

Relationship between the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership, cognitive and affective trust and organizational citizenship behavior: a multilevel mediational pathway

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Abstract

Purpose – The current study aims to explore the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership (i.e. moral leadership, benevolent leadership and authoritarian leadership) and their dual pathways of positive and negative influences on employees' organizational citizenship behavior through the two aspects of trust (i.e. cognitive and affective trust).

Design/methodology/approach – Given that trust is pertinent in any human relationship, especially in Asian countries where bonding plays an important role, the current study investigated the relationship of each leadership style within paternalistic leadership on employees' cognitive and affective trust in their leaders, employees' organizational citizenship behavior and the processes involved. The current study employed a cross-sectional multilevel approach with 435 employees from 85 workgroups participating in the study.

Findings – As hypothesized, benevolent and moral leadership styles (but not the authoritarian leadership style) had a positive effect on employees' cognitive and affective trust in their leaders and on employees' organizational citizenship behavior. Cognitive and affective trust also mediated the relationships of benevolent and moral leadership styles with organizational citizenship behavior.

Originality/value – The study's findings urge practitioners and human resources personnel to be aware of the dual effects that a paternalistic leader has on employees. To be specific, benevolent and moral leadership styles are conducive to employees' work outcomes, whereas the authoritarian leadership style has a non-significant role in employees' work outcomes.

Keywords Paternalistic leadership, Benevolent leadership, Moral leadership, Authoritarian leadership, Cognitive trust, Affective trust, Organizational citizenship behavior, Multilevel

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Organizational citizenship behavior has been viewed as superior to job performance, as it refers not only to an employee's job performance but also to the employee's proactivity, adaptivity, helping behavior and willingness to work outside and above his/her duty and tasks (Yaakobi and Weisberg, 2020). All these attributes translate into effective employees performing above mere

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completion of their bare minimal work tasks. Leadership has been found to be one of the most influential contributors to employee work outcomes (Lee *et al.*, 2019). This relationship between leader and employee signifies the characteristics and behaviors displayed by leaders that influence employees' work behavior and outcomes. Previous studies have explored positive leadership styles, for example, transformational leadership (Purvanova *et al.*, 2006), ethical leadership (Shin, 2012) and servant leadership (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010), all of which may lead to a higher level of organizational citizenship behavior.

While transformational leadership has been recognized as one of the most effective leadership styles in producing high-performing employees (Wang *et al.*, 2011), paternalistic leadership (Farh and Cheng, 2000) – a leadership style closely resembling Asian culture and values (Bedi, 2020) – has shown a unique and significant influence on employee work outcomes (Bedi, 2020). Aligned with the rise in economy development in Asia (Azam, 2020), it is timely to investigate paternalistic leadership style that is unique to Asian countries and how this leadership style may affect employees' organizational citizenship behavior. Different from most leadership styles which are typically unidirectional (i.e. either positive or negative), paternalistic leadership encompasses dual pathways (i.e. both positive and negative) (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). This has led researchers to suggest that the three leadership styles (i.e. benevolent leadership, moral leadership and authoritarian leadership) within the paternalistic leadership style, while should be viewed collectively, should also be viewed independently as they contribute different dynamics to the employee–leadership relationship (Tang and Naumann, 2015).

However, the current literature hasn't explored the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership style concurrently, resulting in a few issues. The current literature consists of fragmented studies on the relationships between the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership style and employee work outcomes. This doesn't allow for a holistic understanding of the complex interdependencies and influence of the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership style (Banwo *et al.*, 2022), especially given that paternalistic leadership style consists of dual pathways of positive and negative influences on employee work outcomes (Möller *et al.*, 2022). Hence, investigating all three dimensions of leadership style is needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of paternalistic leadership style.

Trust has been viewed as a reflection of *guanxi* (i.e. relationship) that binds together the relationship between the leader and employee (Yu, 2022). Trust has been found to mediate the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee work outcomes, including helping behavior, the employee voice and leader–member exchange (Wu *et al.*, 2012). A deeper exploration of the paternalistic leadership literature has also found that trust is a critical component of the perception of paternalistic leaders as effective leaders (Lau *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, benevolent and moral leadership styles were found to have positive relationships with trust in the leader, whereas no significant relationship was found for the authoritarian leadership style (Rawat and Lyndon, 2016).

Nevertheless, these studies have only superficially investigated trust. The trust literature encompasses not only trust in the leader but also types of trust which include cognitive and affective trust. Studies have investigated affective trust but not cognitive trust (Bai *et al.*, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2014), thus disallowing a good comparison between the two. While both cognitive and affective trust increase employee job performance, the basis and formation of the two trusts are different (Legood *et al.*, 2023).

The objective of the current study is therefore to investigate how the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership style (i.e. moral leadership, benevolent leadership and authoritarian leadership) relate to employee organizational citizenship behavior. The study focuses on cognitive and affective trust as mediators between paternalistic leadership and employee organizational citizenship behavior. With its use of a cross-sectional multilevel approach (Bliese *et al.*, 2002; Day *et al.*, 2014), to the best of the author's knowledge, this study investigates the intricate relationship between the three leadership styles and the two types of trust, assisting future studies to explore the different pathways along which paternalistic leadership influences employees. Social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005)

underpins the current study to explain the characteristics of the paternalistic leadership style, with these signaling and reinforcing employees' attitudes (i.e. cognitive and affective trust), as derived from the quality of their relationship with their leader. The study's findings on relationships between the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership styles and the two types of trust will contribute to the current literature in confirming the dual pathways of paternalistic leadership and how each of the dimensions of the leadership style relates to both cognitive and affective trust. Additionally, the findings will assist organizations to be more mindful of the positive and negative influences that paternalistic leadership may have on employees. Organizations can better train their managers on how to practice paternalistic leadership effectively through cognitive and affective trust.

The study's setting within the Asian context adds to the paternalistic leadership literature, with previous studies having been conducted and validated in other Asian countries, such as China (Bai *et al.*, 2019), Taiwan and Singapore, providing further support on the cross-country applicability and effectiveness of paternalistic leadership in another Asian country – Malaysia. The study further advances the current comprehension of this distinctive leadership style. It is not only distinctive in terms of its characteristics when compared with other leadership styles, with these being mostly unidirectional, but it also provides the leadership literature with another angle from which to gain a better understanding of Asian leadership (Hiller *et al.*, 2019).

Literature review

Influence of paternalistic leadership on organizational citizenship behavior

Paternalistic leadership is defined as a combination of “strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence and moral integrity couched in a ‘personalistic’ atmosphere” (Farh and Cheng, 2000). Its characteristics are closely embedded with Chinese values that are representative of Asian values. More specifically, paternalistic leadership comprises moral leadership, benevolent leadership and authoritarian leadership (Lee *et al.*, 2023). This reflects the values that Asian people cherish and by which they live, including collectivism, harmony, benevolence, morality, righteousness, propriety, filial piety, family and *guanxi* (Liu, 2017).

Employee work behavior is influenced in a context in which leaders exhibit these values in their behavior. For example, when leaders have a high level of morality, they follow rules and principles. In this example, employees then sense that their leaders practice fairness and justice. Therefore, with employees perceiving themselves to be treated fairly and justly by their leaders, a positive working environment is created for them. Not only do employees in this type of environment perform well at work, they also perform at a higher level than what is required as they seek to repay being treated equally by their leaders. Leaders with a high level of morality are also viewed as ethical leaders. These behaviors have been shown to lead to a higher level of organizational citizenship behavior (Sarwar *et al.*, 2023).

In addition, when leaders are benevolent towards employees, leaders are seen to place employees' well-being as a high priority and to be concerned about them. This caring attitude from leaders shows that they have kind hearts. When employees perceive that their leaders care for them and are not a threat, they will perform at a higher level than required, in a way, to return their leaders' kindness. As previously stated, benevolent leadership provides a psychologically safe and empowering environment within which employees work (Sepahvand and Hassanvand, 2019). This finding is also consistent with Tang and Naumann's (2015) study which found that benevolent and moral leadership styles have a positive effect on employee organizational citizenship behavior.

However, authoritarian leadership has not been perceived the same way, being seen as highly disciplinary and focusing on full obedience without question, due to leaders having a certain position and power (Wu *et al.*, 2020). At times, authoritarian leaders have abused their power to obtain personal gain at the expense of other people's benefits and well-being

(Kiazad *et al.*, 2010). This leadership style has often been frowned upon and has also been deemed to be toxic leadership. When employees feel threatened in their work context, they will resort to protecting themselves and performing at an even lower level for their organization (Lyu *et al.*, 2016). In addition, these behaviors by leaders will lead employees to conserve their own energy and capital instead of doing more for their organization. To be specific, employees will first guard their own well-being, ensuring that they are protected and safe. This does not allow employees to work efficiently in the workplace: it also discourages them from wanting to contribute more to their organization. A meta-analysis study by Bedi (2020) also supported the positive influence of benevolent and moral leadership styles, while the authoritarian leadership style was found to have a negative influence on employees. Hence, we propose that:

- H1. Benevolent leadership and moral leadership are positively related to organizational citizenship behavior, while authoritarian leadership is negatively related to organizational citizenship behavior.

Paternalistic leadership and its relationship to trust in the leader

Cognitive trust is viewed as the willingness of the trustee to show his/her vulnerability based on the evaluation of the trustor's ability and integrity, while affective trust is viewed as how willing the trustee is to show his/her vulnerability to the trustor generated by the amount of care and concern by the trustor toward the trustee (Chua *et al.*, 2008). While they differ in the origin of trust, both forms of trust are found in the social psychology literature with a focus on interpersonal relationships. In the current study, the word "trustee" refers to employees while the word "trustor" refers to leaders. Trust is stated as being a sign of leadership effectiveness and an attribute that binds relationships together. Within the Asian setting, *guanxi* remains an important factor in the level of quality in relationships (Chen *et al.*, 2024). With a high level of *guanxi*, leaders can more effectively influence employees to achieve organizational objectives. However, when *guanxi* is low, leaders cannot effectively perform their role, as employees are defiant and reject the leaders' role in the workplace (Lee *et al.*, 2024). While employees may feel compelled to follow instructions from leaders, this does not convey to employees the attributes of proactiveness, higher self-regulation and higher work engagement, all of which are important criteria in producing high-performance employees (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012).

The literature has shown some support within paternalistic leadership on how moral leadership will lead to higher trust in the leader. From the cognitive trust perspective, leaders with a high level of morality follow sets of principles and guidelines; therefore, they are perceived to have a high level of leadership ability (Xu *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, their behaviors also show integrity as they do not abuse their power and authority to gain benefits for themselves. From the affective trust perspective, leaders with a high level of morality ensure their employees are not harmed or threatened by implementing justice and fairness. We therefore propose that moral leadership has a positive relationship with both cognitive and affective trust.

On a similar note, benevolent leadership, as it cares for employees' well-being, would also earn employees' trust, both cognitive and affective. Cognitive trust is established when kindness and care shown by benevolent leaders reflect competent and capable leaders (Chou *et al.*, 2005). In addition, these leaders ensure that employees' well-being is being looked after, with both these behaviors reflecting a leader's high levels of ability and integrity. In addition, benevolent leaders who care for, and are concerned about, employees display a level of humility and kindness which is a full representation of benevolence (Koo and Park, 2018). This results in employees having a higher level of affective trust, displaying this behavior through their higher level of affective trust in their leaders. Studies conducted in Taiwan and China by Chen *et al.* (2014) and Wu *et al.* (2012) also found that benevolent and moral leadership styles both led to higher trust in the leader.

However, when misusing its power and position to coerce employees rather than to motivate and support them (Kiazad *et al.*, 2010), authoritarian leadership does not show leadership capability and competence, as full compliance by employees is achieved through coercion. In addition, the misuse of power shows that authoritarian leaders completely lack integrity, continually changing rules to benefit themselves. The result is employees' lack of cognitive trust in their leaders. Authoritarian leaders are also ruthless in their behavior and show a lack of care for their employees (Gu *et al.*, 2020), with discipline being their priority. Thus, authoritarian leadership leads to employees having a lower level of affective trust in their leaders.

- H2. Benevolent leadership and moral leadership are positively related to (a) cognitive and (b) affective trust, while authoritarian leadership is negatively related to (a) cognitive and (b) affective trust.

Paternalistic leadership increases organizational citizenship behavior through trust in the leader

In the relationship between trust in the leader and organizational citizenship behavior, the current study views trust as a type of social resource that enables employees to work effectively in the workplace. A high-quality relationship between leaders and employees allows better interactions and communication between them without any barriers (Hill *et al.*, 2014). Trust in the leader plays a similar role to job resources in helping employees to achieve goals and reducing their level of stress (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023). In other words, job resources, in the form of social resources, facilitate, rather than impede, work performance.

Several studies have shown that trust leads to organizational citizenship behavior. For example, a study by Tourigny *et al.* (2019) investigated how ethical leadership leads to trust which then leads to a higher level of organizational citizenship behavior. Under low trust working conditions, employees have low job satisfaction which leads to lower organizational citizenship behavior (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2004). These two studies suggest the need for a high level of trust between these two parties to produce positive work outcomes. Specifically, within the context of the current study, when employees have high levels of cognitive and affective trust towards their leaders, this, in turn, allows and compels employees to contribute more to the workplace.

- H3. Cognitive and affective trust is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior.

The overall process from paternalistic leadership to organizational citizenship behavior through trust in the leader can be explained using social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) which posits that a relationship between two individuals is created through each individual weighing the cost vs the benefit. For the current study, when leaders are kind toward employees and abide by rules and regulations, this kindness and fairness are beneficial for employees, allowing them to focus on their work. In addition, when employees receive rewards rather than punishment, they will pursue the relationship with their leader more than the leader pursuing the relationship with them (Cook *et al.*, 2013). Employees will therefore contribute more than they are required to do in the workplace to ensure the whole department excels within their organization. The relationship between paternalistic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior is tied together, in line with social exchange theory, through trust. When viewed as a type of social resource, trust is an important criterion in binding close relationships together as well as being able to connect leaders' behaviors and employee work outcomes, as reported in the study by Chen *et al.* (2014). Hence, we propose that:

- H4. Cognitive and affective trust mediates the relationship of benevolent leadership and moral leadership (but not authoritarian leadership) with organizational citizenship behavior.

Method

Participants

The current study employed a cross-sectional multilevel design with 435 employees (average age = 32.53 years; standard deviation [SD] = 6.27) in 85 workgroups from various private organizations in the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. The location was chosen as it is the main economic hub of the country. All organizations were from the services industry, with all participants being white-collar employees working from their offices with a formal work schedule. The mean length of their working experience was 3.13 years (SD = 4.48). More females ($N = 255$, 58.7%) participated than males. Participants' mean working hours per week were 46.13 h (SD = 77.12), with their mean salary being Malaysian ringgits (RM)3463.62 (SD = 2097.98). Their mean appraisal score for the previous year was 74.59/100 (SD = 16.25).

Following ethics approval from the main author's previous institution (Approval no: SUREC, 2017/075), small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on a list obtained from the governmental website were contacted to see if they were interested in participating in this study. We then contacted the organizations that responded positively to discuss data collection. Hard-copy questionnaires were distributed to employees in workgroups in these organizations. One week after distribution, the completed (and incomplete) questionnaires, each sealed in a supplied envelope, were collected from the organizations when we returned. The number of participants per workgroup ranged from three to 11.

Instruments

The instruments were chosen based on their reliability, validity, previous use in Asian studies and overall suitability (Juhdi *et al.*, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2019). Participants could complete the questionnaire using their best understanding of the questions in either the original English language or Malay, the official language of Malaysia. The Malay language version was back-translated to mirror the English wording and meaning. Table 1 shows the reliability of the rating scales which measured participants' responses.

Paternalistic leadership was measured using 26 items from the Paternalistic Leadership Scale (Cheng *et al.*, 2000) with the term "my leader" changed to "my group leader" to better reflect leadership as a multilevel construct. The scale consisted of 11 items on benevolent leadership, six items on moral leadership and nine items on authoritarian leadership. An example of the items is: "My group leader ordinarily shows kind concern for my comfort." The scale ranged from "1" (strongly disagree) to "6" (strongly agree).

Trust in the leader was measured using 10 cognitive and affective trust items adopted from McAllister (1995). An example of the items is: "I can rely on my leader to do what is best at work." The scale ranged from "1" (strongly disagree) to "5" (strongly agree).

Organizational citizenship behavior was measured using six items from the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (Wayne *et al.*, 1997). An example of the items is: "I help others with their work when they have been absent even when I am not required to do so". The scale ranged from "1" (never) to "7" (always).

Analysis strategy

Prior to analyzing the hypotheses, we first ascertained that paternalistic leadership was a group-level construct. The $r(WG)(J)$ (index of agreement) is a statistical tool used to measure the level of agreement among raters (i.e. employees) within a group. The $r(WG)(J)$ scores for paternalistic leadership were 0.88, 0.87, and 0.90, respectively, for benevolent leadership, moral leadership, and authoritarian leadership, indicating a high level of within-group agreement which is above the 0.70 recommended value (LeBreton and Senter, 2008). The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC[I]) values were 0.15, 0.24, and 0.22, respectively, with the $F_{(III)}$ values found to be significant ($F_{(III)} = 1.47, 1.74, \text{ and } 3.32, p < 0.001$), indicating all three leadership styles could be aggregated and treated as a group-level construct.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliability and Pearson’s bivariate correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	α	No. of items	1	2	3	4	5	F	ICC(I)
1. Moral Leadership	4.17	0.62	0.93	11	1					1.468*	0.1474
2. Benevolent Leadership	4.25	0.81	0.84	6	0.44**	1				1.736**	0.2418
3. Authoritarian Leadership	3.41	0.90	0.88	9	-0.21**	-0.02	1			3.323**	0.2159
4. Cognitive Trust	3.91	0.63	0.91	4	0.52**	0.55**	-0.08	1		1.397*	0.0883
5. Affective Trust	3.77	0.70	0.9	5	0.48**	0.72**	-0.11*	0.68**	1	1.167	0.0311
6. Organizational Citizenship Behavior	5.54	0.91	0.92	6	0.32**	0.18**	-0.01	0.23**	0.24**	2.028**	0.1396

Note(s): SD = standard deviation; ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; N (individual) = 435; N (workgroup) = 85; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Table 1 created by author

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) software (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992) was used to test the hypotheses. HLM software was chosen over other software because of its ability to analyze data at multiple levels. Since leadership is an organizational construct (Batistič *et al.*, 2017), it should be treated as a group-level construct. Additionally, HLM provides more accurate estimates compared to other software (Huta, 2014). As described above, the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership (i.e. benevolent leadership, moral leadership, and authoritarian leadership) were treated as a group-level construct as they have a top-down influence on employees, more so in the Asian context (Suen *et al.*, 2007). Three types of analysis were conducted: lower-level direct effects, cross-level direct effects, and mediation effect. Lower-level direct effects and cross-level direct effects were tested using Mathieu and Taylor's (2007) recommendations. Firstly, we ran the analysis for lower-level direct effects, followed by conducting a cross-level direct effects analysis. The Monte Carlo test (Selig and Preacher, 2008) was then used to confirm the mediation pathway relationships.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis results and correlations between all measures at the individual level. The results from the HLM analysis are shown in Table 2. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that benevolent leadership and moral leadership are positively related to organizational citizenship behavior, but that authoritarian leadership is negatively related to organizational citizenship behavior. The hypothesis was partially supported as benevolent leadership and moral leadership have a positive relationship with organizational citizenship behavior ($\gamma = 0.28, p < 0.001$; $\gamma = 0.14, p = 0.046$, respectively), while authoritarian leadership does not ($\gamma = 0.07, p = 0.35$) (see Table 2, Model 2).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that benevolent leadership and moral leadership are positively related to (a) cognitive and (b) affective trust, but that authoritarian leadership is negatively related to (a) cognitive and (b) affective trust. As shown in Table 2, Models 5 and 6, our analyses showed that benevolent leadership and moral leadership have a positive significant relationship with cognitive trust ($\gamma = 0.35, p < 0.001$; $\gamma = 0.20, p < 0.001$) and affective trust ($\gamma = 0.45, p < 0.001$; $\gamma = 0.21, p = 0.003$), respectively. However, authoritarian leadership does not have a significant relationship with either cognitive or affective trust ($\gamma = -0.03, p = 0.67$; $\gamma = -0.10, p = 0.26$). Hence, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that cognitive and affective trust is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior. This was supported as cognitive and affective trust is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.31, p = 0.004$, respectively) (see Table 2, Model 1).

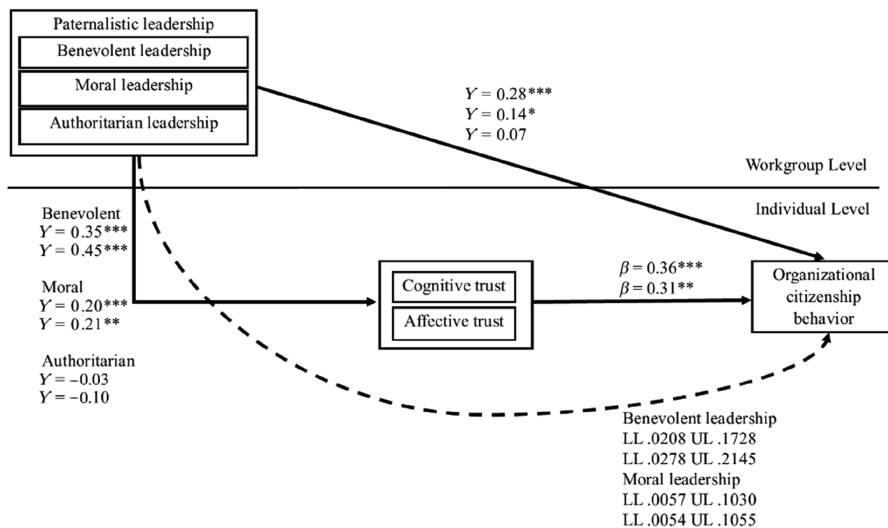
Hypothesis 4 predicted that cognitive and affective trust mediates the relationships of benevolent leadership and moral leadership (but not authoritarian leadership) with organizational citizenship behavior. The Monte Carlo bootstrapping method indicated that benevolent leadership has a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior through cognitive and affective trust (95% confidence interval [CI], lower limit [LL] = 0.0208, upper limit [UL] = 0.1728; 95% CI, LL = 0.0278, UL = 0.2145, respectively).

The same procedure was repeated to see the effect of moral leadership on organizational citizenship behavior through cognitive and affective trust. Again, the Monte Carlo bootstrapping method supported the mediation process (95% CI, LL = 0.0057, UL = 0.1030; 95% CI, LL = 0.0054, UL = 0.1055, respectively).

No mediation analysis was conducted for authoritarian leadership as direct relationships from authoritarian leadership to cognitive and affective trust were not significant.

Table 2. Hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) analyses of lower-level outcomes and cross-level effect of paternalistic leadership on lower-level outcomes

Effect Model	Organizational citizenship behavior 1	Organizational citizenship behavior 2	Organizational citizenship behavior 3	Organizational citizenship behavior 4	Cognitive trust 5	Affective trust 6
<i>Lower-Level Effects</i>						
Cognitive trust	0.36(0.09)***		0.26(0.10)**			
Affective trust	0.31(0.08)**			0.23(0.10)*		
<i>Cross-Level Effects</i>						
Benevolent leadership		0.28(0.05)***	0.32(0.09)***	0.39(0.10)***	0.35(0.06)***	0.45(0.06)***
Moral leadership		0.14(0.07)*	0.16(0.11)	0.18(0.11)	0.20(0.05)***	0.21(0.06)**
Authoritarian leadership		0.07(0.08)	0.13(0.07)*	0.13(0.07)*	-0.03(0.07)	-0.10(0.09)
<p>Note(s): The first value is the unstandardized parameter estimate; the value in parentheses is the standard error (SE); *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$ N (individual) = 435; N (workgroup) = 85 Source(s): Table 2 created by author</p>						



Note(s): —→ Direct effect

- - -> Mediational pathway

N (individual) = 435; N (workgroup) = 85, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Figure created by author

Figure 1. Final model

Discussion

Previous studies on paternalistic leadership mainly investigated the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee work outcomes (Chen *et al.*, 2014; Ugurluoglu *et al.*, 2018). Our study's contribution to the literature is its specific investigation of the role of both cognitive and affective trust in the leader in mediating the relationships between all three dimensions of paternalistic leadership (i.e. moral, benevolent and integrity leadership). As one of the few studies to have investigated the element of trust in the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee organizational citizenship behavior, our study found that affective trust (in comparison to cognitive trust) has a stronger relationship with employee organizational citizenship behavior. Both benevolent and moral leadership styles were found to lead to higher levels of trust in the leader and organizational citizenship behavior, while the authoritarian leadership style had no relationship with trust or organizational citizenship behavior.

Theoretical contributions

While the role of job resources in increasing organizational citizenship behavior is commonly known, through the current study, we now add the importance of providing social resources to employees within the context of the leader–employee relationship (Bouma *et al.*, 2008). To be specific, and as posited in social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), trust reflects the close-knit relationship between leaders and employees (Costigan *et al.*, 2006). When employees have a high level of cognitive and affective trust in their leaders, this signifies their positive evaluations of their leaders owing to their leaders' characteristics and behaviors. A high level of cognitive trust demonstrates employees' cognitive evaluations in which they judge their leaders to be dependable. Thus, employees are able to expose themselves to a certain level of risk in return, knowing that leaders would deliver employees' expectations and would not cause them harm (Moorman *et al.*, 1992).

In addition, employees' high level of affective trust demonstrates their emotional trust in their leaders. The stronger association with organizational citizenship behavior suggests the importance of this affective component of trust within the Asian setting, with its emphasis on human relationships (Huff and Kelley, 2003). It also shows the importance of affective trust in increasing the level of employees' work behavior. Overall, trust in the leader can create a psychologically safe environment in which employees work, added to which, they know that their psychological contract is protected. In return, employees have a higher level of willingness to go the extra mile to perform well at work (Johnson and Grayson, 2005).

Our study found that paternalistic leadership, specifically benevolent leadership and moral leadership, leads to a higher level of trust in the leader. Benevolent leadership leads to higher levels of both cognitive and affective trust in the leader. Kindness and caring for employees signify that leaders are focused on ensuring employees' well-being and are signs of effective leadership within the Asian context (Wang *et al.*, 2011). The relational component, while not directly related to the work aspect, translates to leaders placing an emphasis on *guanxi*. To be effective, leaders should be not only task-oriented but also relationship-oriented (Rüzgar, 2018).

In a similar vein, this represents the soft skills displayed by leaders which play an important and incremental role in improving relationships with employees (Henkel *et al.*, 2019). In circumstances where work relationships and personal relationships overlap in the workplace, the presence of a high-quality leader-employee relationship in which leaders are benevolent and trust is manifested is very important (Wasti *et al.*, 2011). When leaders care for employees, employees will trust their leaders more and can reveal their vulnerability knowing that their leaders, rather than exploiting them, will look after them (Gumusluoglu *et al.*, 2017).

The study's findings also show that moral leadership led to only a higher level of cognitive trust in the leader (but not to a higher level of affective trust in the leader). We argue that employees expect leaders to have a certain level of values, morals and principles that they follow and that allow the workplace to establish a system of rules to which to adhere which allows employees to refer to acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors (Li *et al.*, 2012). This makes it easier for employees to know what behaviors and standards are expected of them, and those which leaders will enforce and to which they will adhere (Scarnati, 2002). Leaders who have a high level of morality also convey a sense of justice within their organizations (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Employees, in turn, will sense that they are being treated fairly and similarly to their colleagues. This allows employees to show their vulnerability, knowing that these leaders will also consider protecting their well-being (Hungerford and Cleary, 2021).

Authoritarian leadership, when analyzed alongside benevolent and moral leadership, does not show any relationship with either cognitive or affective trust in the leader. The findings show that the characteristics of authoritarian leadership neither increased nor decreased employee trust in the leader. This suggests that, as employees are accustomed to working under this style of leadership, they feel neither positive nor negative reactions in response. Another suggestion is that the positive influences of both benevolent and moral leadership overshadow the negative aspects of authoritarian leadership. If authoritarian leadership was analyzed separately, this could show its negative influence on employees, as revealed in findings from other studies (Obi *et al.*, 2022) which show the negative role of authoritarian leadership in employee behavior.

No significant relationships were found in our study between authoritarian leadership, trust in the leader and organizational citizenship behavior. Most studies have reported the negative effects of authoritarian leadership on employee work outcomes. However, other studies have found it to be a positive leadership style, demonstrating increased job performance (Wang and Guan, 2018), especially in harsh working environments which require leaders to take on a disciplinary role (Xu *et al.*, 2015). We attribute the non-significant findings to various factors; for example, authoritarian leadership can be viewed as either dominance-based leadership or discipline-based leadership. If authoritarian leadership practices dominance-based leadership, this will reduce employee organizational citizenship behavior, whereas discipline-based

leadership will increase employee organizational citizenship behavior (Cheng *et al.*, 2019; Sim *et al.*, 2021). Hence, when both leadership styles were practiced, we were not able to differentiate between them. Employees' goal orientation may also affect how their work behavior is influenced by authoritarian leadership in situations where employees have to avoid revealing their goal orientation.

These findings show that each leadership style within paternalistic leadership is different. Specifically, benevolent leadership showed relationships to both cognitive and affective trust, revealing its role in influencing employees on both aspects. Moral leadership, however, only increased the level of cognitive trust in the leader, while authoritarian leadership showed no relationship to either cognitive or affective trust. Hence, paternalistic leadership should not be treated as other leadership styles commonly known for their unidirectional construct (Chou *et al.*, 2015). Our study followed a similar approach taken by many studies which also looked at these leadership styles individually (Chen *et al.*, 2014; Ugurluoglu *et al.*, 2018). This allows practitioners to be more aware of which leadership styles should be strengthened while knowing which ones to avoid or prevent.

The significant mediational relationship shows that trust in the leader mediates the relationships of benevolent and moral leadership styles with organizational citizenship behavior. The overall model shows that paternalistic leaders who abide by rules and principles in addition to caring for their employees, gain a higher level of trust from their employees. As trust serves as a "glue" that binds together the relationship between leaders and employees (Nienaber *et al.*, 2015), employees would, in turn, do their best and work beyond their job scope. This would ensure that they play their part in delivering organizational success and ensuring that other elements, such as providing additional help and being proactive in attending to their fellow employees' needs, would enable all employees to perform well in the workplace. This is consistent with social exchange theory which posits that kindness is repaid with kindness (Chen *et al.*, 2021). A high-quality relationship reflects a high level of job performance.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

While various studies on paternalistic leadership have been conducted in the past decade, only a handful have placed trust as the focal point of the study (cf. Chen *et al.*, 2014). Asian culture emphasizes human bonding and relationships; hence, in the work context, trust plays an important role in how two parties interact and communicate which affects information sharing, the quality of the relationship and the quality of teamwork (Chen and Chen, 2004). The current study explores the aspect of trust comprising both cognitive and affective aspects, thus enabling a better understanding of the processes within employees that reflect their relationships with their leader.

This study's investigation, by looking at the three dimensions of the paternalistic leadership style, rather than looking at the paternalistic leadership style as a whole, allows us to delve into the dual process mentioned by Zhang *et al.* (2015). As paternalistic leadership consists of both positive and negative aspects of a leadership style, the current study manages to capture the essence of which aspect of the paternalistic leadership style links most to which aspect of trust. For example, the study's findings show that the benevolent leadership style demonstrates a strong influence on employees' affective trust, further supporting the argument that being kind helps a leader to go a long way and that affective trust is effective in sustaining the relationship for the long haul.

The current study findings reveal similar outcomes to those of studies conducted in other Asian countries including Taiwan, China, South Korea, India and Japan, further adds to findings on the applicability of paternalistic leadership in Asian countries. While paternalistic leadership has been viewed as an Asian leadership style, no similar study has been conducted in the Western setting. Well-known leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, have been investigated in Eastern countries, with the applicability of this leadership style

found in various countries (Crede *et al.*, 2019). Future studies may also want to investigate the paternalistic leadership style when practiced in Western countries. The reason is that more Western organizations consisting of Western values and employees are being managed by Asian leaders (Hofstede, 2007). Therefore, the paternalistic leadership style may be more relevant to the Western context, with future research helping to reveal the intricate relationship between leaders from minority cultures in Western countries.

Finally, while we conducted a cross-sectional study, we were not able to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between our study's constructs. It is therefore advisable that future studies conduct a longitudinal study, at least two-wave, if not, three-wave, so the effects happening at each time interval can be better observed (Zapf *et al.*, 1996). This would also enable an investigation of whether reverse relationships could happen between our study's constructs, thus further expanding our understanding (cf. Kinnunen *et al.*, 2019). For example, will work engagement also increase work meaningfulness and will work meaningfulness increase inclusivity? The findings in response to these research questions would allow us to group together constructs that are reversible; by finding similar shared characteristics this would be able to occur.

Practical implications

Paternalistic leadership, a leadership style closely relates to Asia, is different from most leadership styles derived from Western literature. While transformational leadership has been shown to be relevant and effective in the Asian context, it still lacks the cultural aspect of Asian countries that would allow a better understanding of workplace phenomena through the Asian cultural lens. The current study findings further support the applicability of paternalistic leadership (Farh and Cheng, 2000) in Malaysia, alongside with many other Asian countries (Cheng *et al.*, 2019). In line with the cultural values of many Asian countries, which emphasize benevolence, morality and authority (Lee *et al.*, 2017), the current study demonstrates that paternalistic leadership is not only prevalent but also effective in the Malaysian context. This reinforces the notion that paternalistic leadership style is embedded across various Asian cultural practices. Additionally, the findings reveal specific nuances in how paternalistic leadership is perceived and enacted in Malaysia, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural leadership dynamics in Asia.

Organizational citizenship behavior is touted as the gold standard of job performance, with employees doing more than what is required (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). Kim (2006) also stated that organizational citizenship behavior is a reflection of an employee's behavioral and affective commitment towards the workplace. Organizations can ensure that Asian leaders place more focus on the benevolent and moral aspects of leadership style as this will increase employees' cognitive and affective trust. As Asian people are more relationship-based, trust plays an integral part in the work relationship; furthermore, trust is an element of communication, interaction and information sharing (Özer *et al.*, 2011). Cognitive trust refers to a conscious decision to trust the leader, leading to employees' decisions to perform a higher level of organizational citizenship behavior. Affective trust refers to a more direct trust in the leader which enables work processes to run well. A relationship built on kindness, high morality, and trust will enhance work relationships and ensure that leaders can effectively fulfil their roles, motivating employees to achieve organizational goals.

The findings also inform leaders in Asia to be mindful of the dual pathways of positive and negative influences on employees. Specifically, benevolent leadership and moral leadership were beneficial in the leader-employee relationship, while authoritarian leadership had no influence on employees. Hence, organizations could initiate more training for leaders on the benevolent and moral aspects of the paternalistic leadership style. Developing a benevolent leadership style is crucial as kindness and care are important in human relationships. When leaders care, employees can place their trust in them (Schuh *et al.*, 2018). In the work context, this enables employees to work harder and perform better at work. With the moral leadership

style, leaders abide by the rules and set standards of behavior that are moral, that have integrity, and that adhere to the rules. These behaviors also set an example for employees, encouraging them to follow the same behaviors. By displaying these behaviors, leaders can influence employees collectively, fostering a unified effort in delivering organizational outcomes and achieving organizational goals.

Conclusion

The current study is the first to explore how the three leadership styles within paternalistic leadership are related to cognitive and affective trust and, subsequently, to employee organizational citizenship behavior. The study's findings support the different roles of the three leadership styles in their influence on employee trust in the leader, with benevolent and moral leadership having positive relationships with both cognitive and affective trust, while authoritarian leadership shows no relationship with either cognitive or affective trust. Both cognitive and affective trust mediate the relationship between paternalistic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Future studies could further investigate the negative influence that authoritarian leadership has on employees and could also explore ways to manage this leadership style within paternalistic leadership.

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