moral cognition, and form correct moral will through repeated practice in teaching and life. Compared to external management mechanisms that clarify behavior boundaries through institutionalized norms and regulate teacher behavior through rigid constraints, school culture, as an endogenous educational

force, exhibits significant differences in its influencing mechanism. Based on the excellent civilization achievements accumulated in educational practice, school culture, through implicit and immersive dissemination paths, not only constitutes the value foundation of teacher cultural identity, but also forms a lasting and stable field of education in deep structure. This cultural form continuously shapes the professional personality and educational beliefs of teachers through the dual effects of value guidance and spiritual inspiration, ultimately transforming into the conscious value pursuit and career investment of educational subjects. The spirit of Xi'an Jiaotong University's westward migration is a typical representative of the leadership style of cultural influence infiltration. The original site of Xi'an Jiaotong University was in Shanghai, China. In the 1950s, China made a major decision to relocate the university to Xi'an. After four years of relocation, Jiaotong University officially moved to Xi'an in 1959. Professor Peng Kang, who was then the Secretary of the Party Committee and President of Xi'an Jiaotong University, and many experts and scholars, rooted themselves in the Loess Plateau and worked hard to establish Xi'an Jiaotong University, laying a solid foundation for its development. Now Xi'an Jiaotong University has become a Double First Class university in China, known for its excellence in science and the common development of arts and sciences. Its spirit of "embracing the big picture, selfless dedication, promoting tradition, and hard work and entrepreneurship" during its westward migration has been included in the spectrum of the founding spirit of the Communist Party of China and has received unanimous praise from leaders of the Party and the state. The spirit of westward migration, as a precious cultural asset of Xi'an Jiaotong University students, is influencing them to consciously devote their personal values to the development of the school.

### **2.3 Establish a shared vision for the school**

In addition, moral leadership requires building a moral community in schools to implement ideas into practice. Marx and Engels had a relatively complete discussion on what a community is from a historical perspective. The community formed in primitive society was voluntarily organized by people to defeat the invasion of wild beasts. This community has natural attributes, and the members of the community form a whole through blood ties. During this period, due to the backwardness of productivity, the members of the community had the same economic level, development environment, material living conditions, and pursuit of interests. The members of the community had equal status, cared for each other, and took care of each other. Afterwards, with the transformation of productivity levels, marked by the emergence of labor as a commodity and surplus value, class society emerged, and the contradictions represented by the bourgeoisie and proletariat became increasingly opposed. Different classes formed different communities, and the essence of a person's ideological consciousness represented the consciousness of their class. People living in this community did not have true freedom. In the view of Marx and Engels, 'under the conditions of a true community, individuals obtain their freedom through their own union.'. (Han Qiaosheng 2017) Marx and Engels' discourse on the community provides experience for understanding the moral community. Marx understood the community as a relationship, and due to the objective reality of private ownership, the community is subordinate to the obedience between interests, which in turn conceals the ethical norms that should be formed between people within the relationship. How to establish ethical norms within the community provides thinking for constructing a moral community. 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, transforming from being centered on "me" to being centered on "us".(Xu Ping 2023)

Of course, the moral community cannot be understood as completely sacrificing oneself for others. The moral community constructed by the theory of moral leadership is a win-win situation between oneself and others on the basis of achieving development, effectively balancing the relationship between individual utilitarianism and organizational utilitarianism, and is the unity of purposefulness and regularity. The unified view on constructing the theory of moral leadership is to cultivate it from the perspective of obligation, which means that university leaders have the obligation to provide moral leadership to educators. However, how they achieve personal development in the process of moral leadership has not received much attention from researchers. This theoretical research is relatively incomplete and one-sided. Although it analyzes the solutions to the main aspects of the contradiction in moral leadership, it has not studied how leaders can improve their moral abilities on the other side of the contradiction. This is not in line with the reality and ignores the prerequisite for leaders to engage in moral leadership, that is, leaders need to enhance their own moral cultivation in order to have the ability to lead others. Leaders enhance their own moral abilities through the practice of moral leadership, and both leaders and schools develop through two-way interaction. “Sachiovanni has discussed this matter before, the first dimension is the self-interest of the individual.” (Liu Yunbai 2021) As individuals, we will do things that bring us the most goods and help us minimize losses. “The second dimension is the broad expression of self-interest (which is also commonly overlooked in management theory and leadership theory);” (Liu Jianjun 2020) we not only seek to maximize individual self-interest, but also seek to maximize public interest to enhance all factors that promote the overall well-being of society, and believe that this will ultimately benefit ourselves. In the long run, this is to promote common interests under individual interests. (Sergiovanni 2023) Leaders educate teachers in a moral way based on personal growth characteristics and development laws, so that teachers can manage themselves independently. Voluntary combination for organizational goals, Realize a win-win situation between personal quality improvement and the healthy development of the school.

### **3. The cultivation methods of moral leadership in universities**

By combining the three propositions put forward by Sachiwani's school moral leadership ideology with the actual development of higher education, this paper proposes ways to cultivate moral leadership in universities.

#### **3.1 Do the right thing, rather than doing things correctly**

Peter Drucker, a renowned scholar of leadership theory in the United States, proposed the idea of "doing the right thing, not doing it right." (Peter Drucker 2021) This proposition

emphasizes that in higher education management, correct management ideas are more beneficial than specific management techniques. The correct management ideology plays a fundamental role in the effective operation of school organizations. If the values guiding the development of schools are wrong, even in clear management standards, specific management methods, and rigorous management processes, the actual management effect is doomed to fail. Therefore, in the management practice of universities, leaders should have values that are in line with the essence of education, which fundamentally promote the comprehensive development of individuals. Based on the research in this article, the term 'person' referred to here refers to educators engaged in the education industry. To promote the comprehensive development of individuals, educators need to clarify the essence of their work and play a key role in promoting students' growth and development. To turn these value effects into reality, moral leaders' value leadership is needed to help them combine their personal values with school goals, so that teachers can deeply feel the meaning of their work and life. The theoretical premise of moral leadership is that human behavior is not only driven by interests, but also by emotional attitudes and values. Colleges and universities should regard positive and uplifting values as their ideal pursuit. Therefore, it is necessary to rely on the encouragement of ideal beliefs to promote the moral participation of faculty and staff, and to stimulate their values to consciously undertake their educational responsibilities. As a key place for people to be benevolent, school leaders should have moral responsibility and leadership methods that work out of moral motivation. Moral motivation is formed by the continuous strengthening of values, which is the ethical requirement that distinguishes educational leadership from leaders in other industries. Regarding how school leaders lead through values, leaders need to establish moral authority. As for what moral authority is, the founder of the theory, Sachiwani, divided it into two types: professional authority and moral authority. Professional authority refers to leaders setting behavioral norms and specific values for teachers when engaging in specific educational work. The purpose of building professional authority is to enable educators to work seriously even without specific management in order to obtain professional dignity. The moral authority of leaders comes from their values and responsibility towards the group of educators. Leaders construct schools as schools for social construction and cultivating successors, using responsibility and belief to inspire people's emotions and make them work hard towards the goal of cultivating talents with firm beliefs. In the process of establishing moral authority, 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. This is more effective than the constraints of rules and regulations in encouraging educators to consciously engage in their work and stimulate their work motivation. This irrational emotional factor has a more lasting effect on people.

### **3.2 Enhance the cohesion of school culture**

Cultural scholar Edgar H. Schein pointed out that "the power of culture lies in the fact that it plays a role as a series of unconscious, unobtrusive, and natural assumptions." (Edgar H. ScheinIn 2023) Moral leadership, compared to the constraints of institutional norms, the greatest characteristic of cultural ways is its profound persistence. University culture unites human power through interpersonal etiquette, social customs, ceremonial ceremonies, and other behavioral methods, giving school faculty and staff a common ideological foundation and stimulating people's moral motivation. Moral leadership through cultural means should

use flexible cultural influence to subtly improve people's overall literacy and guide faculty and staff to consciously enhance their moral level. The theory of moral leadership holds that people should be respected rather than commanded, and should not be constrained by a list of prohibited actions. Instead, cultural guidance should be used to encourage people to accept ideas and stimulate motivation. Only in this way can they consciously engage in moral activities. Some scholars believe that the moral leadership style of schools should be "loose in management and close in culture". Schools should have strong cultural guidance to enable teachers and staff to clearly fulfill their responsibilities and make their work meaningful. Therefore, when building schools in a cultural way, we should focus on tapping into the symbolic power that exists within the school, which can inspire people's motivation and vitality. Moral leaders should construct a set of values based on the specific development reality of the school and the survival status of faculty and staff, live a valuable and meaningful life, and guide them to consciously fulfill their moral responsibilities to conform to the organization's goals and vision. Values are the most core part of school culture construction. Due to the commitment to values, teachers and students in the school can still fulfill their responsibilities under the influence of values even after a leader is transferred. That is to say, all teachers and students in the school follow the aspirations of values rather than individual leaders, which makes the role of "leader" in the hierarchical system less necessary. When the core values are deeply rooted in the school, people's commitment to him replaces traditional leadership. " Education leaders, especially principals and other figures who play an important decision-making role in the development of schools, should lead by example, demand more from themselves, manage their relatives well, and not use their positions to seek personal gain for the promotion of cadres, engineering bidding, and other aspects. We should love everyone working in the school, no matter how much role they play in the construction of the school. We should treat everyone equally and not favor someone based on their outstanding scientific research or teaching performance, which will harm other teachers. In the process of moral leadership, we should fully respect and trust the work of school faculty and staff, stimulate their enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, and timely motivate and praise their behavior. We should pay attention to our own way of speaking, prohibit the use of sarcastic and mocking words, praise their actions more, and educate and remind them of their inappropriate behavior, so as to achieve a balance between relaxation and relaxation. Education leaders should pay more attention to the lives of faculty and staff, take care of living conditions that affect their work, such as transportation and accommodation issues for employees in different places, and solve their concerns by adding commuting vehicles and providing dormitories. They should also be good at using the role of trade unions as a link and regularly visit difficult teachers to care for and care for faculty and staff, so as to ensure that they are fully focused on their work and ensure the effective operation of the organization.

### **3.3 Establish a moral community in schools**

Moral leadership needs to put ideas into practice and establish a school moral community. A community is a social organization composed of relationships as its core, and a moral community values the growth and progress of each person in a team. Team members are able to care for each other's survival and development, and on this basis, have a moral will to share responsibility. "According to Blo and Scott's interpretation of community, the core of community is the interdependence of various relationships and perceptions. The social structure created by community connects people and is constrained by a shared set of values



and ideas. In the moral community of schools, teachers care about each other, and their relationships have moral attributes.” (Cai Jinxiong 2017) They use collective wisdom to find solutions to problems towards common organizational goals, and in the process of practice, jointly establish the core spirit of the team. This core spirit is the vision of team members working together. A shared vision embodies the wisdom of the team, but in the process of realizing the vision, ethical leaders play a crucial role. Ethical leaders are the leaders in the team, with the ability to plan the overall situation and strategize. They can consider various potential favorable factors and risk challenges in the team, and effectively use management art to engage in targeted management work based on the individual characteristics of different team members. They are quite sensitive to the development direction of the organization, able to see the current development pattern clearly and accurately predict the future development direction, so as to coordinate and manage work, and use goal management to motivate employees, improve their work initiative, and maintain efficient operation of the school. Moral leaders are able to accurately analyze the current work situation and development opportunities based on practical work. They have the ability to mobilize the positive factors of community members, so that they can see the relevance between the direction of organizational development and their own interests. In this way, organizational members can find common goals, mobilize their positive factors, and jointly contribute value to the organization's vision. At the same time, leaders also need to consider whether the organizational vision is reasonable and the degree of relevance to team members. They should be able to understand the different voices of organizational members towards the organizational vision, be good at listening to their criticism and opinions, carefully analyze these opinions, and actively reform the reasonable factors related to the improvement of the vision, in order to establish the vision. In this process, moral leaders respect the reasonable expression of organizational members, make the vision conform to the wishes of organizational members, gain their understanding and support, and make them see the consistency between their interests and the goals of the vision. In addition, they need to strengthen the promotion of the vision through symbolic rituals and other means, which can mobilize the subjective will of faculty and staff to turn the vision into reality. To establish a moral community in schools, moral leaders need to provide refined educational management, listen to the voices of faculty and staff, and respond to their emotional needs. This butler style service, although different from traditional leadership styles, is a consensus service for the values of the community and can effectively enhance the sense of belonging of faculty and staff. In addition, moral leaders should appropriately delegate power to faculty and staff. Delegating power does not mean "grasping the big and letting go of the small", but rather handing over issues of common concern to everyone to solve together. Through this delegation of power, faculty and staff can have a sense of ownership, stimulate the development potential of teachers, and reflect the responsibility of teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The way of moral leadership in schools is an important concept in educational management. This leadership style can solve the contradictions between individual interests and organizational development goals, value conflicts between individuals, and differences in goals between organizations. Moral leadership includes three behaviors: constructing values for managers, giving them moral judgment, using cultural leadership to guide school teachers, establishing a moral community centered on mutual trust, cooperation, and consensus building within the school. This leadership style that returns to human nature can

improve people's comprehensive quality, achieve the ideal state of self leadership, and then lead other members in the organization, forming a healthy organizational ecology. In promoting the ethical leadership model in school management in our country, efforts still need to be made to address several practical issues. Firstly, although the traditional concept of "governing the country with virtue" provides a profound cultural soil for moral leadership, the current mainstream theories of school moral management are mostly transplanted from Western corporate management practices, and their application and development in the field of education are also based on the Western social context. Due to significant differences in institutional environment and cultural traditions, the practical applicability of such theories in Chinese universities faces challenges, and there is an urgent need for localization adjustment and theoretical innovation to construct a development path for moral leadership in universities that is in line with China's actual situation. Secondly, how to transform moral leadership from conceptual advocacy into actionable practical solutions is the key to promoting its implementation. To truly leverage the role of moral leadership theory in educational reform, especially in terms of its practical impact on teacher development, student growth, and other aspects, it is necessary to conduct systematic empirical research. For example, a scientific evaluation questionnaire can be designed to measure the effectiveness of school moral leadership implementation, and statistical tools such as SPSS can be used to analyze its relationship with variables such as organizational effectiveness and teacher behavior, providing data support and action references for practice. Finally, in the complex reality of universities, how to effectively transform the theory of moral leadership into practical wisdom and institutional support to promote school reform and development, and avoid it becoming a formal slogan or vague preaching, is a key challenge. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a moral practice community to consolidate value consensus and form a sustainable driving force for organizational development. Specifically, it may be considered to establish a pilot program for ethical leadership practices in universities, leveraging administrative promotion and institutional safeguards to systematically test the applicability and effectiveness of ethical leadership models in real campus environments. By introducing relevant indicators of school development for multidimensional evaluation, it is possible to scientifically verify the actual impact of ethical leadership on the governance effectiveness of universities, thereby providing empirical evidence for its promotion and application.

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