



Leading with care or control? paternalistic leadership and employee performance in a Nigerian Local Government Council

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Abstract

Paternalistic leadership is characterized by a patriarchal, totalitarian, and authoritarian style of management. The purpose of this empirical study was to investigate the relationship between paternalistic leadership (authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership) and employee performance (task performance and contextual performance). Data were obtained from 197 employees working at Okpe Local Government Council, Delta State, Nigeria, randomly selected from a population of 574 employees. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using STATA 13.0 statistical software. The results reveal that authoritarian leadership negatively influences both task performance ($\alpha_1 = -0.112$, $t = -1.49$, $p < 0.05$) and contextual performance ($\beta_1 = -0.171$, $t = -2.36$, $p < 0.05$), while benevolent and moral leadership positively influence both dimensions of employee performance. The dimensions of paternalistic leadership jointly explained 49.1% of variance in task performance and 40.4% of variance in contextual performance. It is concluded that paternalistic leadership significantly influences employee performance, and leaders are encouraged to emphasize benevolent and moral leadership behaviors.

Keywords: Paternalistic leadership, Authoritarian leadership, Benevolent leadership, Moral leadership, Task performance, Contextual performance

Introduction

For decades, scholars and practitioners have argued that established leadership theories and approaches fail to capture some of the construct space around how leadership is conceptualized and practiced in many regions of the world (Sivaruban, 2021) [56]. Although some practices and characteristics of leaders and leadership show broad applicability across cultures, societal context influences many of the expectations about and practices of leadership (Nwankwo *et al.*, 2024; Eruvwe *et al.*, 2024) [8, 45]. One form of leadership held to be both common and potentially effective in many societies, not only of Confucian Asia but also in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America (Ma & Tsui, 2015 [39]; Mansur, Sobral, & Goldszmidt, 2017) [40], is referred to as paternalistic leadership. However, even while paternalistic leadership is presumed to be prevalent in many regions of the world, it is generally considered an unacceptable or unexpected form of leadership in countries characterized as Western, Educated, Industrialized, and Rich (WEIRD) countries (Ünler & Kılıç, 2019).

Paternalistic leadership (PL) is a leadership style that emphasizes the paternalistic role of the leader towards subordinates (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, Gumusluoglu, & Scandura, 2020 [30]; Godbless & Israel, 2022 [20]). This leadership style is characterized by a combination of authoritative and fatherly or motherly behaviors, where leaders act as caretakers, make decisions for subordinates, and take responsibility for their well-being. In the context of Nigerian public organizations, it is important to understand the impact of paternalistic leadership on workers' performance. Nigeria is a diverse country with various cultural beliefs and values, which influence leadership practices (Lu, Zhou, Wang, & Zhu, 2022) [38]. Traditionally, Nigerian society has had a patriarchal structure, where elders are revered and respected, and their decisions are

rarely questioned. These cultural norms have shaped the adoption of paternalistic leadership styles within Nigerian organizations.

Research on the impact of paternalistic leadership on employee performance in Nigerian public organizations is crucial as it provides insights into the effectiveness of this leadership style in a specific cultural context. Understanding how paternalistic leaders interact with subordinates and influence employee performance is essential for organizational success (Salih & Salih, 2021) [54]. Despite the growing body of literature on paternalistic leadership globally, significant research gaps persist in the Nigerian public sector context.

1. Statement of the Problem

Several challenges complicate the study of paternalistic leadership in Nigerian organizations. First, the meaning and scope of paternalistic leadership in Nigeria remain debatable due to definitional ambiguity, which makes it difficult to measure and analyze its effect on employee performance (Egbon-Charles *et al.*, 2024) [16]. Second, existing research has predominantly focused on various leadership styles in different cultural contexts, limiting applicability to Nigerian organizations. Nigerian organizations prioritize seniority and authority, where hierarchical conventions and traditional beliefs strongly influence leader-subordinate relationships (Lee & Ding, 2023) [34].

Third, the changing corporate environment of Nigerian public enterprises marked by rapid technological change and evolving labor demographics in a globalized economy necessitates a re-evaluation of paternalistic leadership's effectiveness (Jianga & Alib, 2024) [29]. Finally, without a thorough knowledge of how paternalistic leadership affects employee performance, organizations may struggle to optimize their leadership strategy and foster employee

growth and productivity (Koçak & Küçük, 2021) [36]. Based on these gaps, this study aimed to examine the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee performance in Okpe Local Government Council, Delta State, Nigeria.

2. Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to examine the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee performance (task performance and contextual performance) among Okpe Local Government Council employees in Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to: (a) determine the association between authoritarian leadership and task performance; (b) investigate the relationship between benevolent leadership and task performance; (c) explore the relationship between moral leadership and task performance; (d) determine the association between authoritarian leadership and contextual performance; (e) investigate the relationship between benevolent leadership and contextual performance; and (f) explore the relationship between moral leadership and contextual performance.

3. Research Hypotheses

H1: There is no relationship between paternalistic leadership and task performance.

H1a: There is no relationship between authoritarian leadership and task performance.

H1b: There is no relationship between benevolent leadership and task performance.

H1c: There is no relationship between moral leadership and task performance.

H2: There is no relationship between paternalistic leadership and contextual performance.

H2a: There is no relationship between authoritarian leadership and contextual performance.

H2b: There is no relationship between benevolent leadership and contextual performance.

H2c: There is no relationship between moral leadership and contextual performance.

Literature Review

1. Paternalistic Leadership

In the style of paternalism, leaders show concern toward their subordinates or followers as a father figure (Cahyadi, Poór, & Szabó, 2022) [7]. Both leader and follower treat each other as a family, within and outside the organization. Such interaction encourages both parties to share problems with the belief that they can solve them collaboratively (Hou, Hong, Zhu, & Zhou, 2019; Chukwugozeim *et al.*, 2025) [13, 23]. Workers under paternalistic leaders strive to complete assigned tasks to achieve organizational objectives and often exceed targets to please their supervisors. The paternalistic leadership style comprises three dimensions: benevolent leadership, moral leadership, and authoritarian leadership (Yamin, 2022; Omoye *et al.*, 2024) [45, 64].

Benevolent leadership refers to situations in which leaders create an environment of employee well-being and provide continuous care both in the workplace and outside it (Sahoo & Sahoo, 2019) [53]. Benevolent leaders allow employees to learn from their mistakes and, outside of the workplace, motivate employees to overcome life challenges like a family member would (Yamin & Mahasneh, 2018) [65]. These behaviors make employees more energetic, enthusiastic, and committed to innovative work behavior (Tian & Zhai, 2019) [58].

Moral leadership, the second dimension, is characterized by high spiritual virtues, unselfish and self-disciplined behavior toward employees, respect for rules, and refusal to abuse power (Islam, Idris, & Furuoka, 2022; Omoye *et al.*, 2024) [17, 27]. Leaders with moral characteristics influence employee behavior such that subordinates seek to imitate the leader and develop similar moral qualities (Gu *et al.*, 2018) [61].

Authoritarian leadership, the third dimension, reflects leaders' rigidity toward subordinates in the workplace. The authoritarian leader maintains strong autocratic control over employees and requires absolute obedience (Gu *et al.*, 2018). This leadership style tends to create a depressing organizational culture that diminishes employee creativity (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampieri, 2019) [14]. Organizations practicing authoritarian leadership are typically less productive because employees are afraid of being reprimanded by their leaders (Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2010) [48].

2. Task Performance

Task performance can be defined as the direct contribution of employees to the main technological process of an enterprise, or as indirect activities that benefit that process (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) [6]. It can be described as the proficiency with which individuals perform the core substantive or technical tasks central to their job (Campbell, 1990) [9]. Behaviors used to describe task performance often include work quantity and quality, job skills, and job knowledge (Nuryanti, Masharyono, & Faishal, 2021; Omoye, 2025) [42, 44]. From the employee's perspective, task performance refers to actions that are 'expected, evaluated and rewarded' (Yaman & Yaman, 2023) [62]. Employees may perceive two types of task performance: general task performance, which encompasses all activities in the organization, and specific task performance, which is linked to activities explicitly listed in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Aslan, Yaman, Aksu, & Güngör, 2022) [4].

3. Contextual Performance

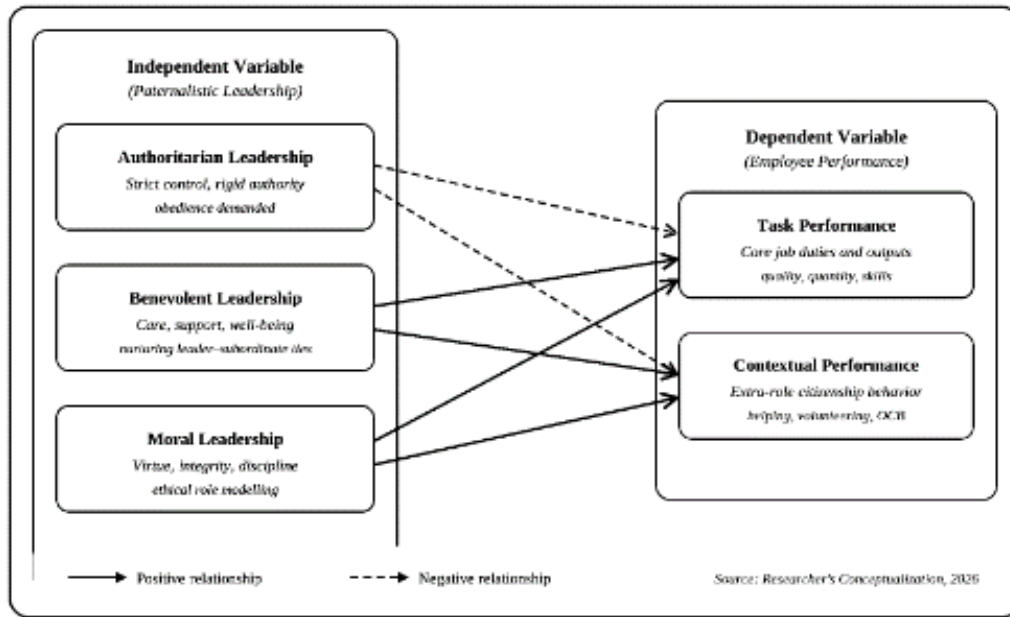
Contextual performance (CP), also known as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) or extra-role behavior, boosts organizational effectiveness by contributing to creativity, innovation, adaptability, and resource transformation (Khalifa & Awad, 2018; Akpomimie *et al.*, 2026). Organ (1997) [2, 32, 47] describes CP as discretionary individual behavior that is not explicitly admitted by the reward system but that, in aggregate, bolsters the effective functioning of the organization. Typical examples of CP include exhibiting polite behaviors and positive attitudes, helping colleagues with work issues, performing overtime without expectation of acknowledgement, and competently representing the organization to outsiders (Fahim, 2023) [18]. Previous research has demonstrated that employee characteristics, task characteristics, organizational characteristics, and leader behaviors are among the strongest antecedents of contextual performance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000) [50].

4. Conceptual Framework

Based on the foregoing conceptual review, Fig 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. The framework posits that the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership—authoritarian, benevolent, and moral leadership—directly influence the two dimensions of

employee performance: task performance and contextual performance. Solid arrows represent hypothesized positive

relationships, while dashed arrows represent hypothesized negative relationships.



Source: Researcher's Conceptualization, 2026 [2]

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory. According to Liden and Graen (1980) [35], the quality of a leader-follower connection—referred to as 'LMX'—determines important work outcomes. Followers with high-quality exchange connections with their leader experience high levels of trust, respect, and commitment. In contrast, followers with low-quality exchange connections exhibit low levels of commitment, support, and trust. The parallels and differences between LMX and paternalistic leadership have been studied by earlier researchers. Paternalistic leadership differs from LMX in that paternal leaders prioritize improving both the work and personal outcomes of followers, whereas LMX is primarily concerned with improving work productivity (Hou *et al.*, 2019) [23]. Furthermore, paternalistic partnerships entail social exchanges aimed at strengthening commitment and human ties, rather than purely financial gains (Duangekanong *et al.*, 2017) [15]. This study proposes that moral and benevolent leaders are likely to enjoy high-quality LMX relationships, while authoritarian leaders are likely to have strained relationships with followers due to their hierarchical and domineering behaviors.

6. Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have investigated the relationships between paternalistic leadership, task performance, and contextual performance. Calan and Aksu (2024) [8] found a positive and significant relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee performance and organizational identification among 380 employees in five-star hotel establishments in Antalya. Januar and Santoso (2022) [28] found that paternalistic leadership has a positive and significant effect on both task and contextual performance, with trust in leadership acting as a full mediator. Kassim *et al.* (2021) [31] similarly reported that the three dimensions of

paternalistic leadership were positively and significantly associated with job performance among university staff. In a large-scale meta-analysis, Hiller, Sin, Ponnappalli, and Ozgen (2019) [22] analyzed 165 independent samples from 152 studies (N = 68,395) across fourteen countries, revealing that authoritarianism is consistently negatively related to task performance and citizenship behaviors, while the benevolence dimension demonstrates consistently positive relationships with follower performance and attitudes. Liu, Xu, and Li (2021) [37], in a meta-analysis of Chinese studies (N = 44,605), confirmed that benevolent and moral leadership have strong positive correlations with both task performance and organizational citizenship behavior, while authoritarian leadership shows significant negative correlations with these outcomes. These findings support the theoretical framework of the present study and provide a basis for the hypotheses tested.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, in which data relating to paternalistic leadership and employee performance were collected at a single point in time from a defined population.

2. Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of 574 employees working at the Okpe Local Government Area (LGA) in Delta State, Nigeria. The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1973) [63] formula:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2) = 574 / [1 + 574(0.05)^2] = 574 / 2.435 \approx 236$$

A sample of 236 respondents was selected using a simple random sampling technique, whereby all 574 employees were assigned numbers and selection was made using a table of random numbers.

3. Measurement of Variables

Task performance was measured by 6 items and contextual performance by 10 items, all adopted from the Pradhan and Jena (2017) [51] scales on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The three dimensions of paternalistic leadership were each measured by 5 items (15 items total), adopted from Cheng *et al.* (2013) [12], rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 6 = frequently). Cronbach's alpha coefficients confirmed good internal reliability for all scales (see Table 2).

4. Model Specification

The following multiple regression models guided the analysis:

$$TP = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1AL + \alpha_2BL + \alpha_3ML + \mu \dots (1)$$

$$CP = \beta_0 + \beta_1AL + \beta_2BL + \beta_3ML + \mu \dots (2)$$

Where: *AL* = Authoritarian Leadership; *BL* = Benevolent Leadership; *ML* = Moral Leadership; *TP* = Task Performance; *CP* = Contextual Performance; $\alpha_1, \alpha_3, \beta_1, \beta_3$ = Regression coefficients; α_0, β_0 = Constant terms; μ = Error term.

Results

1. Response Rate

Of the 236 questionnaires administered to participants, 30 were not retrieved and 9 were incomplete. Thus, 197 complete and usable questionnaires were coded and analyzed, yielding a response rate of 83.47%, which exceeds the 60% benchmark recommended by Baruch (1999) [5].

2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The demographic distribution of participants is presented in Table 1. Of the 197 participants, 56.85% were male and 43.15% were female. The majority (49.75%) were aged 30–39 years, followed by the 20–29 age group (35.03%). In terms of marital status, 52.28% were married and 37.06% were single. Regarding educational qualification, 57.36% held a Bachelor's/HND degree, 25.89% held a Diploma/NCE, and 16.75% held a postgraduate degree. For work experience, 37.06% had spent 20–29 years in their organization.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variable	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	112	56.85
	Female	85	43.15
Age	20 – 29 years	69	35.03
	30 – 39 years	98	49.75
	40 – 49 years	25	12.69
	Above 50 years	5	2.53
Marital Status	Single	73	37.06
	Married	103	52.28
	Divorced	4	2.03
	Widowed	7	3.55
	Separated	10	5.08
Educational Level	Diploma/NCE	51	25.89
	Bachelor Degree/HND	113	57.36
	Postgraduate Degree	33	16.75
Work Experience	Below 10 years	28	14.21
	10 – 19 years	67	34.01
	20 – 29 years	73	37.06
	Above 30 years	29	14.72

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026 [2]

3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients for all study variables.

The means for authoritarian leadership (AL), benevolent leadership (BL), and moral leadership (ML) were 3.97, 4.03, and 4.54, respectively, all exceeding the mid-point of a 6-point scale.

The means for task performance (TP) and contextual

performance (CP) were 3.75 and 4.24, respectively.

Authoritarian leadership was negatively and significantly correlated with both task performance ($r = -0.20, p < 0.05$) and contextual performance ($r = -0.47, p < 0.05$). Benevolent and moral leadership were positively and significantly correlated with both performance dimensions. The correlation coefficients ranged from low to medium, ruling out the possibility of multicollinearity.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variables	Mean	SD	α	Min	Max	AL	BL	ML	TP	CP
AL	3.97	0.78	0.81	1	6	1.00				
BL	4.03	0.94	0.90	1	6	-0.11*	1.00			
ML	4.54	0.72	0.87	1	6	-0.17*	0.21*	1.00		
TP	3.75	0.79	0.92	1	5	-0.20*	0.13*	0.41*	1.00	
CP	4.24	0.93	0.85	1	5	-0.47*	0.27*	0.19*	0.28*	1.00

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026 [2]

Note: SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach Alpha; AL = Authoritarian Leadership; BL = Benevolent Leadership; ML = Moral Leadership; TP = Task Performance; CP = Contextual Performance; * $p < 0.05$

4. Hypotheses Testing

4.1 Paternalistic Leadership and Task Performance

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. As shown in Table 3, the R^2 for Model 1 was 0.491 ($F =$

33.323, $p = 0.0209 < 0.05$), indicating that 49.1% of the variance in task performance was explained by the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership. H1 was therefore rejected in favor of the alternative. Specifically,

authoritarian leadership had a negative and significant effect on task performance ($\alpha_1 = -0.112$, $t = -1.49$, $p = 0.001$), meaning a unit increase in authoritarian leadership corresponds to an 11.2% decrease in task performance (H1a rejected).

Benevolent leadership had a positive and significant effect

on task performance ($\alpha_2 = 0.233$, $t = 2.12$, $p = 0.021$), corresponding to a 23.3% increase per unit change (H1b rejected). Moral leadership also had a positive and significant effect ($\alpha_3 = 0.144$, $t = 2.15$, $p = 0.033$), corresponding to a 14.4% increase per unit change (H1c rejected).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis: Paternalistic Leadership and Task Performance

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	p > t	[95% Conf. Interval]
Authoritarian Leadership	-0.112	0.075	-1.49	0.001	-0.261 to 0.036
Benevolent Leadership	0.233	0.056	2.12	0.021	0.010 to 0.275
Moral Leadership	0.144	0.067	2.15	0.033	0.012 to 0.276
Constant	2.379	0.394	6.04	0.000	1.603 to 3.155

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026^[2]

Note: $R^2 = 0.491$; $F = 33.323$; $p = 0.0209 < 0.05$; Criterion: Task Performance

4.2 Paternalistic Leadership and Contextual Performance

As shown in Table 4, the R^2 for Model 2 was 0.404 ($F = 43.688$, $p = 0.0000 < 0.05$), indicating that 40.4% of the variance in contextual performance was explained by the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership. H2 was therefore rejected. Authoritarian leadership had a negative and significant effect on contextual performance ($\beta_1 = -$

0.171, $t = -2.36$, $p = 0.019$), corresponding to a 17.1% decrease per unit change (H2a rejected). Benevolent leadership had a strong positive and significant effect ($\beta_2 = 0.435$, $t = 10.98$, $p = 0.000$), corresponding to a 43.5% increase per unit change (H2b rejected). Moral leadership also had a strong positive and significant effect ($\beta_3 = 0.394$, $t = 9.26$, $p = 0.000$), corresponding to a 39.4% increase per unit change (H2c rejected).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis: Paternalistic Leadership and Contextual Performance

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	p > t	[95% Conf. Interval]
Authoritarian Leadership	-0.171	0.073	-2.36	0.019	-0.261 to -0.028
Benevolent Leadership	0.435	0.040	10.98	0.000	0.357 to 0.514
Moral Leadership	0.394	0.043	9.26	0.000	0.310 to 0.478
Constant	2.353	0.298	7.89	0.000	1.765 to 2.942

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026^[2]

Note: $R^2 = 0.404$; $F = 43.688$; $p = 0.0000 < 0.05$; Criterion: Contextual Performance

Discussion

This study examined the association between paternalistic leadership (and its dimensions) and employee performance (task performance and contextual performance) in a Nigerian public sector context. The first major finding is that paternalistic leadership has a direct and significant impact on both task and contextual performance, consistent with the findings of Calan and Aksu (2024) and Januar and Santoso (2022)^[8, 28].

The negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and both task and contextual performance is consistent with the meta-analytic results of Hiller *et al.* (2019)^[22] and the findings of Liu *et al.* (2021)^[37]. However, it is at variance with the findings of Wang and Guan (2018) and Igbomor and Olisemenogor (2024)^[25, 61], who reported a positive association between authoritarian leadership and employee performance. These contrasting findings may reflect contextual differences in power distance and organizational culture between the samples studied.

The positive associations between benevolent leadership and moral leadership on both task and contextual performance align with multiple prior studies (Afsar & Rehman, 2015; Tang & Naumann, 2015; Hiller *et al.*, 2019)^[1, 22, 57]. The particularly strong effect of benevolent leadership on contextual performance ($\beta = 0.435$) suggests that employees who feel genuinely cared for by their leaders are significantly more willing to engage in discretionary, extra-role behaviors. However, the present findings diverge from Ugurluoglu *et al.* (2018)^[59], who reported that moral leadership was negatively related to task performance,

possibly due to differences in the hospital setting and national cultural context studied. These findings are broadly consistent with LMX Theory: leaders who demonstrate benevolence and moral integrity build higher-quality leader-member relationships, which in turn foster better employee performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the effects of paternalistic leadership dimensions on employee performance among employees of Okpe Local Government Council in Delta State, Nigeria. The results indicate that paternalistic leadership significantly influences employee performance. More specifically, authoritarian leadership is negatively associated with both task and contextual performance, while benevolent leadership and moral leadership are positively associated with both performance dimensions.

These findings carry important practical implications. Leaders in Okpe Local Government Council and similar Nigerian public organizations should promote benevolent and moral leadership behaviors by demonstrating individualized concern for employee personal and familial well-being, providing encouragement during difficulties, and emphasizing group identity to strengthen subordinates' self-esteem. Conversely, authoritarian tendencies should be minimized as they are consistently detrimental to employee performance. Policymakers should design leadership training and development programs that cultivate benevolent and moral leadership competencies within the specific cultural context of Nigerian public organizations.

Future research should consider expanding the sample to a larger number of Local Government Councils to enhance the generalizability of findings. Additionally, future studies should consider collecting data from multiple sources, including both leaders and subordinates, to mitigate common method bias. Longitudinal designs and the inclusion of mediating variables such as trust and organizational commitment may also provide richer insights into the mechanisms linking paternalistic leadership to employee performance.

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