

A contingent model of moral pride and legitimacy for sustainable ethical leadership

Shorai Chitimbe, Lovemore Chikazhe & Rahabhi Mashapure

To cite this article: Shorai Chitimbe, Lovemore Chikazhe & Rahabhi Mashapure (2026) A contingent model of moral pride and legitimacy for sustainable ethical leadership, Cogent Business & Management, 13:1, 2677337, DOI: [10.1080/23311975.2026.2677337](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2026.2677337)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2026.2677337>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



View supplementary material [↗](#)



Published online: 24 May 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 67






View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

A contingent model of moral pride and legitimacy for sustainable ethical leadership

Shorai Chitimbe , Lovemore Chikazhe  and Rahabhi Mashapure 

School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

Despite the recognition of the importance of ethical leadership, there is a gap in understanding what enables leaders to sustain it over time and under pressure. This study proposed a process model integrating leader moral pride, earned legitimacy, and leader humility to predict sustainable ethical leadership. Data were collected from 342 academic and administrative staff in four Zimbabwean state universities between May and July 2025. Data were analysed using Hayes PROCESS Macro Model 1 and 7. Results revealed: (1) earned legitimacy emerged as a direct driver of sustainable ethical leadership; (2) Moral pride predicted legitimacy; (3) leader humility demonstrated an independent positive effect on sustainable ethical leadership. The results did not support either the moderation or the moderated mediation predictions, but a dual process in which moral pride influences ethical leadership sustainability through leader-earned legitimacy, whilst leader humility contributes its own unique value in the process. The research contribution: (1) integrating affective and social-cognitive perspectives to explain ethical leadership as a dynamic, sustained process; (2) introducing moral pride as a socially embedded emotional driver which initiates the conferment of legitimacy to leaders by followers. The findings offer practical guidance for nurturing an ethical culture within institutions of higher education.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 January 2026
Revised 9 May 2026
Accepted 17 May 2026

KEYWORDS

Moral pride; earned legitimacy; sustainable ethical leadership; leader humility; hubristic pride



SUBJECTS


Social Psychology; Business, Management and Accounting; Human Resource Management; Organizational Studies; Corporate Social Responsibility & Business Ethics; Strategic Management; Leadership

1. Introduction

Research interest in ethical leadership has grown over the years since the seminal work of Brown et al. (2005), driven by the proliferation of corruption and other corporate scandals in both the public and private sectors. This has heightened the need for leaders of moral character—leaders who not only understand ethical values but can also sustain them (Mohan et al., 2022). Research conducted over the years has established ethical leadership as one of the few positive leadership styles that predicts positive outcomes (Alkhadra et al., 2023). Sharma et al. (2019) noted that the effectiveness and the success of an organisation are associated with the ethical attitude of its leaders, making ethical leadership a critical component for organisational success. Recent scholarship continues to underscore its significance, linking it to organisational performance (Alkhadra et al., 2023), demonstrating its cross-temporal and cross-cultural relevance (Amory et al., 2024), and showing its influence extending to employee ethical behaviour (Al Halbusi et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the view that understanding ethical leadership requires attention to both leader characteristics and follower attributes.

However, the focus has often been on the outcomes of ethical leadership rather than the internal processes that enable its persistence. Even so, we are yet to understand what enables a leader to sustain ethical leadership in the long term, and more importantly, under conditions of continued pressure. Most studies portray ethical leadership as a stable attribute whilst ignoring the dynamic, effortful, and challenging process of maintaining ethical conduct (Hannah et al., 2020; Hossain, 2023). This dynamic perspective aligns with emerging research, which is demonstrating that ethical leadership functions

CONTACT Shorai Chitimbe  chitimbes@gmail.com  School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences, Chinhoyi University of Technology, 9 Magamba Way, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2026.2677337>.

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

through multiple pathways (Al Halbusi et al., 2025). In relation to ethical leadership, sustainability encompasses both consistency in moral conduct over time and resilience under adversity (Nan & Chaiprasit, 2023).

Prior studies on ethical leadership have enlightened our understanding of its nature and associated organisational outcomes (Alkhadra et al., 2023; Amory et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2005). However, the literature offers little insight into the endogenous factors that drive persistence in its demonstration. This gap is particularly significant given evidence that the positive impact of ethics-related interventions may diminish over time in the absence of sustained reinforcement mechanisms. Research on ethics training programmes reveals that whilst comprehensive training of leaders can enhance ethical culture in the short term, these gains often disappear over time without ongoing reinforcement (Ruiz-Palomino, Linuesa-Langreo & Toro-Arias, 2025). This finding highlights the need to understand the psychological and social mechanisms that enable ethical leadership to go beyond the initiation stage (Zhao & Liu, 2022). Whilst these factors are vital, focusing only on leader characteristics ignores the role of social reinforcement mechanisms that emerge from the practice of leadership itself. There is a need to move beyond static trait-based approaches (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Leaders are not simply a product of their traits; their behaviours produce affective reactions and social feedback from their followers. These affective responses can shape future behaviour (Kehr et al., 2022). This iterative cycle is central to understanding the sustainability of moral behaviour; at the same time, the specific emotional and social rewards that drive it remain unclear. The challenge of sustainability is further complicated by the person-to-situation interactions that characterise ethical leadership. Research demonstrates that the positive influence of ethical leadership on the ethical behaviour of subordinates is amplified when subordinates possess both high moral identity and high self-control (Al Halbusi et al., 2023). It becomes apparent that self-regulatory mechanisms play a crucial role in translating ethical leadership into sustained moral conduct; hence, the need to understand how the leader's own self-regulatory emotional experiences, such as moral pride, might also interact with follower perceptions to create sustainable ethical leadership. We argue that existing constructs such as moral identity—a stable cognitive self-schema, or ethical climate, a contextual factor, are insufficient to explain sustainability. These constructs do not capture the dynamic, affective experiences that reinforce ethical conduct. This aligns with the call from Ahmad et al. (2017) for a clearer understanding of how ethical leadership is conceptually distinct from other related constructs and for exploring the mechanisms through which it operates. This study introduces moral pride as the missing link in this puzzle.

We propose that a key component of this mechanism lies in the emotion of moral pride, which signifies a self-conscious affective state that is aroused when a leader appraises their own ethical conduct as aligning with internalised standards and at the same time perceives this conduct to be valued by significant others (Bernhard, 2025; Xu & Ju, 2024). Moral pride has to be differentiated from related constructs such as authentic pride. Authentic pride is linked to personal achievement and competence (Jiao et al., 2022; Tracy et al., 2023), while moral pride is tied to the moral domain of action. Moral pride is an affective state aroused by the appraisal of one's actions as good and right, going beyond merely being successful. Furthermore, it is distinct from moral identity, which is a more stable, cognitive schema of the self (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Whilst moral identity represents the what of the leader's moral self-concept, moral pride is the how it feels when that identity is enacted and socially validated. This distinction positions moral pride as a dynamic emotion which provides immediate affective feedback, setting it apart from static trait-based or cognitive explanations of moral behaviour. It is important to note that, whilst pride is an internal state, it can be inferred by followers through observable behavioural cues, such as a leader's increased conviction when discussing ethical principles or expressions of fulfilment after a successful moral stand. These cues form the basis for follower attributions about the leader's authentic commitment to moral values. Authentic moral pride is a signal of self-consistency and social valuation. Despite its inherent relevance, moral pride has been absent from organisational leadership discourse. Its absence has created a significant theoretical gap. How does this distinct emotional experience translate into the sustained behavioural pattern of ethical leadership?

To close this theoretical gap requires going beyond the individual mind. Emotions are embedded in social contexts (Van Kleef & Côté, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). We argue that the sustaining power of moral pride operates through a social mechanism in which earned legitimacy is conferred by followers. This

legitimacy-building process resembles findings from organisational ethics research showing that ethical culture is shaped through visible, consistent modelling by leaders, and that such culture change requires deliberate reinforcement mechanisms (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2025). When followers confer legitimacy based on perceived moral pride, they become active participants in sustaining ethical leadership. Leader legitimacy, a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system (Abdulai et al., 2025), is a fundamental pillar of leadership influence (Iwanowska & Majczyk, 2024; Marques et al., 2021). The concept of legitimacy is also being recognised as a critical factor within organisations (Zhao et al., 2025). We conceptualise earned legitimacy as coming from the followers (Goswami et al., 2021). Leaders earn the right to lead by acting with integrity. We posit that when authority is seen as genuine, leaders are judged and conferred with legitimacy by their followers. In this study, we treat earned legitimacy as a follower perception, a judgement about the moral credibility of the leader. The conferment is incremental as it provides the leader with enhanced social capital. Such capital reduces resistance and becomes a source for continued and amplified ethical leadership (Sánchez-Del-Río-Vázquez et al., 2024). Translating moral pride into prosocial and sustainable action is a delicate mechanism. Pride can be a double-edged sword, one which can inspire people to help others or one which makes them self-centred and arrogant (Ning et al., 2025).

We introduce leader humility as a means of resolving this paradox, as a balancing factor. Humility, which is characterised by an accurate self-view, appreciation of others, and openness to feedback (Brunzel & Ebsen, 2023; Kelemen et al., 2023), is predicted to act as a regulatory attribute. When a leader is humble, moral pride is likely to be experienced as a connective emotion—one which reinforces collective values and the contributions of others. This connection then directs pride into legitimacy and sustainable ethical behaviour. On the other hand, for leaders who are low in humility, the same pride may be interpreted as confirmation of superior personal worth over others. This view fosters arrogance and self-centred entitlement, and detachment from followers (Huynh & Romero Gonzalez, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to develop and test an integrated, contingent model that explains how and when the emotional experience of moral pride in a leader nurtures sustainable ethical leadership within institutions of higher education. We seek to contribute a process-oriented perspective that views ethical leadership not as static but as a socially embedded practice reinforced by specific affective and cognitive exchanges. To guide the exploration of the research interest, we introduce the following research questions:

1. To what extent does perceived leader moral pride predict sustainable ethical leadership?
2. What is the influence of moral pride on the earned legitimacy of a leader?
3. What is the effect of earned legitimacy on sustainable ethical leadership?
4. What is the moderating effect of leader humility on the relationship between leader moral pride and earned legitimacy?
5. Does earned legitimacy mediate the relationship between leader moral pride and sustainable ethical leadership?
6. Is this mediated relationship conditional on the level of leader humility?

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

The present research integrates moral pride, leader legitimacy, and leader humility in an attempt to develop a contingent model for sustainable ethical leadership.

2.1. Moral pride as the affective catalyst

The study of pride has shifted to a more complex understanding of its duality, rather than its being treated as a singular, unwanted emotion (Dickens & Robins, 2022; Witkower et al., 2022). Contemporary research has distinguished between authentic pride, which arises from hard-won accomplishments, and hubristic pride. Hubristic, arrogant pride stems from an inflated sense of self (Jeong et al., 2025; Mercadante et al., 2021). A recent review has confirmed the dual structure of pride as central to understanding its varied workplace outcomes (Schilpzand et al., 2025).

The role of self-conscious emotions such as pride is increasingly being recognised as a driver of moral conduct within the discipline of organisational behaviour (Bahmannia et al., 2023). Specifically, in a meta-analysis of unethical pro-organisational behaviour, Zou et al. (2025) found that positive emotions like pride can trigger both moral licensing and conscientiousness effects, highlighting the complex motivational role of pride. However, research in this area has mainly focused on pride in the context of individual and group achievement (Chitimbe & Chikazhe, 2025; Dickens & Robins, 2022). The function of pride in association with morality in ethical leadership studies is being overlooked. This oversight is notable given that ethical leaders themselves are characterised by the demonstration of moral virtues that evoke positive affective responses in followers. Research in virtue ethics suggests that ethical leaders provide the moral goods that help employees to make relational perceptions of their leaders (Al Halbusi et al., 2025). The experience of moral pride may represent the internalisation of this moral good provision, signalling to leaders that their ethical conduct serves the common good. This is a critical gap worth closing, considering that emotions are not merely reactions but are feelings that can shape future action (Brosch & Steg, 2021).

Moral pride plays a critical motivational function in leaders. It makes future ethical behaviour repeatable and with less effort (O'Keefe et al., 2019; Xu & Ju, 2024). The arousal of moral pride as a social experience depends on the acknowledgement of one's actions by significant others (Jeong et al., 2025); an acknowledgement which confirms such moral actions are aligned with the values of the group (Solinger, Jansen & Cornelissen, 2020). Moral pride, whilst representing the internal state of a leader, is a link between a leader and their social environment. It is felt internally but experienced outwardly when recognised as an influence on others.

By introducing moral pride as a distinct affective emotion aroused by recognised ethical behaviour, we aim to infuse a dynamic, sequential element into the study of ethical leadership (Hannah et al., 2020). We posit that this specific emotional experience is a critical mechanism which can explain why a leader might be motivated to sustain ethical conduct even under conditions of pressure. Based on the conclusions from the literature, it is therefore hypothesised that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between perceived leader moral pride and sustainable ethical leadership.

2.2. Earned legitimacy as the social exchange of moral leadership

If moral pride is the internal mechanism through which a leader can derive self-worth, leader legitimacy is the social exchange which sustains ethical leadership. Legitimacy is a concept in sociology and organisational theory, referring to a generalised perception that an individual's actions are desirable and appropriate within a social system of norms and values (Haack et al., 2021; Schoon, 2022). Recent research (Sánchez-Del-Río-Vázquez et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2025) provides empirical support for this, showing that perceived legitimacy is a critical foundational antidote to attitude for sustained leader-follower relationships. In the context of leadership, legitimacy is the conferment to lead, which can be viewed as the psychological and social authorisation from followers that makes influence possible and acceptable (Marques et al., 2021). Without legitimacy, leadership relies on coercion and transactional exchanges. Unlike leading by coercion, legitimacy makes leadership a mutually endorsed process where followers willingly concede some of their discretion to the leader (Haugard, 2025).

Our focus is on earned or conferred legitimacy, a form of legitimacy which is conferred by followers based on their perceptions of the leader's character and conduct (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Haugard, 2025). Earned legitimacy differs from ordinary legitimacy, which is derived from the position and formal authority one holds. Earned legitimacy is granted when followers judge the actions of the leader as credible. In the domain of ethical leadership, earned legitimacy is performative; a judgment is made based on perceptions of the leader's ethical conduct (Ahmad et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2005; Jakobsen et al., 2022). Similarly, Tapia-Espinoza (2025) found that organisational culture influences institutional legitimacy through knowledge sharing, highlighting that legitimacy is a conferred judgment based on perceived actions and shared values.

When a leader makes a difficult ethical decision, and even to the extent of taking personal risk for such a principled action, followers make an attribution about the underlying character of the leader

(Abdulai et al., 2025). Santalla de Banderali et al. (2025) note that such attributions are central to understanding why employees engage in or refrain from pro-organisational behaviours, underscoring the follower's role in conferring legitimacy based on perceived leader integrity. A positive attribution of a principled leader compels followers to confer earned legitimacy.

The granting of legitimacy is a form of social learning (Bandura, 1977). It is here that the integration of our theoretical framework becomes evident. Applying the Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the ethical actions of the leader and the subsequent social acknowledgement from followers constitute a work event. This event generates the affective reaction of moral pride in the leader. However, for this internal state to translate into sustained behaviour, it must be validated externally. This is where Social Learning Theory (SLT) provides the mechanism. When followers observe the ethical conduct of the leader it becomes a potential signal of the leader's internal state of pride. Through this vicarious learning, followers make attributions about the character of the leader.

When followers interpret the moral conduct as stemming from authentic commitment rather than hubristic tendencies, it compels followers to confer legitimacy on the leader (Sewell, 2024; Srimongkolkul et al., 2025). Studies show that authentic pride promotes prosocial outcomes while hubristic pride leads to antisocial outcomes (Tracy et al., 2023). Follower attributions about the type of pride from the leader have an influence on their willingness to confer legitimacy to the leader. The conferment becomes a strong signal to the leader of legitimate endorsement, one which validates their leadership identity (London & Sherman, 2021). Legitimacy then serves as the bridge which transforms an internal emotional state into socially reinforced behaviour. Research demonstrates that ethical leadership influences the ethical behaviour of subordinates when subordinates possess the self-regulatory capacity to internalise modelled behaviours (Al Halbusi et al., 2023). The effectiveness of the conferment process is also contingent on the ethical climate, which shapes what behaviours are reinforced (Din et al., 2025). In our framework, we perceive that when followers observe the moral pride of the leader and their subsequent conferred legitimacy, this represents a parallel social learning process. Through this process, leaders themselves receive reinforcement for ethical conduct. In light of this, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Leader moral pride has a positive influence on leader earned legitimacy.

2.3. Sustainable ethical leadership as a dynamic process

The dependent variable in our model represents a conceptual shift from the majority of research on ethical leadership, which tends to measure it as a relatively stable behaviour at a single point in time (Ng & Feldman, 2015; Amory et al., 2024). Viewing ethical leadership as a static concept overlooks the question of its sustainability, how it persists over time and under varying conditions (Hannah et al., 2020). We argue that this static view is inadequate in the face of modern organisational pressures. In today's organisations, leaders are confronted not only with routine ethical dilemmas. Today's leader is also under sustained pressure to compromise values for short-term gains, navigate crises, and maintain integrity amidst competing stakeholder demands. Whilst traditional measures capture the presence of ethical leadership, they fail to capture its durability under tempting conditions. To address this gap, we draw from the growing discourse on resilient leadership and conceptualise Sustainable Ethical Leadership as a higher-order construct comprising two interrelated dimensions: ethical consistency and ethical resilience (Batool et al., 2022; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2025).

Ethical consistency represents the stability of ethical leadership behaviours over time in the face of routine challenges and competing demands. Ethical consistency reflects the ability of a leader to integrate ethical principles into their daily routine. It ensures that the words of leaders are backed by action (Ughulu, 2024). Consistency between words and action is critical for a leader. This consistency has an influence on followers who are observers of the behavioural patterns of their leaders. When a leader fails to maintain consistency between the two, it raises scepticism and erodes trust among followers. A leader who is perceived as ethical only when convenient or when being observed undermines their own credibility (Malik et al., 2022; Schilling et al., 2023). Ethical resilience has to do with the ability of a leader to maintain moral behaviours under adversity conditions (Batool et al., 2022; Waldner, 2023). The resilience of a leader goes beyond ordinary consistency. It represents the ability to uphold ethical standards under

adverse conditions. A resilient ethical leader does not simply avoid unethical behaviour under pressure but remains resolute in ethical commitments. A resilient leader provides moral clarity and protects ethical norms when they are under threat (Askew, 2023). Under such testing conditions, resilience becomes the test quality of sustainable ethical leadership.

Integrating the two dimensions, consistency and resilience form the complete domain of sustainable ethical leadership. A leader could be consistent in demonstrating ethical behaviour under routine conditions but fail to do so when put under pressure. In such a context, a leader could demonstrate consistency but failed to demonstrate resilience. On the other hand, a leader might prove resilience in times of crisis but intermittently demonstrate ethical behaviour in routine operations. Under such conditions, resiliency is observed, but the leader is failing in consistency. To conclude, sustainability requires that both conditions of consistency and resilience be satisfied. It is important to acknowledge that whilst we conceptualise sustainable ethical leadership as a two-dimensional construct, we operationalise it as a unidimensional scale reflecting the overall perception of followers about the sustained ethical conduct of their leaders. Our measure captures the holistic outcome of sustainability rather than its distinct components. This conceptualisation shifts the focus of ethical leadership from being an ethical leader to positioning it as sustaining ethical leadership. It acknowledges that ethical leadership is not a destination but a continuous, effortful process that must be sustained against routine conditions and under opposition. We position a socio-affective loop in which pride and legitimacy provide the psychological and social resources that drive both consistency and resilience. With these insights, we hypothesise that:

H3: Earned legitimacy has a positive influence on sustainable ethical leadership.

2.4. Leader humility as the essential contingency

The fourth construct of interest for the paper takes the form of a boundary condition, one which determines whether the proposed socio-affective loop functions as predicted rather than disintegrates into hubristic behaviour. We view leader humility as a representation of interpersonal willingness to interpret oneself accurately. It represents an appreciation of others and openness to new ideas and feedback (Frank, 2023). Meta-analysis studies confirm that leader humility boosts employee engagement, which is crucial for sustaining the connecting loop where pride is socially experienced (Maldonado et al., 2022; Ansong et al., 2024). This study perceives humility to act as a regulatory filter on moral pride, one which regulates moral pride to remain legitimate. The duality of pride makes this moderating role essential. As noted, authentic pride can motivate prosocial behaviour, but if unchecked can also be harmful.

Without humility as a filter, pride can turn into hubristic pride, a feeling of arrogance and superiority over others (Bahmannia et al., 2023; Witkower et al., 2022). The dividing line between these two emotional domains can easily be permeable (Liu et al., 2025). If so, this raises a critical question about the mechanism through which humility conditions follower perceptions. The paper argues that it operates through attributions. Followers are not passive recipients of leader behaviour. They make appraisals of such behaviour and also seek to understand the motives behind it. For a humble leader, the feeling of pride is experienced as gratitude, a connective emotion. When a humble leader has an accurate self-appraisal, helps them to avoid attributing success to themselves. They acknowledge the contributions of other team members to their success (Frank, 2023; Lin et al., 2025). Followers judge the leader's pride as authentic, and followers are compelled to confer legitimacy.

In contrast, a leader low in humility provides no such signalling. Their expression of pride is more likely to be attributed to self-serving motives (Ansong et al., 2024). When pride is attributed to self-serving motives, it turns to hubris, distancing followers from the leader and breeds resentment. This attribution of hubris undermines the leader's moral credibility and erodes their legitimacy. Any subsequent behaviours from the leaders will be perceived as arrogance. Therefore, humility moderates the pride to legitimacy relationship. It shapes the attributions followers make about the source and nature of the leader's pride.

Humble leaders provide psychological safety to their followers (Albdareen et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025). This is most evident in high-pressure environments such as the public sector (Karadas et al., 2025; Kumagaya et al., 2025). The moral pride of a leader is not seen as a threat to the harmony of the group. Instead,

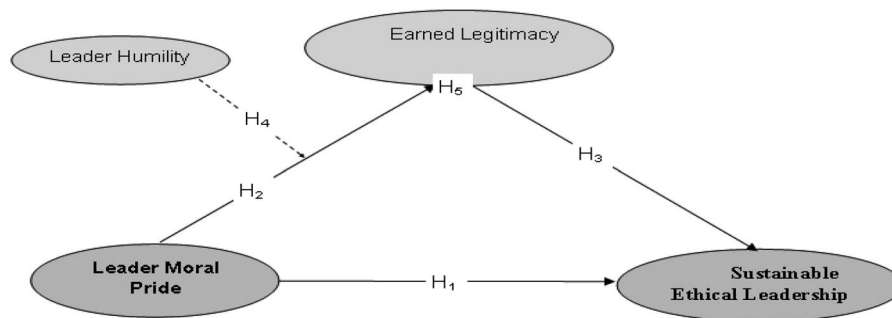


Figure 1. The moderated-mediation conceptual framework.

Source: Author's own work (2025).

moral pride is framed as a shared victory for the values of the group. Therefore, humility socialises moral pride, taming it to ensure that its expression is prosocial. When humility is positioned as a moderator in the relationship between pride and earned legitimacy, we believe that the pride-to-hubris paradox will be neutralised, and this offers a theoretical explanation of how ethical leadership can be sustained over time, even under adverse conditions. It is suggested that sustainable ethical leadership is not the product of moral pride alone, but a mixture of moral pride filtered through the lens of humility, as indicated in [Figure 1](#). In view of the current discourse emerging from the reviewed literature, it is hypothesised that:

H4: Leader humility moderates the relationship between leader moral pride and earned legitimacy.

H5: Leader earned legitimacy mediates the relationship between leader moral pride and sustainable ethical leadership through the moderated effect of leader humility.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach

A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design was employed for this study. This design was the most suitable for addressing the stated research hypotheses. It enables the examination of relationships between variables and the testing of theoretical models at a specific point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Saunders et al., 2024).

3.1.1. Target population

The target population of 1,500 from four state universities comprised academic staff (excluding senior management, which was delineated as those occupying an administrative position such as dean, deputy dean, and chairperson) and administrative staff from the rank of Deputy Registrar and above from four selected state universities in Zimbabwe. The exclusion aimed to obtain first-hand experiences from a bottom-up perspective on leader moral pride, legitimacy, and leader humility perceptions from the followers. Including leaders would have introduced self-report bias. The study was approved by the Chinhoyi University of Technology Research and Ethics Committee on 15 May 2025.

3.1.2. Sample size and sampling technique

The study adopted a combination of stratified simple random and criterion purposive sampling. Strata were created based on university and employee category: academic and administrative. Within each stratum, a random sample was taken from the list of employees obtained from each university's human resources department. The criterion purposive sampling was used to execute the inclusion and exclusion requirements, to include only respondents who met the category and ranks of the employees required for the study. Purposive sampling enables a researcher to collect data that align with the specific parameters and research objectives of a study, regardless of whether it is a qualitative or quantitative study (Memon et al., 2024). The Raosoft Sample Size Calculator was used to calculate the sample size after inputting the key parameters (population size, margin of error, confidence level, response distribution).

The Raosoft Sample Size Calculator yielded 306 as the minimum sample size at the 5% margin of error and the 95% confidence level (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>). To cater for potential non-response, 20% (61) of the sample size was added to make a total sample size of 367.

3.1.3. Data collection instrument

Data were collected using a self-developed Likert scale questionnaire, as indicated in Table 1. The questionnaire was developed with reference to well-established scales in the literature: Leader's moral pride (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Tracy & Robins, 2007); Leader humility (Owens & Hekman, 2016); Leader earned legitimacy (Tyler, 2006); Sustainable ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005). All four latent constructs were each measured by five items on a five-point agreement Likert scale calibrated as: 1. Strongly Disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly Agree. The questionnaires were hand-distributed and physically collected from May 2025 to July 2025. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The researchers obtained approval from Chinhoyi University of Technology's Research and Innovation Ethics Committee. Chinhoyi University of Technology Research and Innovation Ethics Committee does not offer an approval reference number besides signing and stamping the approval letter. The respondents were informed about informed consent through a written statement on the data collection instrument, stating that they had the absolute right to withdraw from the study at any time and at any stage during the study. After data cleaning, which involved removing incomplete responses and outliers, 342 responses were ready for use. This gave a response rate of 93.63%, meeting the minimum sample size requirement. With the high response received, the 25 questionnaires not used were considered a negligible number to influence a non-response bias, as the minimum sample size of 306 was fulfilled.

3.1.2. Content validity

Content validity of the measurement instrument was checked by two content experts in the area of leadership and organisational behaviour. The qualitative judgements provided insights into the measurement instrument items' ability to measure the intended underlying constructs (Spoto et al., 2025). The views assisted in refining the measurement items to represent the latent constructs of the study truly, and the validity was further validated by comparison of the measurement instrument to established measurement scales.

Table 1. Moral pride for sustainable ethical leadership measurement instrument.

CODE		1	2	3	4	5
LMP1	My leader's moral pride					
LMP2	My leader seems to feel genuine satisfaction from acting ethically.					
LMP3	My leader takes pride in making decisions based on their moral principles.					
LMP4	Being known as an ethical person appears important to my leader's self-image.					
LMP5	My leader conveys a sense of accomplishment when they do the right thing.					
LMP5	My leader's ethical actions seem to be a source of personal fulfilment for them.					
CODE	My Leader's Humility	1	2	3	4	5
LH1	My leader openly admits their limitations and mistakes.					
LH2	My leader actively seeks feedback, even if it is critical.					
LH3	My leader acknowledges when they don't know something.					
LH4	My leader frequently highlights the contributions of team members.					
LH5	My leader is open to learning from anyone.					
CODE	My Leader's Earned Legitimacy	1	2	3	4	5
EL1	My leader has earned the right to lead through their ethical character.					
EL2	I trust my leader's moral judgment.					
EL3	My leader's actions have built a reputation of integrity that I respect.					
EL4	I believe my leader is genuinely motivated by what is right, not just by rules or profit.					
EL5	My leader's past behaviour gives me confidence in their future ethical decisions.					
CODE	My Leader's Sustainable Ethical Leadership	1	2	3	4	5
SEL1	My leader demonstrates ethical conduct consistently, even in difficult situations.					
SEL2	My leader makes decisions that consider the long-term well-being of our team and stakeholders.					
SEL3	My leader's ethical behaviour is a stable and predictable part of their leadership.					
SEL4	My leader empowers others to act ethically and holds everyone to high standards.					
SEL5	My leader's approach to ethics seems built to last, not just a temporary response.					

Source: Author's own work.

3.2. Data analysis

After completing data entry into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software, version 21, a data cleaning process was undertaken. The process included checking for missing values, outliers, and errors with the help of frequencies and descriptive statistics in SPSS (Pallant, 2020). Normality was tested through box plots, histograms, and the explore function in SPSS, and the results indicated that the data were normally distributed. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, and frequencies, whilst inferential statistics included correlation, moderation, and regression analysis.

3.2.1. Common method bias and multicollinearity analysis

Harman's single-factor test was employed to assess for Common method bias (CMB) in SPSS software through principal axis factoring (Polas, 2025). The test results yielded 69.5% variance, a percentage above the accepted threshold of 50%. The results suggest that common method bias is an issue. Harman's single-factor test is known for its low statistical power and can produce false positive rates, and this is so when the constructs under investigation are highly correlated (Fuller et al., 2016; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The strong relationships between moral pride, legitimacy, and sustainable ethical leadership are substantive, and the high variance explained by a single factor may reflect a potential conceptual overlap. Having said that, we acknowledge that common method bias is a significant concern in this study. We also test collinearity, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) diagnostic method was employed (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2015; Gurung, 2024; Kyriazos & Poga, 2023).

The VIF for Leader Humility (5.343) exceeded the conservative threshold of 5, and its high bivariate correlation with Moral Pride ($r=0.846$) and Earned Legitimacy ($r=0.872$) suggests a conceptual overlap. When interpreted using the more liberal threshold of 10, multicollinearity is not an issue, but when the results are interpreted using the stricter threshold of 5, multicollinearity becomes a concern, as indicated by Leader Humility (5.343) and Legitimacy (4.618). Theoretically, the conceptual overlap is expected, as ethical leaders often embody overlapping virtues. Statistically, this raises the question of whether multicollinearity is inflating standard errors and destabilising the unique parameter estimates (Upendra et al., 2023).

To assess the strength of our findings in view of this concern, we conducted a supplementary Ridge Regression analysis. Ridge Regression is designed to handle multicollinearity by introducing penalty terms into the regression equations, to stabilise coefficient estimates and reduce variance (Hoerl & Kennard, 1970; Zhang & Politis, 2022). We regressed Sustainable Ethical Leadership onto Moral Pride, Earned Legitimacy, and Leader Humility, with the lambda parameter selected via 10-fold cross-validation. The results of the Ridge Regression confirmed the stability of our main findings, in which Earned Legitimacy remained the dominant predictor, Humility retained a significant and positive independent coefficient. The unique contribution of Moral Pride remained non-significant. The consistency between the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) based and Ridge Regression results indicates that while multicollinearity is present, it does not distort the substantive conclusions of our model.

4. Results

4.1. Sample characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the 342 respondents are presented in Table 2. The sample has more academic staff ($n=236$, 69.0%), with administrative staff comprising 106 (31.0%). The distribution reflects the actual set-up in universities, where academic staff outnumber administrative staff. The gender distribution also had more male respondents (191, 55.8%) than female respondents (151, 44.2%). Regarding the experience of the respondents, the largest proportion had 11–15 years of experience (103, 30.1%), followed by those with 5–10 years (82, 24.0%), and 16–20 years (72, 21.1%). Respondents within the fewer than five years of experience category accounted for 14.0% ($n=48$) of the sample, whilst the most experienced group (21 years and above) represented 10.8% ($n=37$) of the sample.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents ($N=342$).

Demographic variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Employee category		
Academic	236	69.0
Administrative	106	31.0
Gender		
Male	191	55.8
Female	151	44.2
Years of experience		
Less than 5 years	48	14.0
5–10 years	82	24.0
11–15 years	103	30.1
16–20 years	72	21.1
21 years and above	37	10.8
Total	342	100

Source: Authors' own.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of key variables ($N=342$).

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leader Moral Pride	4.00	0.96
LMP1	3.72	1.11
LMP2	3.93	0.955
LMP3	3.91	0.943
LMP4	3.94	0.900
LMP5	3.98	0.889
Leader's Humility	4.00	0.91
LH1	4.01	0.933
LH2	3.98	0.935
LH3	3.98	0.924
LH4	3.98	0.931
LH5	4.08	0.812
Leader Earned Legitimacy	4.25	0.92
EL1	4.02	0.866
EL2	3.94	0.951
EL3	4.05	0.855
EL4	3.99	0.949
EL5	3.96	0.980
Sustainable Ethical Leadership	3.99	0.95
SEL1	3.93	1.01
SEL2	4.01	0.932
SEL3	3.99	0.952
SEL4	4.01	0.927
SEL5	4.02	0.924

Source: Authors' own work.

4.2. Descriptive statistics of key variables

The mean scores for all the statements that aim to measure the perceptions of the respondents regarding the four latent constructs indicate that the overall mean scores for the four constructs were near or above the scale midpoint, as indicated in Table 3. Leader moral pride had a mean of 4.00 with moderate variability ($SD = 0.96$). At its item level, mean scores ranged from 3.72 to 3.98. Leader humility also has an average mean score of 4.00 with a dispersion ($SD = 0.91$). Its item mean scores were between 3.98 and 4.08. Leader earned legitimacy received the highest overall rating ($M=4.25$, $SD = 0.92$), with item mean scores ranging from 3.94 to 4.05, whilst Sustainable ethical leadership yielded $M=3.99$, $SD = 0.95$, with item-level mean scores between 3.93 and 4.02. All the latent constructs demonstrated acceptable variability, with standard deviations indicating sufficient spread within the sample.

4.3. Reliability

Cronbach's alpha statistic, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess the reliability of the measurement instrument, and the results are shown in Table 4. A Cronbach's alpha and a composite reliability of 0.70 or higher have become the convention to conclude reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kline, 2023). The results showed that the Leader moral pride scale with five items ($\alpha = 0.898$, $CR = 0.982$, $AVE = 0.901$) and the Leader's humility scale with five items ($\alpha = 0.941$, CR

Table 4. Factor loadings, reliability, and variance summary ($N=342$).

Construct	Item	Std. Load	SMC (R^2)	SE	C.R.	p	AVE	Cronbach's alpha (α)	CR
Moral Pride	LMP1	0.742	0.551	0.020	49.991	<0.001	0.901	0.898	0.982
	LMP2	0.828	0.686	0.020	49.991	<0.001			
	LMP3	0.833	0.693	0.023	45.559	<0.001			
	LMP4	0.799	0.639	0.028	38.784	<0.001			
	LMP5	0.811	0.658	0.040	25.476	<0.001			
Leader Humility	LH1	0.862	0.742	0.012	86.584	<0.001	0.965	0.941	0.994
	LH2	0.894	0.800	0.012	86.584	<0.001			
	LH3	0.894	0.799	0.014	73.071	<0.001			
	LH4	0.884	0.781	0.018	58.499	<0.001			
	LH5	0.837	0.700	0.018	58.325	<0.001			
Leader Legitimacy	EL1	0.883	0.780	0.009	107.413	<0.001	0.981	0.945	0.996
	EL2	0.901	0.811	0.009	107.413	<0.001			
	EL3	0.837	0.701	0.009	115.401	<0.001			
	EL4	0.881	0.776	0.012	79.098	<0.001			
	EL5	0.900	0.810	0.012	74.681	<0.001			
Ethical Leadership	SEL1	0.913	0.834	0.003	368.127	<0.001	0.991	0.947	0.999
	SEL2	0.861	0.741	0.003	368.127	<0.001			
	SEL3	0.846	0.716	0.009	108.222	<0.001			
	SEL4	0.899	0.808	0.007	154.888	<0.001			
	SEL5	.894	0.799	0.005	190.024	<0.001			

Source: Authors' own.

= 0.984, AVE = 0.965) demonstrated strong reliability. The same was true for the Leader earned legitimacy scale with five items ($\alpha = 0.945$, CR = 0.996, AVE = 0.981), and the Sustainable ethical leadership scale with five items ($\alpha = 0.947$, CR = 0.999, AVE = 0.991). At the same time, convergent validity was demonstrated. All the squared multiple correlations (SMC) and average variance extracted (AVE) are greater than 0.50, satisfying Fornell and Larcker (1981) thresholds: AVE > 0.50 for all constructs, > 0.70 for all constructs, and all factor loadings > 0.70 and significant. The results indicated that all items exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the items provided a consistent measure of the constructs. However, it is important to note that these high reliability values are unusually high in social science research. Such values may indicate potential item redundancy—items measuring the same aspect of a construct—or inflation due to common method bias. Whilst these coefficients satisfy statistical thresholds, they warrant cautious interpretation. This is particularly relevant for the sustainable ethical leadership scale, where our two-dimensional conceptualisation (consistency and resilience) was operationalised unidimensionally. The same-source, self-report nature of our data may have contributed to the very high reliability and validity coefficients. This limitation is discussed more fully in Section 5.5.

4.4. Validity

Convergent and discriminant validity are the two key validity measures in structural equation modelling (SEM). To assess convergent validity, we used the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) method. An average variance extracted greater than 0.50 has become the convention for concluding convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kline, 2023). All constructs showed AVE values above 0.50, supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity assessed the degree to which the measures that should not be correlated with each other were actually distinct. Discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than the variance between the construct and other constructs in the model. The square roots ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) of the AVE of each construct should be greater than its correlation with any other construct in the assessment. Discriminant validity was supported, as the square roots of AVE for all the constructs exceed the correlations between constructs, as indicated in Table 5.

4.5. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion

Discriminant validity was further assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). As shown in Table 6, all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, with most falling below the more stringent threshold of 0.85. The 95% bootstrap confidence intervals for all

Table 5. Validity measures summary for the key constructs ($N=342$).

Construct	LMP	LH	EL	SEL	CR	AVE	\sqrt{AVE}
Leader Moral Pride (LMP)	0.949	0.846	0.819	0.809	0.982	0.901	0.949
Leader Humility (LH)	0.846	0.982	0.872	0.879	0.994	0.965	0.982
Earned Legitimacy (EL)	0.819	0.872	0.990	0.917	0.996	0.981	0.990
Sustainable Ethical Leadership (SEL)	0.809	0.879	0.917	0.995	0.999	0.991	0.995

Source: Authors' own.

Notes: Diagonal in bold are the square root of the average variance extracted (\sqrt{AVE}) for each construct, and Off-diagonal values are the correlations between constructs.

Table 6. Summary Table of HTMT results.

Construct pair	HTMT	95% CI	Verdict
LMP ↔ LH	0.820	0.79, 0.86	Acceptable
LMP ↔ LEL	0.865	0.84, 0.90	Borderline
LH ↔ LEL	0.895	0.86, 0.92	Borderline
LMP ↔ SEL	0.770	0.73, 0.81	Acceptable
LH ↔ SEL	0.880	0.84, 0.93	Borderline
LEL ↔ SEL	0.830	0.80, 0.87	Acceptable

Source: Authors' own work.

Note: LMP=Leader Moral Pride; LH=Leader Humility; LEL=Leader Earned Legitimacy; SEL=Sustainable Ethical Leadership. HTMT values below 0.85 indicate good discriminant validity; values below 0.90 are acceptable for exploratory research (Henseler et al., 2015).

construct pairs did not include 1.00, confirming that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. These results support the discriminant validity of the four constructs.

4.6. Confirmatory factor analysis

To further assess whether the measured variables accurately reflected the underlying latent constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was deployed in AMOS. Initially the model showed a poor fit in the incremental indices (CMIN/df, GFI, TLI, CFI, RMR, RMSEA), which were below the accepted thresholds, but showed a good fit in the baseline indices (NFI, RFI, IFI). The model was refined based on the modification indices by adding 8 parameters that were correlated errors (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023). These modifications accounted for shared method variance and item similarity, resulting in an improvement in the model fit from the initial specification. All the added parameters were justifiable, such as correlated errors between items with similar wording and those that were measuring overlapping aspects of the constructs. After the refinement, the measurement model showed a good fit: although the value for CMIN/df did not reach the restrictive range of between 0 and 3, it fell to 3.5, a cut-off within the accepted liberal threshold of < 5.0 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2004). In addition, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were considered in determining the measurement model fit, and the values are as indicated in Table 7. It is important to note that adding correlated error terms, whilst justifiable on a theoretical basis, may indicate that the measurement model is overfitted to this specific sample. The final model should therefore be interpreted with caution and may require cross-validation in other samples. Detailed results of the final measurement model, including all standardised factor loadings and the specific correlated error terms, are provided in Appendix A.

4.6.1. Assessment of model overfitting

Given the addition of 8 correlated error terms to achieve an acceptable fit, we conducted a sensitivity analysis to rule out model overfitting specific to this sample. The dataset ($N=342$) was randomly split into a training sample ($n=242$) and a validation sample ($n=100$). The final measurement model specification was applied to the validation sample. The fit indices in the validation sample remained within acceptable thresholds (CFI = 0.981, RMSEA = 0.082, $\chi^2/df = 3.8$). The stability of these fit statistics in a hold-out sample mitigates concerns that the model adjustments are merely capitalising on chance characteristics of the full dataset.

Table 7. Measurement model fit indices ($N=342$).

Fit index	Value	Threshold for acceptable fit	Interpretation	Sources
χ^2/df	3.521	< 5.0	Acceptable	Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2004; Kline, 2023
CFI	0.985	> 0.90	Acceptable	
TLI	0.978	> 0.90	Acceptable	
NFI	0.930	> 0.90	Acceptable	
RMSEA	0.08	< 0.08	Acceptable	
SRMR	0.011	< 0.08	Acceptable	
RMR	0.024	< 0.05	Acceptable	
GFI	0.891	> 0.90 (marginal)	Adequate	

Source: Authors' own.

Table 8. Correlations among key variables ($N=342$).

Variable	LMP	LH	LEL	SEL
Leader Moral Pride (LMP)	1			
Leader Humility (LH)	0.846**	1		
Leader Earned Legitimacy (LEL)	0.819**	0.872**	1	
Sustainable Ethical Leadership (SEL)	0.809**	0.879**	0.917**	1

Source: Authors' own.

Notes: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.7. Correlation analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to test for correlation among the variables and the results are as shown in Table 8. Moral Pride showed strong correlated with Leader Humility ($r=0.846$, $p=0.001$); Earned Legitimacy ($r=0.819$, $p=0.01$); and Sustainable Ethical Leadership ($r=0.809$, $p=0.01$). The same was with Moral Pride, which was strongly correlated with Leader Humility ($r=0.846$, $p=0.01$); Earned Legitimacy ($r=0.819$, $p=0.01$), and Sustainable Ethical Leadership ($r=0.809$, $p=0.01$). Leader Humility also showed strong positive relationships with Leader Earned Legitimacy ($r=0.872$, $p=0.01$) and Sustainable Ethical Leadership ($r=0.879$, $p=0.01$). The strongest correlation was between Earned Legitimacy and Sustainable Ethical Leadership, with $r=0.917$, $p=0.01$.

4.8. Testing of hypotheses

The proposed hypotheses were tested using Hayes' PROCESS Macro for SPSS (Version 21). Rather than testing hypotheses through separate bivariate regressions, we adopted an integrated approach, testing the full moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 7) simultaneously. This approach enables interpreting the full model not isolated bivariate paths. The results are presented in three stages: (1) direct effects and mediation, (2) moderation analysis, and (3) moderated mediation analysis.

4.9. Direct effects and mediation (H1, H2, H3)

Although bivariate relationships were examined as preliminary checks, we emphasise that all hypotheses were tested within the integrated PROCESS Model 7 framework. As shown in Table 9, when examined in isolation, each bivariate relationship was positive and statistically significant ($p<0.001$). Consistent with best practices for moderated mediation analysis, sections 4.9–4.13 report the full integrated model results, which provide a more accurate test of the proposed theoretical framework. Table 9 presents the bivariate regression results for descriptive purposes only.

4.10. Moderation analysis (H4)

As a prerequisite for moderated mediation, we first examined whether Leader Humility moderates the relationship between Moral Pride and Earned Leader Legitimacy (H4) using Hayes (2022) Process Macro (Model 1) in SPSS with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The overall model was significant, explaining 78.4% of the variance in Earned Legitimacy ($R^2 = 0.784$, $F(3, 338) = 409.77$, $p<0.001$). Examining the main effects, both Moral Pride ($B=0.1692$, $SE = 0.0500$, $t=3.384$, $p<0.001$, 95% CI [0.0700, 0.2684]) and Leader Humility ($B=0.5348$, $SE = 0.1031$, $t=5.186$, $p<0.001$, 95% CI [0.3319, 0.7376]) demonstrated significant positive

Table 9. Bivariate regression results ($N=342$).

Hypothesis	Path	B	SE	β	t	R2	p
H1	Pride -> ethical leadership	0.861	0.034	0.809	25.42	0.655	< 0.001
H2	Moral Pride -> Leader Legitimacy	0.843	0.032	0.819	26.33	0.671	< 0.001
H3	Leader Legitimate -> Ethical leadership	0.948	0.022	0.917	42.38	0.841	< 0.001

Source: Author's own work.

Table 10. Moderation analysis summary ($N=342$).

Variable	β	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.6939	0.3775	1.838	0.067	-0.0486	1.4364
Moral Pride	0.1692	0.0500	3.384	< 0.001	0.0700	0.2684
Leader Humility	0.5348	0.1031	5.186	< 0.001	0.3319	0.7376
Pride \times Humility Interaction	0.0306	0.0260	1.177	0.240	-0.0206	0.0818
Model summary	R2	$\Delta R2$	F	df1	df2	p
Full Model	0.784	—	409.77	3	338	< 0.001
Interaction Term	—	0.0009	1.38	1	338	0.240

Source: Author's own work.

Note: LLCI=lower level confidence interval; ULCI=upper level confidence interval. Bootstrap samples = 5,000.

relationships with Earned Legitimacy. However, the interaction term between Moral Pride and Leader Humility was not statistically significant ($B=0.0306$, $SE = 0.0260$, $t(338) = 1.18$, $p=0.240$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.0009$). The 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the interaction term included zero ($LLCI=-0.0206$, $ULCI = 0.0818$). H4 was not supported. Leader Humility did not moderate the relationship between Moral Pride and Earned Leader Legitimacy. This non-significant moderation result ($p=0.240$) indicates that the effect of Moral Pride on Earned Legitimacy does not depend on the level of Leader Humility, suggesting an additive rather than a contingent relationship. The moderation analysis summary is presented in Table 10.

4.11. Moderated mediation analysis

Hayes (2022) PROCESS Macro Model 7 was employed to test a moderated mediation analysis. The moderated mediation analysis was to establish the indirect effect of Leader Moral Pride on Sustainable Ethical Leadership through Leader Earned Legitimacy, as a condition of Leader Humility. The indirect effect was examined at three levels of Leader Humility (1) low, (2) mean, and (3) high. As shown in Table 11, the conditional indirect effects were significant at all three levels of Leader Humility. The estimates ranged from 0.2129 to 0.2529, and all bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals excluded zero. This indicates a positive indirect effect regardless of Humility level. This result supports the mediation hypothesis, and it confirms that earned legitimacy serves as a significant mediator in transmitting the effect of moral pride to sustainable ethical leadership.

However, the index of moderated mediation was not statistically significant (index = 0.0244, Boot SE = 0.0248, 95% CI [-0.0254, 0.0723]). Because this confidence interval contains zero, the strength of the indirect effect did not vary across levels of Leader Humility. While the indirect effect of Moral Pride on Sustainable Ethical Leadership through Earned Legitimacy is positive and significant, it is not conditional on Leader Humility. H5 was not supported, and the data do not establish moderated mediation. This result indicates that the data do not support the originally proposed contingent model (Figure 1) and supports an additive dual-process model, which aligns with the empirical evidence of the data (Figure 2). The moderated mediation analysis summary is presented in Table 11.

4.12. Summary of hypothesis testing

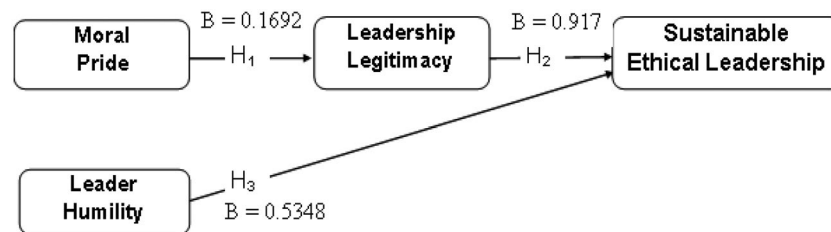
Table 12 presents a summary of all hypothesis testing results based on the integrated PROCESS Model 7 analysis. As shown in Table 12, H2 and H3 were supported, while H4 and H5 were not supported. H1 is supported only through the indirect mediation pathway, as the direct effect of Pride on SEL was not significant in the full model. These findings indicate that the originally proposed contingent moderated mediation model (Figure 1) is not empirically supported. Based on these results, we propose a Revised Dual-Process Empirical Model (Figure 2), which is presented and discussed in Section 5.

Table 11. Conditional indirect effects and index of moderated mediation ($N=342$).

Level of leader humility	Value	Indirect effect	Boot SE	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Low (-1 SD)	3.1894	0.2129	0.0563	0.0950	0.3180
Mean	4.0064	0.2329	0.0470	0.1363	0.3216
High (+1 SD)	4.8235	0.2529	0.0455	0.1636	0.3422
Moderated mediation index	Index	Boot SE	95% CI LL	95% CI UL	
Humility → Pride → Legitimacy → Sustained Ethical Leadership	0.0244	0.0248	-0.0254	0.0723	

Source: Author's own work.

Note: CI=confidence interval; LL=lower limit; UL=upper limit. The index of moderated mediation is the slope of the indirect effect across levels of the moderator. A confidence interval containing zero indicates non-significant moderated mediation.

**Figure 2.** Dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership.

Source: Author's own work.

4.13. Revised model specification

Figure 2 presents the new model after non-significant paths (moderation and moderated mediation) have been removed from the initial proposed model. As shown in the revised dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership (Figure 2), leadership legitimacy is modelled as a mediator between moral pride and sustainable ethical leadership, while leader humility is modelled as a direct predictor of sustainable ethical leadership. The mediation path from moral pride through legitimacy to sustainable ethical leadership indicates a positive path coefficient of moral pride to leader legitimacy ($B=0.1692$). Leaders who experience moral pride are likely to be perceived as legitimate. The leadership legitimacy to the sustainable ethical leadership path is strong ($B=0.917$). It can be deduced that perceived legitimacy is a strong and direct driver of sustainable ethical leadership. This path implies that moral pride influences sustainable ethical leadership through perceived legitimacy. On the other hand, the direct path from humility to sustainable ethical leadership, the path coefficient ($B=0.5348$) supports the hypothesis that humble leaders directly contribute to sustainable ethical leadership, independent of the moral pride to legitimacy path.

5. Discussion of key findings

This study proposed a contingent model integrating leader moral pride, humility, and earned legitimacy to predict sustainable ethical leadership. However, as detailed in Sections 4.9–4.13, the empirical results required a refinement from a contingent moderated mediation model (Figure 1) to a dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership (Figure 2). The non-significant interaction term and the non-significant index of moderated mediation indicate that humility does not moderate the pride-legitimacy relationship, nor does the indirect effect vary across the levels of humility.

When each of the first three hypothesised relationships is examined, all three hypotheses (H1–H3) were supported. In relation to moderated mediation analysis, we emphasise that these bivariate relationships must be interpreted within the full integrated model rather than as standalone effects. Perceived leader moral pride demonstrated a positive relationship with sustainable ethical leadership when considered alone. This confirms that leaders who are high on moral pride are strongly associated with being perceived as ethical leaders. The same was true with moral pride as a strong predictor of a leader's earned legitimacy. Where a leader displays moral conviction, they compel their followers to grant them legitimate authority. Most notably, leader earned legitimacy emerged as a strong predictor of sustainable ethical leadership. However, a more refined view of the results emerged when the unique

Table 12. Summary of hypothesis testing results ($N=342$).

Hypothesis	Statement	Result	Finding
H1	Pride → SEL (positive relationship)	Supported via indirect effect	Significant indirect effect (Pride → Legitimacy → SEL); direct effect non-significant
H2	Pride → Legitimacy (a-path)	Supported	$B=0.1692, p<0.001$
H3	Legitimacy → SEL (b-path)	Supported	$B=0.917, p<0.001$
H4	Humility moderates Pride → Legitimacy	Not supported	Interaction $B=0.0306, p=0.240$
H5	Moderated mediation (indirect effect conditional on Humility)	Not supported	Index of moderated mediation 95% CI $[-0.0254, 0.0723]$ – contains zero

Source: Author's own work.

Note: SEL=Sustainable Ethical Leadership.

contribution of each of the predictors was tested whilst statistically controlling for the others. In the full PROCESS Macro Model 7 analysis, moral pride maintained a significant positive effect on earned legitimacy, while earned legitimacy demonstrated a strong positive effect on sustainable ethical leadership.

The most exciting finding of the study is the dominant and direct influence of leader earned legitimacy on sustainable ethical leadership, even under conditions where moral pride and humility were controlled. This finding is central to our revised dual-process model presented in Figure 2, where legitimacy serves as the critical mediator transmitting the effect of moral pride to sustainable ethical leadership. This direct influence of a leader's earned legitimacy on sustainable ethical leadership confirms the main assumption of our study (Haugaard, 2025) that legitimacy is a critical social resource for sustained influence. When followers judge the actions of a leader as credible and morally principled, followers confer a form of social approval (Ahmad et al., 2020; Jakobsen et al., 2022). The conferred legitimacy secures the willingness of cooperation from followers (Haugaard, 2025). The relationship creates a positive sequential chain of actions, where ethical behaviour excites legitimacy and legitimacy guarantees future ethical sustainability. This finding shifts the focus from the internal state of the leader alone to the critical social approval of that state by followers as the key driver of sustained ethical conduct. In our dual-process model, this legitimacy pathway operates as one of two parallel mechanisms.

The results confirm that a leader's moral pride positively influences earned legitimacy. In the full model, controlling for humility and their interaction, moral pride demonstrated a significant unique effect on legitimacy. This agrees with the conceptualisation of moral pride as a socially embedded emotion whose arousal depends on the acknowledgement of one's actions by significant others (Solinger, Jansen & Cornelissen, 2020; Jeong et al., 2025). When a leader displays moral pride—the kind stemming from authentic commitment (Witkower et al., 2022), followers will be observing. The observation by followers serves as a credibility signal of moral integrity, and the followers are compelled to grant legitimacy to the leader. However, the study found a non-significant unique direct effect of moral pride on sustainable ethical leadership in the full model. As shown in Figure 2, the direct path from moral pride to Sustainable Ethical Leadership indicates full mediation through earned legitimacy. The result suggests that the function of moral pride is not directly to sustain ethical behaviour but to initiate the socio-affective process of granting legitimacy. Its strong bivariate relationship with sustainable ethical leadership is to a great extent explained by this indirect pathway through leader legitimacy, as confirmed by the significant conditional indirect effects. This supports our dynamic, process-oriented view in which moral pride is the internal affective reward that ignites the sequence, but it is the social resource of legitimacy that translates this emotion into sustained behavioural outcomes.

Contrary to our proposal that humility acts as a central moderator in preventing moral pride from becoming hubristic (Bahmannia et al., 2023; Jeong et al., 2025), the findings indicate that humility does not moderate the pride-legitimacy relationship. Instead, humility and moral pride operate as independent, additive predictors in our Revised Dual-Process Model. The significant, unique direct effect of humility on sustainable ethical leadership ($\beta=0.5348, p<0.001$) further demonstrates its independent value as the second pathway in our dual-process framework in Figure 2. This suggests that followers perceive and value humility as a standalone leader virtue that contributes directly to sustainable ethical conduct (Albdareen et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025), just as they interpret the moral pride of the leader. Instead of functioning as a moderator of pride, humility exerts its own direct influence on sustainable ethical leadership, operating through a separate, unmediated path. How, then, is the pride–arrogance

paradox resolved if humility does not contribute a direct moderating effect? Based on our findings, we propose an alternative explanation. It could be that the pride–arrogance paradox is resolved not by a contingent interaction but by the co-presence of both traits. A leader who is high in both authentic moral pride and humility is likely to be seen as principled yet approachable, confident yet teachable. Such a combination may strengthen the conferred legitimacy and, through the direct humility path, enhance sustainable ethical leadership through two distinct mechanisms.

Instead of supporting a moderated mediation, the evidence points towards a parallel dual-process model where (a) moral pride influences sustainable ethical leadership through building earned legitimacy via a mediation pathway, the legitimacy path, and (b) leader humility influences sustainable ethical leadership directly, operating as a separate, additive pathway, the humility path, with no significant indirect effect through legitimacy required. The moral conviction, the humility, and the legitimate authority of a leader are intertwined aspects of a credible and sustainable ethical leader. However, our findings demonstrate that these aspects operate through distinct mechanisms in which pride signals moral conviction which earns legitimacy, which then sustains ethical leadership. Humility directly enhances perceptions of sustainable ethical leadership.

Just as followers bring multiple characteristics such as moral identity and self-control to the leader–follower relationship, leaders may also display multiple virtues that followers evaluate independently (Al Halbusi et al., 2023). Sustainable ethical leadership is not a static attribute but a dynamic concept which can best be explained by the additive interplay of two distinct mechanisms (1) moral pride, an internal affective driver through earned legitimacy, a social resource, and (2) humility, which is a character virtue, operating through a direct path. This inference integrates the affective events theory (the pride-arousing event) with social learning theory (which confers legitimacy through reinforcement). At the same time, it also accommodates an independent direct pathway for humility (Ng & Feldman, 2015; Hannah et al., 2020).

5.1. Implications for theory

The findings of this study have important implications for theory, refining existing knowledge and offering new pathways for research on ethical leadership. This study addresses the call to move beyond the conceptualisation of ethical leadership as a stable attribute (Hannah et al., 2020). The study supports a sequential socio-affective process in which a specific emotional event, moral pride, activates a social evaluation: legitimacy conferral. Contrary to our original contingent model, the results support a dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership in which two additive pathways operate in parallel. We have conceptualised sustainable ethical leadership as framed by consistency and ethical resilience (Batool et al., 2022), which builds a dependent variable with the power to capture how ethical behaviour is maintained over time and under difficult conditions. The study demonstrates that leadership is sustained not by the mere possession of ethical principles but through an ongoing process by which those principles are validated and reinforced by followers.

The findings support the view that moral pride is a unique motivational mechanism which links the moral standards of a leader to their social environment (Pascual, Conejero & Etxebarria, 2020; Solinger, Jansen & Cornelissen, 2020). This positions emotions as central, active ingredients in the ethical leadership development process, shaping future behaviour through internal reinforcement and social signalling. Our results demonstrate that this path operates independently of leader humility, as the non-significant interaction and index of moderated mediation indicate that the indirect effect of pride on sustainable ethical leadership through legitimacy does not vary across levels of humility. The mediating role of earned legitimacy in our model extends the understanding of how ethical leadership influences organisational outcomes. Just as ethical leadership enhances supervisor technical and social effectiveness, which in turn cultivates employees' sense of purpose (Al Halbusi et al., 2025), moral pride appears to enhance leader legitimacy, which in turn sustains ethical leadership. By identifying earned legitimacy as the dominant mediator, the study provides empirical evidence for the theoretical claim that ethical leadership is a socially conferred status (Brown et al., 2005). The significant mediation path confirms that legitimacy fully transmits the effect of moral pride to sustainable ethical leadership. This shifts the theoretical emphasis from the behaviour of the leader to the follower's interpretation and granting of authority based on attributions of moral integrity. When followers become the key link in the granting of

legitimacy to their leaders, it demonstrates the influence of social learning (Bandura, 1977). The conferment becomes a strong form of social reinforcement that validates the legitimacy of a leader (London & Sherman, 2021).

The study suggests that the humility of a leader is an independent attribute, a virtue which contributes its own value in building sustainable leadership. Contrary to our initial assumption, the potential threat of moral pride turning into hubristic pride is managed through followers simultaneously judging their leader as possessing both authentic pride and humility, not because humility moderates the relationship between moral pride and earned legitimacy, but because both virtues contribute independently to sustainable ethical leadership (Lin et al., 2025). The reframing from a contingent to an additive model suggests that leader virtues may operate as complementary predictors.

5.2. Implications for institutional practice

Moral pride is a strong emotion for leader legitimacy, and as such, institutions should deliberately create conditions that recognise and celebrate ethical conduct. Organisations can invest in pride-oriented interventions even without focusing on the humility profile of their leaders, as the mediation path does not depend on the levels of humility. The findings align with evidence that the gains from ethics training decline when there is no ongoing reinforcement (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2025). In view of this, institutions should take the cultivation of moral pride not as a one-time initiative, but as an ongoing process, the same as in building psychological capital (Karadas et al., 2025). Just as investing in the psychological resources of employees is an ongoing process for sustaining work engagement, nurturing moral pride should also receive continuous reinforcement to sustain its positive effects on leadership (Trung et al., 2026).

Organisations can establish values-based awards, create formal platforms for sharing ethical success stories, and ensure that leaders openly acknowledge and appreciate ethical conduct demonstrated by others. These practices signal that moral conduct is valued and can trigger the affective experience of pride in leaders, thereby initiating the legitimacy-building process. The study indicated that earned legitimacy is the strongest direct driver of sustainable ethical leadership. As such, organisations must prioritise the legitimacy path by ensuring that leader actions consistently signal moral conviction and integrity. Organisations must focus on building and maintaining leader legitimacy through consistent, transparent, and principled actions. This involves ensuring that the decisions by leaders are aligned with organisational values. Leaders are exhorted to admit their mistakes and learn from them. Such a stance highlights that legitimacy cannot be granted by formal position alone; it must be earned through demonstrated integrity.

The direct additive path from leader humility to sustainable ethical leadership further suggests that organisations should invest in humility development as an independent strategic priority, not merely as a moderator of other leader attributes. By exerting its own unique effect on sustainable ethical leadership, institutions should actively cultivate this virtue regardless of the level of moral pride in their leaders. Institutions should actively create conditions where legitimate authority is built to enhance the leader–follower dynamics. Organisations must move beyond selecting leaders on the basis of confidence and charisma alone, and instead develop systems that identify and nurture humility within leaders (Albdareen et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025). A dual-process approach, one which simultaneously develops moral pride to activate legitimacy conferment and leader humility to directly enhance sustainable ethical leadership, should be adopted. Furthermore, consistent with previous research showing that ethical leadership effects are amplified when subordinates possess both moral identity and self-control (Al Halbusi et al., 2023), organisations should consider both leader and follower characteristics in developing sustainable ethical leadership. Selection and development systems should assess not only the capacity of leaders for moral pride and humility but also the readiness of followers to recognise and confer legitimacy based on ethical conduct.

5.3. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the psychological and social mechanisms that sustain ethical leadership over time and under challenging conditions. We proposed and tested an integrated framework that positioned leader moral pride as an affective stimulus, earned legitimacy as the critical social-exchange mechanism, and leader humility as the boundary condition for sustainable ethical leadership. The

empirical results did not support the proposed contingent moderated mediation model, necessitating a theoretical refinement. The interaction between moral pride and humility was non-significant, and the index of moderated mediation was not supported. We proposed a dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership. The main theoretical assumption that sustained ethical leadership is a dynamic, socially embedded process is strongly supported. Earned legitimacy emerged as the dominant direct driver of sustainable ethical leadership. In addition, leader humility demonstrated a significant independent direct effect, establishing two parallel additive pathways (1) an indirect path through which moral pride influences sustainable ethical leadership through earned legitimacy, and (2) a direct path from leader humility to sustainable ethical leadership.

These results have revealed the critical role of followers in the conferment of authority and legitimacy to their leaders. The significant mediation path confirms that followers actively evaluate the leader moral conviction, conferring legitimacy when they perceive authentic pride. This legitimacy, in turn sustains ethical leadership. The baseline of this appraisal is the moral credibility of leaders, which forms a critical social resource that makes ethical leadership sustainable (Abdulai et al., 2025; Haugaard, 2025). Moral pride has emerged as an affective antecedent that signals the authentic commitment of a leader and one which initiates the process of legitimacy building (Witkower et al., 2022; Pascual, Conejero, & Etxebarria, 2020). Contrary to our initial hypothesis that humility would moderate the pride-legitimacy relationship, leader humility has been shown to function as an independent, additive virtue. It is not as a moderator which regulates pride. Its significant direct effect on sustainable ethical leadership demonstrates that it operates through a separate mechanism away from the legitimacy path and feeds directly into sustainable ethical leadership (Lin et al., 2025).

The revised model contributes to a growing body of evidence that ethical leadership operates through multiple, interconnected mechanisms (Al Halbusi et al., 2025), through interaction with follower moral identity and self-control to promote ethical behaviour (Al Halbusi et al., 2023), or through the socio-affective processes of pride and legitimacy. Ethical leadership sustainability requires attention to both leader characteristics and the social contexts in which leadership is performed. The findings from ethics training research further demonstrate that sustainability requires deliberate, ongoing reinforcement rather than one-time interventions (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2025). Together, these components form an influential socio-affective process for sustaining ethical leadership. Through the dual-process model, we demonstrate that ethical leadership is sustained through two complementary mechanisms, the legitimacy-conferring process triggered by leader moral pride and the direct relational impact of leader humility. Ethical leadership is sustained through an ongoing reciprocal interaction process between the character of the leader and the appraisal of their followers. The findings have significant implications for institutions that endeavour to nurture sustainable ethical leaders. Institutions are required to cultivate moral conviction and develop humble character. They are also required to recognise that these virtues operate through distinct pathways requiring differentiated developmental strategies.

5.4. Future research directions

The findings of the study have supported a process model, which points to causal relationships. The dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership suggests that moral pride triggers a legitimacy-conferment process which leads to sustainable ethical leadership, while humility directly enhances sustainable ethical leadership through a separate, unmediated path. Such a relationship cannot be fully established through cross-sectional data. Future research should employ longitudinal studies to trace the mechanism through which an ethical leadership act to moral pride is experienced, and to observe how follower-conferred legitimacy arouses ethical consistency and resilience over time (Hannah et al., 2020). Longitudinal designs could also test the temporal stability of the two additive pathways and examine whether the relative strength of the legitimacy path versus the direct humility path changes over time or under different organisational conditions.

Having established that moral pride and humility operate through separate paths, future research should investigate the distinct psychological mechanisms underlying each path. There is a need for studies that unpack how followers interpret leader expressions of moral pride and humility in the legitimacy conferring process. How do followers distinguish between genuine humility and pseudo-humility? Future

research might also examine whether the two pathways interact with different follower characteristics, for instance, does the legitimacy pathway depend more on follower moral identity, while the direct humility pathway depends more on follower need for autonomy or psychological safety? Our understanding of these follower-oriented cognitive and affective processes (Solinger, Jansen, & Cornelissen, 2020; Abdulai et al., 2025) is crucial to fully explaining the legitimacy-granting mechanism.

Comparative studies across contexts and conditions are needed, given that data for this study were collected within the context of Zimbabwean state universities. The strength and operation of the pride–legitimacy–humility relationship may vary across national cultures, sectors, and organisational types. Future research should test whether the dual-process additive model replicates across different cultural contexts, or whether the two pathways are differentially emphasised in collectivist versus individualist cultures. For instance, cultures with different norms on emotional expression, such as those with low versus high individualism, might influence how moral pride is displayed and interpreted (Mercadante et al., 2021). Likewise, high-pressure, short-term profit-driven organisations might challenge ethical resilience in a different way than academic settings (Batoool et al., 2022). Cross-sectoral comparisons, such as private versus public would help establish the boundary conditions of the dual-process model. There is a need for research that might also explore whether the dual-process model holds when moral pride is measured as a self-reported internal state from the perspective of a leader rather than as a follower-perceived attribute.

5.5. Limitations of the study

The most significant limitation of the study is the use of a cross-sectional, single-source survey design. Although the hypothesised model implies directional and causal relationships, the data only capture perceptions at one moment in time. This is particularly relevant for the dual-process model of sustainable ethical leadership. The causal sequencing implied by the two additive paths cannot be established with cross-sectional data. Whilst we conducted Harman's single-factor test, its utility is debated, particularly when constructs are theoretically related (Fuller et al., 2016; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The high correlations and AVEs, whilst meeting statistical thresholds, may also point towards conceptual overlap between the constructs as perceived by followers. We employed the Unmeasured Latent Method Factor (ULMC) technique within the Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The model including a common latent factor demonstrated that while method variance is present, the average variance extracted by the substantive constructs ($AVE = 0.89$) was substantially larger than the variance attributed to the method factor. Again, the significance of the structural paths remained unchanged in the presence of the ULMC. This indicates that although CMB inflates the correlations, it does not account for the substantive relationships observed in the model. More so, while HTMT analysis confirmed discriminant validity for all construct pairs, we acknowledge that the borderline values for humility to legitimacy (0.895) and humility to sustainable ethical leadership (0.880) suggest some conceptual overlap between leader humility and the legitimacy and ethical leadership constructs. This overlap is expected, as humble leaders are likely to be perceived as legitimate and ethical. However, the HTMT results remain below the 0.90 threshold, supporting the distinctiveness of these constructs.

In view of the finding that pride and humility operate through separate paths, future research should employ discriminant validity tests to ensure that followers indeed distinguish between these constructs as theoretically distinct predictors. For instance, a leader who is seen as high in moral pride is likely to be seen as having earned legitimacy. However, this raises the possibility that the measures are not discriminating between the distinct theoretical constructs. This concern is partially mitigated by our dual-process finding that pride and humility have different patterns of relationships. Pride operates indirectly through legitimacy, while humility operates directly on sustainable ethical leadership. This suggests that followers do distinguish between these leader attributes. The high intercorrelation among the three key predictor variables, with reference to the shared variance between leader humility, moral pride, and earned legitimacy, suggests construct overlap. The VIF for leader humility, while it satisfies the liberal threshold of 10.0, it exceeds the conservative threshold of 5.0. While this overlap is theoretically expected, it limits the ability to clearly isolate their independent statistical effects. Although the results of our supplementary Ridge Regression analysis (Hoerl & Kennard, 1970; Zhang & Politis, 2022) confirmed the

stability of the reported paths, caution is warranted in interpreting the precise magnitude of these unique effects. Future research should seek to empirically extricate these constructs. This may be achieved perhaps through experimental manipulations or by developing multi-faceted measurement scales that can capture both the shared main domain of ethical and the unique variance of each construct.

Longitudinal and experimental designs would have been preferable to establish the proposed causal sequencing. Such designs could test whether the legitimacy mediation path and the direct humility path exhibit different temporal dynamics or are differentially affected by common method variance. Although we advanced the conceptualisation of sustainable ethical leadership by integrating consistency and resilience (Batool et al., 2022), their operationalisation through a survey instrument simplifies these complex constructs (Hannah et al., 2020). Moreover, our unidimensional operationalisation does not capture the two-dimensional structure we theorised. Future research should develop and validate multidimensional measures of sustainable ethical leadership that capture both consistency and resilience as distinct but related components.

The instrument collected data from academic and administrative staff in state universities in Zimbabwe. The nature of university work may shape how followers perceive and report on leadership constructs such as humility, pride, and legitimacy, which may not be experienced in the same way in different socio-cultural contexts with different national power dynamics (Mercadante et al., 2021). As such, the generalisability of the dual-process model to private sector organisations, non-governmental organisations, or different national cultures remains to be established. This limits the generalisability of the findings to other sectors and countries. Furthermore, the non-significant moderation and moderated mediation results may be specific to the Zimbabwean university context, where cultural norms regarding hierarchy and emotional expression could suppress interaction effects that might emerge in other settings. The study relied exclusively on the perceptions of the followers. It did not capture the experiences of moral pride and self-assessment of humility from the perspective of the leaders. This creates a gap between the internal affective state we theorise, the feeling of pride by the leader and how we measure it using the perceptions of the followers. Future research should incorporate leader self-reports of authentic pride to determine whether follower-perceived pride aligns with leader-experienced pride, and whether the dual-process model holds when both perspectives are considered simultaneously.

5.6. Recommendations

Informed by the revised dual-process model results, we offer specific recommendations for practitioners and organisations that address both the legitimacy path and the humility path as distinct but complementary mechanisms. Practitioners in organisations should go beyond assessing the competencies of their leaders in isolation. They are advised to develop 360-degree feedback mechanisms that measure concurrently the interdependent triad identified in this study, moral pride, earned legitimacy, and humility at the same time, recognising that each contributes through its own path. Leadership training programmes should not only focus on ethical decision-making but also help leaders recognise and appropriately express their feelings of moral pride to activate the legitimacy conferment process identified in our dual-process model. There is a need for coaching leaders on how their actions build or erode their moral credibility in the eyes of their followers in the legitimacy-building process (Ahmad et al., 2020). Leaders should be trained to understand that their authentic expressions of moral pride serve as signals of moral conviction that trigger follower legitimacy conferment, which in turn sustains ethical leadership.

In view of the direct additive path from humility to sustainable ethical leadership, organisations should treat humility development as an independent strategic priority, not merely as a moderator of other leader attributes. Organisations are encouraged to use case studies and role-plays to practise behaviours that equip leaders with skills in admitting mistakes, demonstrating collective success, and soliciting diverse perspectives from their followers (Lin et al., 2025). These humility enhancing interventions have direct value for sustainable ethical leadership. The dual-process model demonstrates that humility operates independently of pride and legitimacy. Practitioners and organisations are encouraged to institutionalise mechanisms that provide social acknowledgement for moral pride as a means of

strengthening the legitimacy path. This could be done through establishing values-based awards and having formalised forums and platforms where ethical leadership examples are shared and celebrated (Solinger, Jansen & Cornelissen, 2020). Such recognition practices serve to reinforce the pride, legitimacy, and sustainable ethical leadership sequence by providing followers with observable evidence of leader moral conviction.

Senior leaders within organisations must visibly be seen demonstrating both moral pride and humility as complementary virtues, as our dual-process model indicates that both distinctively contribute to sustainable ethical leadership. This could involve senior management publicly taking principled decisions whilst also openly acknowledging their personal limitations and mistakes and crediting team efforts. This top-down role modelling is the most powerful behaviour modification mechanism in relation to social learning theory (Albdareen et al., 2025; Bandura, 1977).

As legitimacy serves as the critical mediator that transmits the effect of moral pride to sustainable ethical leadership, nurturing the follower voice and participation may directly strengthen the legitimacy path. Employees who raise ethical concerns should be protected, and there should be a transparent process for addressing such concerns. This empowers followers to be active guarantors of legitimate authority to leaders within the organisation (Haugaard, 2025). In view of the humility path operating directly and independently, organisations should simultaneously create psychological safety mechanisms that encourage leaders to admit mistakes and seek feedback. Such behaviours enhance perceived humility, which in turn contributes to sustainable ethical leadership. Organisations are encouraged to explicitly integrate virtues such as moral pride and humility into traditional performance metrics when selecting leaders for key positions. They should recognise that each virtue contributes its own distinct mechanism to sustainable ethical leadership.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Shorai Chitimbe**: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft; **Lovemore Chikazhe**: Data curation, Investigation, Validation, Writing – review & editing; **Rahabhi Mashapure**: Project administration, Resources, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

No funding was received for this research.

About the authors

Shorai Chitimbe, PhD student in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology. His research interests include ethical leadership and ethics, corruption, corporate governance, performance management, and organisational behaviour.

Dr Lovemore Chikazhe, Dean School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe. His research interest are Services Marketing, Strategic Marketing Management, Business Strategy, Management and Organisational Behaviour.

Dr. Rahabhi Mashapure is a lecturer in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at the Chinhoyi University of Technology, specializing in entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and digital transformation in Africa.

ORCID

Shorai Chitimbe  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2276-1201>

Lovemore Chikazhe  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7030-3507>

Rahabhi Mashapure  <http://orcid.org/0009-0002-6526-9169>

Data availability statement

The authors agree to share the data upon reasonable request.

References

- Abdulai, A., Iddrisu, O., Osman, A., & Iddrisu, A. (2025). Leadership integrity: A strategic pillar for ethical decision making and organizational excellence. *Advances in Research*, 26(1), 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.9734/air/2025/v26i11233>
- Ahmad, I., Gao, Y., & Hali, S. M. (2017). A review of ethical leadership and other ethics- related leadership theories. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 13(29), 10. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n29p10>
- Ahmad, M. G., Klotz, A. C., & Bolino, M. C. (2020). Can good followers create unethical leaders? How follower citizenship leads to leader moral licensing and unethical behavior. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(9), 1374–1390. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000839>
- Al Halbusi, H., Ruiz-Palomino, P., & Williams, K. A. (2023). Ethical leadership, subordinates' moral identity and self-control: Two- and three-way interaction effect on subordinates' ethical behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 165, 114044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114044>
- Al Halbusi, H., Ruiz-Palomino, P., Linuesa-Langreo, J., & Scalzo, G. (2025). Ethical leadership as a driver of supervisor technical and social effectiveness: A triple helix for cultivating employees' sense of purpose. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 34(4), 2013–2033. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12750>
- Albdareen, R., Aljawarneh, N. M., Al-Jedaiah, M. N., Alomari, K. A. K., & Alrousan, A. (2025). Organizational factors affecting employee silence behavior: Does psychological empowerment matter. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1), 2512819. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2512819>
- Alkhadra, W. A., Khawaldeh, S., & Aldehayyat, J. (2023). Relationship of ethical leadership, organizational culture, corporate social responsibility and organizational performance: A test of two mediation models. *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, 39(4), 737–760. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-05-2022-0092>
- Amory, J., Wille, B., Wiernik, B. M., & Dupré, S. (2024). Ethical leadership on the rise? A cross- temporal and cross-cultural meta-analysis of its means, variability, and relationships with follower outcomes across 15 years. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 194(2), 455–483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3740-y>
- Ansong, A., Owusu, S., Ansong, L., & Andoh, R. (2024). Leader humility and organisational citizenship behaviour: The mediating roles of job satisfaction and employee engagement. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2358166>
- Aquino, K., & Reed, A. II (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1423–1440. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.6.1423>
- Askew, N. P. (2023). Leading with principle: The essential role of ethical leadership in adaptive environments. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 20(5), 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jlae.v20i5.6605>
- Bahmannia, S., B, D., Van Knippenberg, D., & Lowe, K. (2023). Even nectar is poisonous in excess: The impact of leader humility on pride, entitlement, and organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 30(4), 381–396. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518231204675>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Batool, F., Mohammad, J., & Awang, S. R. (2022). The effect of servant leadership on organisational sustainability: The parallel mediation role of creativity and psychological resilience. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 43(1), 71–95. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-06-2021-0264>
- Bernhard, F. (2025). *Self-conscious and moral emotions in collectives*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-48206-0>
- Brosch, T., & Steg, L. (2021). Leveraging emotion for sustainable action. *One Earth*, 4(12), 1693–1703. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2021.11.006>
- Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 97(2), 117–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.03.002>
- Brunzel, J., & Ebsen, D. (2023). The role of humility in Chief Executive Officers: A review. *Review of Managerial Science*, 17(4), 1487–1532. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-022-00590-0>
- Chatterjee, S., & Hadi, A. S. (2015). *Regression analysis by example*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Chitimbe, S., & Chikazhe, L. (2025). Balancing the image and income: Organizational pride, corporate wear and employee remuneration conditions in institutions of higher learning. *Prosperitas*, 12(3), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.31570/prosp_2025_0158
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dickens, L. R., & Robins, R. W. (2022). Pride: A meta-analytic project. *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)*, 22(5), 1071–1087. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000905>
- Din, Q., Tahir, A., Yang, X., Alqahtani, S., & Gul, N. (2025). Ethical climate in higher education: The interplay of leadership, moral efficacy, and team cohesion in diverse cultural contexts. *Acta Psychologica*, 255, 104986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.104986>

- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. (1981). Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(3), 382–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800313>
- Frank, F. (2023). *The power of humility in leadership: Influencing as a role model*. Productivity Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003358015>
- Fuller, C. M., Simmering, M. J., Atinc, G., Atinc, Y., & Babin, B. J. (2016). Common methods variance detection in business research. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3192–3198. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.12.008>
- Goswami, M., Agrawal, R. K., & Goswami, A. K. (2021). Ethical leadership in organizations: Evidence from the field. *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, 37(1), 122–144. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-04-2020-0048>
- Gurung, D. (2024). Regression model in social science research: The issue of multicollinearity, detection method, and solution in SPSS. *SXC Journal*, 1(1), 22–29. <https://doi.org/10.3126/sxcj.v1i1.70871>
- Haack, P., Schilke, O., & Zucker, L. (2021). Legitimacy revisited: Disentangling propriety, validity, and consensus. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(3), 749–781. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12615>
- Hannah, S. T., Sumanth, J. J., Lester, P., & Cavarretta, F. (2020). Debunking the false dichotomy of leadership idealism and pragmatism: Critical evaluation and support for a more balanced leadership approach. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 34(4), 543–564. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1931>
- Haugaard, M. (2025). Coercion and legitimacy as sources of power and crisis in autocratic, authoritarian and liberal-democratic leadership: A four-dimensional power analysis. *Journal of Political Power*, 18(1), 125–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2024.2448693>
- Hayes, A. F. (2022). PROCESS (Version 4.2) [Computer software]. Available from <http://www.processmacro.org>
- Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8>
- Hoerl, A. E., & Kennard, R. W. (1970). Ridge regression: Biased estimation for nonorthogonal problems. *Technometrics*, 12(1), 55–67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1267351>
- Hossain, K. (2023). Leadership development and challenges in twenty-first century. *J. Lib. Arts Humanit*, 4(9), 1–42. <https://doi.org/10.48150/jlah.v4no9.2023.a1>
- Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>
- Huynh, A. C., & Romero Gonzalez, R. A. (2024). The fine line between intellectual humility and arrogance: Perceiving humility among the intellectually humble and narcissistic. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 19(4), 599–610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2023.2230455>
- Iwanowska, B., & Majczyk, J. (2024). Conceptions of power legitimacy: Towards understanding of fundamentals. *Studia Polityczne*, 52(3), 155–175. <https://doi.org/10.35757/STP.2024.52.3.07>
- Jakobsen, M. L. F., Andersen, L. B., & van Luttervelt, M. P. (2022). Theorizing leadership credibility: The concept and causes of the perceived credibility of leadership initiatives. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 5(3), 243–254. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvac009>
- Jeong, S., Sun, C., & Yam, K. (2025). The affective processes of ethical leadership: The role of moral emotions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 196(1), 149–167. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05718-8>
- Jiao, J., Cole, C., & Gaeth, G. (2022). The effects of authentic and hubristic pride on indulgence. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(12), 3249–3271. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2020-0388>
- Karadas, G., Hassanie, S., Altun, Ö., Ozturk, A., Şesen, H., & Vatankhah, S. (2025). Meaningful work, psychological well-being, thriving at work and patient aggression: Testing a moderated-mediation model. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1), 2571432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2571432>
- Kehr, H. M., Voigt, J., & Rawolle, M. (2022). Implicit motives as the missing link between visionary leadership, approach and avoidance motivation, and vision pursuit. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 12(2), 135–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20413866211061364>
- Kelemen, T. K., Matthews, S. H., Matthews, M. J., & Henry, S. E. (2023). Humble leadership: A review and synthesis of leader expressed humility. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 44(2), 202–224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2608>
- Kline, R. B. (2023). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (5th ed.). Guilford Press.
- Kumagaya, S.-I., Matsuo, A., Yui, N., Ayaya, S., Kawahara, T., Kashiwabara, K., Koto, G., & Kamioka, H. (2025). Fostering employee engagement and mental health: Impact of psychological safety, humble leadership, and knowledge sharing in the Japanese public sector. *International Review of Public Administration*, 30(4), 326–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12294659.2025.2463135>
- Kyriazos, T., & Poga, M. (2023). Dealing with multicollinearity in factor analysis: The problem, detections, and solutions. *Open Journal of Statistics*, 13(03), 404–424. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojs.2023.133020>
- Lin, T. T., Huang, C. Y., & Chien, C. J. (2025). The relationship between humble leadership and team adaptation: Two paths model perspective. *The Learning Organization*, 32(5), 814–832. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-07-2024-0201>

- Liu, S., Mao, J., Li, N., & Yue, Z. (2025). Not the time to be humble! when and why leader humility enhances and deteriorates evaluations on leader effectiveness and satisfaction with leader. *Journal of Management Studies*, 62(7), 2707–2733. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13137>
- London, M., & Sherman, G. D. (2021). Becoming a leader: Emergence of leadership style and identity. *Human Resource Development Review*, 20(3), 322–344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843211009632>
- Maldonado, T., Vera, D., & Spangler, W. D. (2022). Unpacking humility: Leader humility, leader personality, and why they matter. *Business Horizons*, 65(2), 125–137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.032>
- Malik, M., Mahmood, F., Sarwar, N., Obaid, A., Memon, M. A., & Khaskheli, A. (2022). Ethical leadership: Exploring bottom-line mentality and trust perceptions of employees on middle-level managers. *Current Psychology (New Brunswick, N.J.)*, 42(20), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02925-2>
- Marques, A. G., Pinto, I. R., Leite, A. C., de Moura, G. R., van Prooijen, J. W., & Marques, J. M. (2021). “A right to lead”: The role of leader legitimacy on group reactions to transgressive leadership. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 51(4), 350–362. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12739>
- Marsh, H. W., Hau, K.-T., & Wen, Z. (2004). In search of golden rules: Comment on hypothesis-testing approaches to setting cutoff values for fit indexes and dangers in overgeneralizing Hu and Bentler’s (1999) findings. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 11(3), 320–341. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328007sem1103_2
- Memon, M., Thurasamy, R., Ting, H., & Cheah, J. (2024). PURPOSIVE SAMPLING: A REVIEW AND GUIDELINES FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 9(1), 1–23. [https://doi.org/10.47263/jasem.9\(1\)01](https://doi.org/10.47263/jasem.9(1)01)
- Mercadante, E., Witkower, Z., & Tracy, J. L. (2021). The psychological structure, social consequences, function, and expression of pride experiences. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 39, 130–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.03.010>
- Mohan, G., Seijts, G., & Miller, R. (2022). Does leader character have a gender? *Journal of Business Ethics: JBE*, 188(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05313-9>
- Nan, S., & Chaiprasit, K. (2023). Resilient leadership, innovation, executive incentives, and sustainable business performance: An empirical study. *Journal of Logistics, Informatics and Service Science*, 10(4), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.33168/JLISS.2023.0401>
- Ning, X., Mao, J. Y., Huang, R., Guo, L., & Liu, W. (2025). Loving and hating hubrists: Demonstrating innovativeness while belittling others. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.70008>
- O’Keefe, D. F., Peach, J. M., & Messervey, D. L. (2019). The combined effect of ethical leadership, moral identity, and organizational identification on workplace behavior. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 13(1), 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21638>
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS*. Routledge.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>
- Polas, M. (2025). Common method bias in social and behavioral research: strategic solutions for quantitative research in the doctoral research. *Journal of Comprehensive Business Administration Research*, 00(00), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.47852/bonviewJCBAR52024285>
- Ruiz-Palomino, P., Toro-Arias, J., Rodríguez-Córdoba, M. D P., & Linuesa-Langreo, J. (2025). Enhancing the ethical culture of organizations: A longitudinal study using a comprehensive ethics training. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.70000>
- Sánchez-Del-Río-Vázquez, M., Rodríguez-Rad, C., Orta-Pérez, M., & Revilla-Camacho, M. (2024). Influence of perceived legitimacy and perceived value of professional association members on attitudinal loyalty. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15010004>
- Santalla de Banderali, Z., Malavé, J., Alvarado, J. M., & Dakduk, S. (2025). Unethical pro-organizational behavior in Hispanic American contexts: The role of organizational and interpersonal factors. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1), 2500679. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2500679>
- Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2024). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Schilling, J., Schyns, B., & May, D. (2023). When your leader just does not make any sense: Conceptualizing inconsistent leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 185(1), 209–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05119-9>
- Schilpzand, P., Hamrick, A., Gooty, J., & Huang, L. (2025). Pride in the Workplace: An Integrative Review, Synthesis, and Future Research Agenda. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2869>
- Schoon, E. W. (2022). Operationalizing legitimacy. *American Sociological Review*, 87(3), 478–503. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224221081379>
- Sewell, G. (2024). Can a leader be authentic and cruel? What happens when a vice becomes a virtue. *Leadership*, 20(6), 382–401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427150241283135>
- Sharma, A., Agrawal, R., & Khandelwal, U. (2019). Developing ethical leadership for business organizations: A conceptual model of its antecedents and consequences. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 40(6), 712–734. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-10-2018-0367>

- Spoto, A., Nucci, M., Prunetti, E., & Vicovaro, M. (2025). Improving content validity evaluation of assessment instruments through formal content validity analysis. *Psychological Methods, 30*(2), 203–222. <https://doi.org/10.1037/met0000545>
- Srimongkolkul, P., Boriraj, J., & Wongsansukcharoen, J. (2025). Effects of authentic leadership, employee resilience, job satisfaction, and innovative work behavior on employee work performance in transport and logistics of Thailand. *Cogent Business & Management, 12*(1), 2511282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2511282>
- Tapia-Espinoza, N. J. (2025). Organizational culture and legitimacy: Mediation of the process of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation. *Cogent Business & Management, 12*(1), 2583742. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2583742>
- Tracy, J., Mercadante, E., & Hohm, I. (2023). Pride: The Emotional Foundation of Social Rank Attainment. *Annual Review of Psychology, 74*(1), 519–545. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-032720-040321>
- Trung, C. T. T., Teh, C. J., & Tee, P. K. (2026). The impact of psychological capital on employee work engagement in Vietnam's securities firms: The mediating role of psychological well-being and the moderating role of perceived organizational support. *Cogent Business & Management, 13*(1), 2654115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2026.2654115>
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology, 57*(1), 375–400. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190038>
- Ughulu, J. (2024). Ethical leadership in modern organizations: Navigating complexity and promoting integrity. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research, 08*(05), 52–62. <https://doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2024.8401>
- Upendra, S., Abbaiah, R., & Balasiddamuni, P. (2023). Multicollinearity in Multiple Linear Regression: Detection, Consequences, and Remedies. *International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology, 11*(9), 1047–1061. <https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2023.55786>
- Van Kleef, G. A., & Côté, S. (2022). The social effects of emotions. *Annual Review of Psychology, 73*(1), 629–658. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-020821-010855>
- Waldner, S. (2023). Resilient leadership: How the virtues of hope and patience can become essential elements for resilience in uncertain times. *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology, 10*, 299–314. <https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v10.78>
- Weiss, H. M., & Cropanzano, R. (1996). Affective events theory. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 18*(1), 1–74.
- Witkower, Z., Mercadante, E., & Tracy, J. L. (2022). The chicken and egg of pride and social rank. *Social, Psychological and Personality Science, 13*(2), 382–389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211023619>
- Xu, Z., & Ju, D. (2024). Ethical leadership behaviors are their own reward for leaders: A moderated mediation model. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 39*(4), 483–498. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-02-2023-0120>
- Zhang, R., Voronov, M., Toubiana, M., Vince, R., & Hudson, B. A. (2024). Beyond the feeling individual: Insights from sociology on emotions and embeddedness. *Journal of Management Studies, 61*(5), 2212–2250. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12976>
- Zhang, Y., & Politis, D. N. (2022). RIDGE REGRESSION REVISITED. *The Annals of Statistics, 50*(3), 1401–1422. <https://doi.org/10.1214/21-AOS2156>
- Zhao, H., & Liu, W. (2022). Employee perceptions of corporate hypocrisy and knowledge hiding: Roles of moral identity and organization-based self-esteem. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 26*(8), 1945–1967. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-03-2021-0216>
- Zhao, S., Renxi, W., Giglio, C., & Appolloni, A. (2025). Impact of Leadership Styles and Organisational Citizenship Behaviours on Organisational Green Innovation Performance: The Moderating Role of Organisational Legitimacy. *Business Strategy and the Environment, 34*(3), 3209–3225. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.4148>
- Zou, L., Wang, Y., & Liu, C. (2025). Emotional and subsequent behavioral responses after unethical pro-organizational behavior: A meta-analysis based systematic review. *Behavioral Sciences (Basel, Switzerland), 15*(9), 1266. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15091266>