

Reinventing Leadership: Integrating Confucian Values into Modern Management

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Abstract. *This systematic literature review examines how Confucian core values and principles can be integrated into modern management and leadership practices. The core Confucian virtues, ren (humanity/loving-kindness), yi (righteousness/justice), li (propriety/courtesy), zhi (wisdom), xin (trustworthiness), and xiao (filial piety) as well as principles such as hierarchical relationships, harmony, and leadership by example are examined for their relevance in today's organizational context. The review demonstrates that Confucian values align with modern concepts of people-oriented leadership and managerial ethics, which emphasize moral behavior, trust, and social harmony. Both in Asia and globally, the integration of Confucian principles has the potential to enhance managers' ethical self-regulation, build a people-oriented organizational culture, and positively impact team performance and harmony. However, successful integration requires aligning traditional values with contemporary norms to avoid potential pitfalls (e.g., balancing hierarchy and innovation). This study concludes that Confucian ethics offers timeless insights for reinventing leadership styles, providing guidance on benevolent leadership, moral education within organizations, and achieving sustainable performance through harmony. Recommendations for leaders include embodying Confucian moral role models, caring for the well-being of subordinates, incorporating ethics training, and integrating Confucian values with modern management practices.*

Keywords: *Confucianism, Confucian Leadership, Modern Management, Managerial Ethics, People-Oriented Leadership, Organizational Harmony, Moral Exemplarity*

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INTRODUCTION

Competition and challenges in the modern business environment have encouraged the search for leadership models that are not only performance-oriented but also ethical and people-centered (Cañadas et al., 2026; Sapra & Tandur, 2026). The management literature has long been dominated by Western perspectives, with figures such as Taylor, Fayol, and Weber frequently recognized as foundational contributors to management theory. However, historical examinations indicate that the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE) had already articulated leadership principles that remain highly relevant in contemporary contexts (Rarick & Gallagher, 2000; Sun & Qi, 2024; Chou, 2024; Gotsis, 2022).

Confucius may be regarded as a “forgotten management theorist,” as he discussed themes such as the importance of training, self-development, teamwork, and visionary leadership long before these concepts gained prominence in the Western tradition (Rarick & Gallagher, 2000). His ideas on cooperation and harmony were grounded in the belief that excessive competition and disharmony constitute organizational “illnesses” that can ultimately lead to institutional decline. Confucius emphasized the inherent goodness of human beings and highlighted the

centrality of mutual trust in social relations (Khan et al., 2022; Van, 2025; Hsu et al., 2024; Procyshyn & Wenning, 2019; Liu, 2025). For instance, he stated, “If you desire goodness, the people will become good.” This statement reflects the notion that leaders must maintain positive assumptions and trust toward their subordinates, as trust serves as a prerequisite for effective teamwork and organizational harmony. This perspective aligns with the Pygmalion effect in modern psychology, wherein positive leader expectations can foster improved subordinate performance (Ichilov, 2025; Veestraeten et al., 2021).

The contemporary rise of Asian economic power, particularly China, has stimulated renewed scholarly interest in the distinct characteristics of Chinese leadership styles (Zhang et al., 2014; Koo & Park, 2018). Researchers have increasingly sought to define and differentiate leadership and managerial approaches shaped by Confucian cultural values. In recent years, even political leaders in China have begun to promote models of organizational leadership grounded in virtue and ethical conduct, often drawing upon the moral philosophy of Confucius as an authoritative reference (Wang & Xiang, 2025). This development is particularly notable given that, for much of the twentieth century, Confucianism was widely regarded as a conservative worldview perceived to hinder social and economic progress, most prominently during the Cultural Revolution era.

The reality, however, shows that Confucian values remain deeply embedded within Chinese and East Asian cultures and are increasingly recognized as an indigenous ethical framework capable of supporting ethical leadership in the modern era (Wang & Xiang, 2025). Confucianism, for instance, emphasizes moral education and personal integrity, dimensions that have regained relevance in response to contemporary ethical crises faced by many organizations. Amid growing global attention to managerial ethics and corporate social responsibility, the Confucian approach offers a distinctive virtue-centered ethical perspective (Fernández & Domingo, 2025; Hosseini & Gordijn, 2020; Athota et al., 2025).

As a moral–philosophical system, Confucianism places strong emphasis on the cultivation of individual moral character and the maintenance of social harmony (Li et al., 2024; Ruhai et al., 2024; Al-Nahdi & LI, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). The teachings of Confucius seek to form virtuous individuals (*junzi*) who are capable of leading through moral exemplarity. This orientation is highly relevant to the present demand for ethical leadership that can inspire moral conduct among organizational members in the face of pervasive ethical challenges in business. Several contemporary Western leadership models such as servant leadership, moral leadership, and spiritual leadership share conceptual affinities with Confucian principles, yet they often lack a comprehensive integration of virtue and behavior within cross-cultural contexts. In Confucian (Eastern) cultural settings, ethical leadership not only entails fostering individual development and safeguarding employee rights, but also involves moral guidance for subordinates and the cultivation of collective values in the pursuit of group harmony (Dodamgoda et al., 2025; Xu & Wang, 2025; Yang, 2014; Lin & Huang, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to systematically analyze how the core values of Confucianism can be integrated into contemporary management and leadership practices, as well as to examine their relevance in modern organizational contexts in both Asian and global settings. The scope of the review includes: (1) the identification of key Confucian values and principles related to leadership and management; (2) the ways in which these values are incorporated into modern leadership practices, including their manifestations in people-oriented leadership, ethical management, and moral education within organizational environments (Baysal, 2025; Wihler et al. 2024; Eyong, 2019; Nunez, 2024; Melé, 2016; Akanji et al., 2020); and (3) the impact of implementing Confucian values on organizational performance and interpersonal harmony among organizational members.

Based on these objectives, the research questions (RQ) addressed in this review are as follows. RQ1: How can core Confucian values (such as *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi*, *xin*, and *xiao*) and their associated principles (hierarchical relationships, social harmony, and exemplary leadership) be

integrated into modern management and leadership practices? RQ2: What is the relevance and impact of integrating Confucian values into contemporary organizational leadership, both in Asian and global contexts, on organizational performance and harmony?

In addressing RQ1, this review delineates the conceptual bridge between Confucian philosophical constructs and contemporary management theory, while the discussion of RQ2 elaborates on the implications of Confucian value implementation for organizational effectiveness. The subsequent sections present the theoretical foundations of Confucianism, followed by a description of the methodological approach employed in this study, the findings of the literature review for each research question, the discussion, and finally the conclusions and recommendations.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Core Values of Confucianism in the Context of Leadership

Confucianism is an ethical system and social philosophy grounded in the teachings of Kongzi (Confucius) (Woods & Lamond, 2011). Within the Confucian tradition, a number of cardinal virtues form the moral foundation of both individuals and leaders. Five primary virtues frequently emphasized are ren, yi, li, zhi, and xin, complemented by one fundamental value, namely xiao (filial piety).

Ren (仁), often translated as humanity or benevolence, is regarded as the highest virtue in Confucianism and centers on compassion toward fellow human beings. The Chinese character for ren combines the elements of “person” and “two,” symbolizing interpersonal relationships. Confucius asserts that the essence of ren lies in “loving others.” In the leadership context, ren denotes a leader who embodies empathy, kindness, and a deep concern for the welfare of others (Ding & Hao, 2014). A Confucian-oriented manager is expected to be benevolent and to cultivate harmonious relationships with subordinates, prioritizing relational bonds and loyalty rather than merely emphasizing individual performance outcomes. Traditional Confucian thought even suggests that disparities in individual performance are not of primary importance, as long as the group as a whole functions effectively and remains in harmony.

Yi (义), commonly translated as righteousness or moral propriety, refers to an orientation toward justice, moral integrity, and ethical action. Yi emphasizes doing what is right because it is ethically justified, rather than because it brings personal advantage. For a leader, yi signifies honesty, fairness, and moral consistency in decision-making. A leader who embodies yi prioritizes justice for subordinates and acts in accordance with ethical principles even when confronted with opportunities for personal gain. The concept underscores the idea that individual interests must be subordinated to the greater good, whether that of the organization or society. In this sense, a leader guided by yi places moral principles above profit, aligning with the Confucian view that material gain should never supersede the value of truth and moral correctness.

Li (礼), meaning propriety, ritual, or decorum, encompasses the normative frameworks, etiquette, and social conventions that regulate behavior and social interaction in accordance with one’s role and status. Confucius placed strong emphasis on the importance of ritual order and social etiquette as foundations for harmony. Within an organizational context, li refers to appropriate rules, procedural order, and respectful conduct consistent with hierarchical relationships for instance, juniors respecting seniors, subordinates respecting superiors, and leaders, in turn, protecting and guiding their subordinates. Li may be institutionalized through standard operating procedures, professional codes of ethics, or organizational ceremonies and rituals that cultivate a sense of collective identity. Corporate cultures shaped by Confucian values therefore tend to be formal, polite, and ritual-oriented, reflecting virtues such as patience and perseverance captured metaphorically in the Chinese proverb “dripping water wears away stone.” The essence of li lies in situating oneself appropriately within social relations, thereby fostering order, mutual respect, and social cohesion. Confucius thus encourages individuals to

understand their roles within society or an organization and to act in accordance with the normative expectations attached to those roles.

Zhi (智), wisdom or intellectual insight. Zhi refers to the capacity to perceive matters correctly, to exercise sound judgment, and to possess deep understanding. In Chinese cultural tradition, the pursuit of knowledge and respect for the learned have always been highly valued. Wisdom is closely associated with age and life experience; within Confucian culture, older individuals are often regarded as bearers of wisdom, deserving of respect and emulation. In the context of modern leadership, zhi denotes a continuous learning orientation and the ability to make prudent, long-term strategic decisions. Confucian thought emphasizes the importance of xue (learning) and si (reflection), as reflected in principles of lifelong learning and daily self-examination. A wise leader is expected to consider the long-term implications of decisions, a characteristic identified by Bond and Hofstede as “Confucian Dynamism,” which encompasses future orientation, perseverance, and frugality, values that have significantly contributed to economic success in many Asian societies. Zhi also implies the capacity to harmoniously balance moral considerations ren, yi, and li in everyday practice.

Xin (信), trustworthiness or integrity. Xin signifies honesty, sincerity, and reliability. A leader is expected to uphold promises and remain true to his or her word. Confucius regarded xin as the foundation of enduring relationships; without trust, the leader-subordinate relationship becomes fragile. Accordingly, Confucian-influenced managers are expected to be “true to their word” and to consistently demonstrate strong integrity. In contemporary organizational practice, xin is manifested through the development of a culture of trust, in which leaders act transparently and truthfully, thereby encouraging subordinates to develop commitment and confidence in leadership. Empirical studies indicate that leaders’ integrity and benevolence enhance trust in supervisors, which subsequently improves performance and loyalty (Woods & Lamond, 2011). Confucianism also posits that xin is inherently intertwined with ren and yi, a leader who embodies compassion and righteousness naturally becomes a trustworthy figure in the eyes of others.

Xiao (孝), or filial piety, refers to the moral obligation of respect, obedience, and care toward one’s parents and ancestors. Within the Confucian intellectual framework, xiao is regarded as a fundamental ethical pillar that sustains harmonious human relations. Confucius emphasized that an individual who demonstrates filial devotion toward parents and respect toward elder siblings will likewise exhibit deference toward authority figures in broader social contexts. Xiao therefore cultivates respect for hierarchy and seniority, while simultaneously underscoring the moral responsibility of leaders to safeguard the welfare of those who are younger or subordinate. In contemporary organizational settings, particularly in Asian societies, the principle of xiao often manifests in the form of employee loyalty and deference toward supervisors, accompanied by a paternalistic leadership attitude whereby superiors assume a nurturing, family-like role toward subordinates. For instance, in many East Asian corporations, seniority-based career progression remains a common practice; younger employees are expected to “wait their turn” for promotion until their seniors retire, as an expression of respect for senior hierarchy.

In return, senior leaders are expected to act in loco parentis, attending to the professional and, at times, personal needs of junior employees through mentorship, guidance, and emotional support. This ethical orientation of xiao underlies the emergence of paternalistic leadership in numerous Asian organizations, an approach that integrates authoritative control with benevolence and compassion, thereby reinforcing both hierarchical order and relational care within organizational life. The six values above are often referred to as the Confucian virtues that must be embodied by a leader who adheres to Confucian ethical principles. Confucianism posits that the practice of these virtues constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for becoming a “fully realized human being,” that is, a morally grounded individual. The ideal leader (Junzi) is one who “cultivates virtue within the self,” continually striving to develop moral character through

processes of self-cultivation, so that leadership may be exercised through ethical example and moral excellence.

Confucian Leadership Principles: Hierarchy, Harmony, and Moral Exemplarity

Beyond its emphasis on individual moral virtue, Confucianism articulates a set of social principles that profoundly shape leadership styles and organizational culture across East Asian societies. Three central elements are particularly salient: (a) the doctrine of the five hierarchical relationships as the foundation of social order; (b) the pursuit of harmony as a normative goal; and (c) the notion of the leader as a moral exemplar or role model.

The Five Hierarchical Relationships and Social Order. Confucius introduces the concept of Wu Lun, or the Five Cardinal Human Relationships, which structure social life: (1) Ruler–Subject; (2) Father–Son; (3) Husband–Wife; (4) Elder Brother–Younger Brother; and (5) Friend–Friend (the only non-hierarchical relationship). Each relational category entails clearly defined reciprocal obligations, embedded within a morally grounded hierarchy. Confucius emphasizes that higher-status actors (such as rulers, fathers, husbands, and elder brothers) bear the ethical responsibility to govern and care with benevolence and virtue, while lower-status actors (subjects, children, wives, and younger siblings) are expected to respond with respect, obedience, and loyalty. In this perspective, social hierarchy is not merely a structural arrangement, but an ethical framework oriented toward the cultivation of order, harmony, and moral responsibility within society.

In the context of modern organizations, this principle is reflected in hierarchical organizational structures and paternalistic leadership styles. Leaders are perceived as “father figures” within the organization, they occupy the highest decision-making position (centralization), while employees are expected to demonstrate loyalty by carrying out instructions with minimal questioning. In return, the organization and its leaders are expected to safeguard employees’ welfare in a manner analogous to familial care, such as by providing housing, recreational facilities, and educational support for employees’ children, practices commonly observed in several Chinese corporations. The emergence of clan culture or familial organizational culture in Chinese enterprises is rooted in this principle, wherein the company is conceptualized as an extension of the family and each member assumes a role consistent with their position. Order and stability are highly valued, decisions are executed through a top-down mechanism, and every individual is expected to “know their place” within the hierarchy. Although such hierarchical patterns may appear rigid when evaluated from a Western managerial perspective, they provide role clarity and structural stability within Confucian-influenced organizations. Furthermore, the strong emphasis on seniority reinforces respect for older or longer-tenured members.

It is rare for younger managers to surpass their senior counterparts in promotion decisions, even when they may possess higher competence, because cultural norms obligate younger members to “listen to and respect their elders, and wait their turn.” Conversely, senior members are morally obliged to guide and nurture their juniors, mirroring the relational ethic between a father and child. This pattern fosters a strong sense of belonging within the organization, although it may at times constrain meritocratic dynamism. **The Concept of Social Harmony as the Ultimate Objective.** Harmony (he, 和) is one of the highest values in Confucianism. Confucius posits that an ideal social life is characterized not by conflict, but by harmony. However, harmony does not imply uniformity or the absence of difference; rather, Confucius likens harmony to a musical orchestra, in which diverse tones blend together to produce a beautiful melody. In other words, “harmony is not sameness,” but a form of coexistence in which diverse elements are able to interact in a balanced and mutually enriching manner.

In organizational contexts, the principle of harmony is reflected in efforts to avoid overt confrontation, maintain positive interpersonal relations among team members, and emphasize cooperation rather than internal competition. Confucian culture tends to avoid direct conflict; disagreements are resolved subtly in order to preserve the “face” of all parties involved. Even in

performance appraisal, traditional Confucian approaches place greater value on collective team achievement than on granting conspicuous praise or rewards to specific individuals. Excessive recognition of an individual is considered potentially disruptive to group harmony and may provoke jealousy. Accordingly, responsibility is also shared: “success belongs to the team, whereas failure is a collective burden.” This emphasis on harmony underpins the collectivistic orientation of Confucian culture, in which organizational members are expected to subordinate personal ego to the preservation of group cohesion.

Empirical studies have shown that employees in Confucian cultural environments tend to prefer collaborative efforts that sustain team harmony over individually assertive behavior. Organizational harmony is believed to contribute to long-term productivity, as a harmonious climate promotes smooth communication, high levels of trust, and more effective work coordination. Conversely, disharmony such as acute inter-departmental tensions or hierarchical conflicts between supervisors and subordinates is perceived as “harmful” to organizational sustainability, metaphorically likened to a “disease” in Confucian thought. For this reason, leaders shaped by Confucian values strive to act as wise mediators, maintaining a balance of interests and preventing internal clashes. The concept of harmony is also aligned with the Confucian work ethic, which prioritizes diligence and cooperative endeavor while minimizing social disruption.

The Concept of Leadership through Moral Exemplarship. One of Confucius’ well-known teachings states: “A virtuous leader is like the North Star, remaining steady in its place, while other stars revolve around it in reverence.” This aphorism conveys that a morally upright leader naturally becomes a central model whose followers willingly emulate their conduct. The principle encapsulates a philosophy of leadership grounded in moral exemplarship. Confucius maintained that the strength of a leader’s character and personal virtue is more effective in motivating subordinates than coercion or punitive authority. In contemporary scholarship, this concept is often compared to transformational leadership; however, within Confucian thought the emphasis lies predominantly on the cultivation of virtue in the leader (Junzi virtues). An ideal leader (Junzi) is expected to embody integrity, benevolence, justice, and wisdom to such an extent that subordinates are genuinely inspired and express sincere respect toward them.

The moral example of a leader is believed to be capable of “transforming the character of the people” toward virtue. In other words, leaders inspire ethical self-regulation among their followers through embodied conduct rather than formal instruction. When leaders consistently demonstrate honesty, fairness, and respect for others, organizational culture gradually coalesces around these values because members develop a moral reluctance to deviate from them. Confucian teaching emphasizes the centrality of self-cultivation in leadership: before governing others, a leader must first cultivate himself into a virtuous person. A well-known Confucian maxim states, “If you wish others to act rightly, then first rectify yourself.” This principle of exemplary conduct is likewise reflected in the dictum “governing the nation with virtue,” which underscores that governance should be grounded in moral excellence rather than merely in law and coercive force.

In the context of modern corporations, leadership by example is often manifested in organizational cultures that are strongly shaped by the persona of founders or chief executive officers. Many family-owned firms in Asia exhibit this pattern, in which founders serve as moral and behavioral referents even in seemingly minor matters such as discipline, courtesy, and modest lifestyle and employees subsequently align their work culture with these modeled traits. Business leaders in Shanghai, as reported in Gao et al. (2008), frequently describe their ideal leadership model as that of a “virtuous leader,” rather than merely a high-performing one (Wang & Xiang, 2025). This finding illustrates that appreciation for the leader’s role as a moral exemplar, rooted in Confucian tradition, remains salient in contemporary organizational and business settings.

Beyond the three aspects discussed above, another relevant Confucian principle concerns education and moral cultivation. Confucius is widely recognized as the first great teacher of China;

he founded schools and travelled extensively to provide counsel to rulers. He emphasized lifelong learning and continuous self-improvement. In a contemporary context, these values resonate with the concepts of the learning organization and human resource development. Confucius may also be viewed as an early proponent of training and personal development. As noted by Rarick and Gallagher (2000), Confucius “was a strong advocate of training, personal development, and visionary leadership,” and his insights on teamwork and employee empowerment anticipated many principles of modern management more than two millennia ago. Accordingly, an organizational focus on employee education and development may be understood as an application of Confucian principles in management practices (for instance, through mentoring programs, continuous training initiatives, and character development within the workplace).

Finally, it is important to recognize that although many Confucian values are often perceived as “traditional,” these values have increasingly been viewed as compatible with contemporary management practices. For example, the Confucian emphasis on loyalty and team harmony parallels current efforts to cultivate strong corporate cultures and teamwork in modern organizations. Even in Western contexts, there has been growing appreciation of Confucian-inspired principles. Empirical studies indicate that Confucian values emphasizing teamwork, positive interpersonal relations, and cohesive corporate culture have begun to be adopted and have gained traction within Western firms (Hill, 2006). This development suggests that the cultural distance between Eastern and Western management paradigms may be narrowing as universal human values such as respect for people and ethical conduct, are increasingly acknowledged as globally significant.

People-Oriented Leadership and Managerial Ethics in Modern Organizations

The concept of people-oriented leadership in contemporary management literature emphasizes the importance of leaders attending to human aspects such as well-being, engagement, and the professional development of subordinates. Interestingly, this orientation resonates with the spirit of Confucianism, particularly the virtue of *ren* and the “people-oriented” doctrine in Confucian thought.

Confucianism places human beings at the center of social and ethical life. Mencius, a prominent successor of Confucius, asserted that “the people are the foundation of the state, while rulers are merely boats sustained by the water of the people,” implying that the welfare of the people must constitute the leader’s primary concern. This notion is reflected in the concept of *minben* (民本), which prioritizes the people as the moral and political basis of authority. Within the organizational context, this principle may be analogized to leaders prioritizing employees as the most essential assets of the organization, rather than focusing solely on short-term financial objectives. Empirical and conceptual studies have demonstrated that Confucian thought has been adapted into modern managerial practice through the development of people-oriented management frameworks.

Ding and Hao (2014), for instance, illustrate that managerial understanding has undergone a historical shift from an emphasis on tasks and productivity toward a greater appreciation of human orientation in management. This transition is grounded in the recognition that employees constitute a fundamental factor in organizational sustainability. By fulfilling employees’ needs, motivations, and aspirations, organizations are able to generate long-term developmental momentum and strengthen the foundation for sustainable growth.

People-oriented leadership in the Confucian tradition is reflected in the benevolent form of paternalistic leadership. Leaders treat subordinates as members of a family characterized by care, affection, and tolerance yet always within the framework of discipline and established norms, embodying the synthesis of *ren* (humaneness) and *li* (ritual propriety). When implemented constructively, this approach fosters a strong sense of loyalty: employees feel valued and cared for, which in turn strengthens their organizational commitment. A concrete illustration of this leadership style can be seen in the practice of personalized care, whereby managers understand employees’ personal circumstances, are willing to listen to their concerns,

provide assistance in times of difficulty, and offer encouragement in a manner akin to parental guidance.

According to Ding and Hao (2014), the application of Confucian “benevolent love” within contemporary managerial practice entails that leaders sincerely care for their subordinates, treat them with empathy as they would family members, forgive minor shortcomings, offer sincere advice, recognize individual strengths, and provide emotional support as well as moral encouragement when needed. The ethical principle of “Do as you would be done by” treating others as one wishes to be treated serves as a moral foundation of this approach. Such orientation clearly represents the essence of people-centered leadership, in which employees are regarded as whole human beings rather than merely “productive resources.”

Furthermore, managerial ethics in the Confucian context refers to the integration of moral virtues into managerial functions such as decision-making, control, and planning. Confucianism provides an indigenous ethical framework through which managers regulate themselves in order to remain within moral standards. Woods and Lamond (2011) identify that Confucian principles can assist managers in the self-regulation of ethical behavior. They discuss seven Confucian principles related to ethical self-regulation, including the virtues of ren, yi, li, zhi, xin, and xiao, as previously elaborated, as well as specific practices such as ritual and music. In essence, a manager guided by Confucian ethics prioritizes virtue in every action, for example by placing compassion, justice, and propriety above mere profit orientation. This does not imply the rejection of business profitability; rather, it emphasizes the pursuit of balance so that business decisions remain morally grounded. Thus, in the face of ethical dilemmas, an ideal Confucian manager would choose a course of action aligned with conscience and universal values, even when such a choice may be less profitable in the short term. This orientation parallels the notion of “moral management” in Western thought.

Confucianism also places strong emphasis on moral education within organizations. It underscores the principle that “self-cultivation begins at home,” where individuals first learn morality through the virtue of xiao (filial piety). In the modern context, however, organizations may function as a “secondary moral community.” Many organizations in Asia and increasingly some in the West, have begun to incorporate value-based training or character-building programs. Interestingly, companies in China have recently integrated classical Confucian teachings into employee training initiatives to cultivate moral character (Wang & Xiang, 2025). For example, some firms encourage new employees to read and discuss the Analects of Confucius or to visit Confucian historical sites as part of their orientation programs, with the aim of instilling values such as loyalty, cooperation, respect, and collective responsibility.

Furthermore, incentives in Confucian cultural contexts often integrate both material and spiritual dimensions. This implies that, in addition to financial rewards such as bonuses or salary increases, leaders also provide non-material forms of recognition, including sincere verbal praise, formal appreciation ceremonies, and collective activities such as corporate songs or morning exercises, a tradition commonly found in Japanese and Chinese companies to cultivate collective spirit. These practices are intended to foster an enlivened organizational culture characterized by harmony, mutual respect, and reciprocal support in accordance with Confucian values. In turn, such a culture is expected to generate a work environment conducive to ethical conduct and high levels of productivity.

The Confucian ethical framework is likewise reflected in the modern Chinese governance principle of “rule by virtue,” which, at the corporate level, translates into managing organizations through morally grounded leadership (Wang & Xiang, 2025). Leaders are expected not only to embody the qualities of a moral person, but also to function as moral managers who actively regulate and sustain ethical behavior within the organization. Ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, accompanied by the promotion of similar conduct among followers through communication and decision-making processes. From a Confucian perspective, this notion is

highly compatible: leaders must model moral behavior honesty, fairness, and benevolence while simultaneously encouraging and guiding subordinates to behave ethically.

Overall, this literature review indicates that the foundational values of Confucianism comprising both core virtues and social principles offer a distinctive perspective on leadership. Values such as *ren* reinforce the notion of people-oriented leadership (Ding & Hao, 2014); *yi* and *xin* strengthen integrity within the domain of ethical leadership (Woods & Lamond, 2011); *li* contributes to the development of an orderly and cultured organizational environment; *zhi* encourages continuous learning and long-term vision; while *xiao* and hierarchical ethics shape loyalty and establish clearly defined structures of responsibility within organizations.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to identify, evaluate, and synthesize scholarly works concerning the integration of Confucian values into modern management and leadership practices. A systematic review enables researchers to collect and analyze previous studies through a transparent and replicable procedure, so that the synthesis is not based on unsystematic reading or subjective selection of sources (Booth et al., 2016). The review was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework and adapted through the SALSA procedure, which consists of Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis. PRISMA was used because it provides structured guidance for reporting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the SALSA procedure was applied because it offers a practical structure for organizing the main stages of literature review, especially in studies that synthesize conceptual and theoretical findings (Grant & Booth, 2009). Since the study focuses on conceptual and theoretical synthesis rather than statistical effect estimation, no meta-analysis was conducted.

The review was directed by two research questions formulated in the Introduction. RQ1 examined how core Confucian values, including *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi*, *xin*, and *xiao*, as well as principles such as hierarchy, harmony, and moral exemplarity, can be integrated into modern management and leadership practices. RQ2 examined the relevance and impact of such integration on contemporary organizational leadership, organizational performance, and workplace harmony. These research questions guided the search strategy, selection criteria, data extraction, coding process, and thematic synthesis. This alignment between research questions and review procedures is important because systematic reviews must show a clear connection between the purpose of the study, search strategy, selection criteria, and method of synthesis (Booth et al., 2016; Page et al., 2021).

The literature search was conducted between January and March 2025 through Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and selected publisher databases. Scopus was prioritized for peer-reviewed journal articles, while Google Scholar and JSTOR were used to capture broader interdisciplinary sources in philosophy, management, leadership, and Asian studies. The search used combinations of English keywords and Boolean operators, including: “Confucianism” AND “leadership”; “Confucian values” AND “management”; “Confucian ethics” AND “managerial ethics”; “Confucian leadership” AND “organizational harmony”; “*ren*” AND “people-oriented leadership”; “paternalistic leadership” AND “Confucian values”; and “Chinese management” AND “Confucianism”. Indonesian equivalents such as “*nilai Konfusianisme*”, “*kepemimpinan Konfusian*”, “*etika manajerial*”, and “*harmoni organisasi*” were also used to identify relevant regional publications. Search filters were applied based on publication year, language, document type, and thematic relevance. The use of explicit keywords, Boolean operators, and database-specific searches was intended to strengthen the transparency and reproducibility of the search process, as recommended in systematic review reporting standards (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021).

The inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, or conference proceedings discussing Confucianism in relation to leadership, management, managerial ethics, organizational culture, or workplace harmony; (2) publications

written in English or Indonesian; (3) studies published between 2000 and 2025; and (4) classical or foundational works published before 2000 only when they provided essential theoretical concepts, such as Confucian dynamism, cultural values, or early Chinese philosophical foundations. The exclusion criteria included: (1) non-academic articles, opinion pieces, blogs, and popular writings; (2) studies discussing Confucianism only from a purely historical or theological perspective without relevance to management or leadership; (3) duplicate records; (4) publications with inaccessible full texts; and (5) studies that did not directly contribute to answering either RQ1 or RQ2. The formulation of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria was used to reduce subjective judgment during the screening stage and to strengthen methodological accountability (Booth et al., 2016; Page et al., 2021).

The selection process followed several stages. The initial database search identified 92 records. After removing 18 duplicates, 74 records remained for title and abstract screening. At this stage, 29 records were excluded because they were not directly related to Confucianism in organizational, managerial, or leadership contexts. The remaining 45 full-text documents were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 15 were excluded because they lacked analytical relevance to the research questions, focused only on general Chinese history, or did not discuss implications for management and leadership. Finally, 30 core sources were included in the synthesis. These 30 sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, selected conference proceedings, and theoretically relevant books or book chapters. Books and conference proceedings were included only when they provided foundational conceptual arguments or empirical insights that were not sufficiently represented in journal articles. Reporting the number of studies at each stage follows the principle of PRISMA, which emphasizes transparent documentation of study identification, screening, exclusion, and inclusion (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021).

The screening process was conducted in two stages. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to determine broad relevance to Confucianism, leadership, management, and organizational ethics. Second, full texts were examined to assess conceptual fit with the research questions. Relevance was determined based on whether a source discussed at least one of the following dimensions: core Confucian virtues, Confucian leadership principles, ethical management, paternalistic leadership, people-oriented management, organizational harmony, hierarchy, employee loyalty, or cross-cultural management. To reduce selection bias, the screening results were checked collaboratively by the authors. Any disagreement regarding inclusion or exclusion was resolved through discussion by referring back to the research questions and inclusion criteria. This procedure was applied to ensure that the appraisal stage was systematic, transparent, and aligned with the objectives of the review (Grant & Booth, 2009; Booth et al., 2016).

Data extraction was conducted using a structured matrix. The extracted information included author and year of publication, type of publication, geographical or cultural context, Confucian values discussed, leadership or management concepts addressed, methodological approach, main findings, relevance to RQ1, relevance to RQ2, and limitations or critical perspectives. This extraction matrix helped ensure that the synthesis was not based on general impression but on systematically recorded evidence from each source. Structured data extraction is an important step in systematic reviews because it allows reviewers to compare findings across sources and maintain consistency during analysis (Booth et al., 2016; Page et al., 2021).

The analysis used qualitative thematic synthesis. Coding was conducted in two phases. The first phase used deductive coding based on the conceptual framework of the study, including ren, yi, li, zhi, xin, xiao, hierarchy, harmony, moral exemplarity, people-oriented leadership, managerial ethics, and paternalistic leadership. The second phase used inductive coding to identify emerging themes from the reviewed literature, such as participatory hierarchy, ethical self-regulation, organizational rituals, moral education, employee loyalty, conflict avoidance, and the tension between harmony and innovation. Codes with conceptual similarity were then grouped into broader themes corresponding to the two research questions. Themes related to the practical translation of Confucian values into leadership behavior and organizational systems

were used to answer RQ1, while themes related to organizational ethics, employee commitment, performance, harmony, and possible limitations were used to answer RQ2. This thematic procedure is consistent with the synthesis stage in systematic review methodology, where extracted findings are organized into meaningful categories to answer the research questions (Grant & Booth, 2009; Booth et al., 2016).

To improve analytical consistency, coding results were reviewed repeatedly and compared across sources. Convergent findings were used to identify dominant patterns, while divergent and critical findings were retained to avoid one-sided interpretation. For example, studies highlighting the positive contribution of Confucian values to trust, loyalty, and harmony were analyzed alongside studies discussing potential risks such as excessive hierarchy, face-saving practices, reduced employee voice, and nepotism. This procedure was used to prevent the review from presenting Confucianism only as a normative ideal without acknowledging its possible organizational limitations. The inclusion of both supportive and critical perspectives is important in conceptual reviews because it allows the synthesis to present a balanced interpretation rather than a selective confirmation of the researchers' assumptions (Booth et al., 2016).

The validity of the review was strengthened through source triangulation, conceptual triangulation, and reflexive interpretation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from journal articles, books, and conference proceedings. Conceptual triangulation was carried out by relating Confucian concepts to modern management theories such as ethical leadership, paternalistic leadership, people-oriented leadership, and organizational culture. Reflexive interpretation was applied because Confucianism is a value-based and culturally grounded tradition. The authors acknowledged that interpretations of Confucian leadership may be influenced by cultural assumptions; therefore, the synthesis deliberately included both supportive and critical perspectives. Western and non-Western sources were also balanced to avoid cultural bias and to assess whether Confucian values are applicable only in East Asian contexts or may also offer broader relevance for global management. This reflexive approach is consistent with the need for transparency in review-based research, particularly when the topic involves cultural values and interpretive analysis (Grant & Booth, 2009; Booth et al., 2016).

The adequacy of the final sample was determined based on thematic coverage rather than numerical volume alone. The 30 core sources were considered sufficient because they covered the main conceptual areas required by the research questions, including Confucian virtues, hierarchy, harmony, moral exemplarity, paternalistic leadership, managerial ethics, people-oriented management, and cross-cultural organizational implications. The review process also reached thematic saturation, as additional sources identified through snowballing largely repeated themes already captured in the selected literature. Backward snowballing was conducted by examining the references of core articles, while forward snowballing was used to identify newer studies citing foundational works on Confucianism and management. Snowballing was used as a complementary technique to strengthen literature coverage beyond database searching, particularly because interdisciplinary reviews may require sources from several academic traditions (Booth et al., 2016).

Through these procedures, the method was designed to align the research questions, literature selection, data extraction, coding, and synthesis. RQ1 was addressed by extracting and coding evidence on how Confucian values are translated into leadership practices, organizational policies, and managerial behavior. RQ2 was addressed by synthesizing evidence on the organizational implications of Confucian value integration, including its contribution to ethics, trust, loyalty, performance, and harmony, as well as its limitations in contemporary management contexts. This alignment ensures that the review does not merely summarize literature, but systematically organizes evidence to answer the stated research questions (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the systematic literature review concerning the integration of Confucian values into modern management and leadership practices. Based on the screening and synthesis of 30 core sources, the reviewed literature was grouped into several recurring themes. The analysis was organized around the two research questions formulated in the Introduction. RQ1 focuses on how Confucian values and principles can be integrated into contemporary management and leadership practices, while RQ2 focuses on the relevance and impact of this integration on organizational performance and harmony.

The thematic synthesis shows that the literature does not present Confucian leadership as a single, uniform model. Rather, Confucian leadership appears as a flexible ethical and cultural framework that can be translated into different organizational practices depending on institutional context, leadership style, organizational structure, and cultural environment. The most frequently discussed themes are benevolent or people-oriented leadership, managerial ethics, hierarchical order, harmony, moral exemplarity, paternalistic leadership, and the tension between traditional values and modern organizational demands.

Table 1. Thematic Distribution of Reviewed Literature

Major Theme	Number of Core Sources Discussing the Theme	Main Contribution to the Review
Confucian virtues and moral leadership	18 sources	Explains ren, yi, li, zhi, xin, and xiao as moral foundations of leadership
People-oriented and benevolent leadership	14 sources	Shows the relevance of ren in employee care, loyalty, and trust
Managerial ethics and ethical self-regulation	13 sources	Links Confucian values to integrity, responsibility, fairness, and moral decision-making
Hierarchy, paternalistic leadership, and authority	12 sources	Discusses the role of hierarchy, seniority, authority, and paternalistic control
Harmony, conflict management, and organizational cohesion	11 sources	Explains how harmony supports teamwork, but may also suppress dissent
Cross-cultural management and East-West integration	9 sources	Shows how Confucian values interact with Western management principles
Critical perspectives on Confucian leadership	8 sources	Identifies risks such as excessive power distance, nepotism, reduced voice, and limited innovation

The table indicates that most studies emphasize the constructive contribution of Confucian values to ethical leadership, employee loyalty, and organizational harmony. However, a smaller but significant group of studies highlights the possible negative consequences of Confucian-based leadership when hierarchy, obedience, and harmony are applied without transparency, participation, and accountability. This finding is important because it shows that Confucian leadership cannot be treated simply as a normative solution for modern organizations. Its relevance depends on how traditional values are translated into contemporary organizational systems.

Integration of Confucian Values into Contemporary Management and Leadership Practices

The first research question asks how the core values and principles of Confucianism can be integrated into contemporary management and leadership practices. The reviewed literature shows that Confucian values are integrated into modern organizations through five main

pathways: people-oriented leadership, ethical management, balanced hierarchy, organizational rituals, and continuous learning.

The first pathway is the translation of *ren* into benevolent and people-oriented leadership. *Ren*, often interpreted as humaneness, benevolence, or loving-kindness, is the most frequently discussed Confucian value in relation to leadership. In the reviewed literature, *ren* is associated with leaders' concern for employee welfare, interpersonal sensitivity, moral care, and relational responsibility. Ding and Hao (2014) argue that Confucian management places people at the center of organizational life, meaning that employees should not be treated only as productive resources but as moral and social beings. Woods and Lamond (2011) also show that Confucian ethics encourages managers to regulate their behavior through compassion, propriety, and trustworthiness.

In practical terms, *ren* may be integrated through employee well-being policies, mentoring, empathetic communication, and leader involvement in employees' personal and professional development. This resembles people-oriented leadership in modern management theory, but the Confucian version places stronger emphasis on moral obligation and relational care. The leader is not only expected to motivate employees but also to guide, protect, and cultivate them. This is why several studies link Confucian leadership with paternalistic leadership, especially in Chinese and East Asian organizational contexts (Cheng et al., 2004; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Farh et al., 2008).

The second pathway is the integration of *yi* and *xin* into ethical management. *Yi* refers to righteousness, justice, and moral appropriateness, while *xin* refers to trustworthiness, honesty, and reliability. In the reviewed literature, these two values are often connected with managerial integrity and ethical decision-making. Leaders who internalize *yi* are expected to act fairly and prioritize moral correctness over narrow personal or organizational gain. Leaders who embody *xin* are expected to keep promises, communicate honestly, and build trust-based relationships with subordinates and stakeholders.

This integration can be operationalized through codes of ethics, transparent promotion systems, fair performance evaluation, anti-corruption policies, and leadership development programs that emphasize moral reflection. Woods and Lamond (2011) provide one of the strongest conceptual contributions in this area by explaining Confucian ethics as a form of managerial self-regulation. Their argument is useful because it moves Confucianism from an abstract philosophical tradition into a practical ethical framework for managerial conduct. However, their study is primarily conceptual. It does not provide strong empirical evidence showing how Confucian self-regulation works across different organizational settings. This limitation suggests that further empirical research is needed to test whether Confucian ethical principles produce consistent managerial behavior in real organizations.

The third pathway is the adaptation of *li*, hierarchy, and *xiao* into balanced organizational authority. *Li* refers to propriety, ritual order, and appropriate conduct, while *xiao* emphasizes respect for parents, elders, and authority figures. In organizational contexts, these values support respect for hierarchy, seniority, role clarity, and disciplined interaction. Many studies show that Confucian-influenced organizations tend to value order, loyalty, and respect for superiors (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Hwang, 1997; Tsui et al., 2006).

However, the synthesis also shows that hierarchy is the most ambivalent element of Confucian leadership. On the positive side, hierarchy may create role clarity, reduce ambiguity, and strengthen responsibility. On the negative side, excessive hierarchy may suppress employee voice, discourage criticism, and produce high power distance. This is especially relevant in modern organizations that require innovation, creativity, and open communication. Gao et al. (2008), for example, indicate that employee voice depends not only on trust in leaders but also on empowering leader behaviors. This suggests that Confucian hierarchy must be reinterpreted as responsible authority rather than unquestioned obedience.

The fourth pathway is the use of *li* through organizational rituals, symbols, and cultural practices. In Confucian thought, ritual does not merely refer to formal ceremonies but to repeated practices that cultivate moral order and social harmony. In modern organizations, this may appear in the form of value internalization programs, formal appreciation ceremonies, mentoring rituals, morning briefings, and organizational traditions that reinforce shared identity. Woods and Lamond (2011) emphasize that ritual plays an important role in shaping ethical behavior because it creates repeated moral habits within a community.

This theme is important because it shows that Confucian values are not integrated only through formal policy. They are also embedded in everyday practices, language, symbols, and interpersonal norms. However, ritual-based integration also has limitations. If rituals become merely symbolic and are not supported by fair governance, they may produce conformity rather than ethical commitment. For this reason, ritual must be linked with transparent institutional practices.

The fifth pathway is the integration of *zhi* into learning-oriented leadership. *Zhi* refers to wisdom, sound judgment, and the pursuit of knowledge. Several sources connect this value with lifelong learning, reflection, mentoring, and long-term decision-making. Rarick and Gallagher (2000) argue that Confucius had already emphasized training, self-development, teamwork, and visionary leadership long before these ideas became central in modern management discourse. In contemporary organizations, *zhi* may be implemented through leadership training, knowledge-sharing systems, reflective decision-making, and intergenerational mentoring.

This finding suggests that Confucianism is not inherently opposed to modernization. The value of *zhi* can support adaptive leadership if it is interpreted as openness to learning rather than attachment to tradition. Yet, this depends on how leaders understand wisdom. If wisdom is associated only with age or seniority, it may reinforce rigid promotion systems. If wisdom is interpreted as reflective capacity, ethical judgment, and continuous learning, it can support innovation and strategic adaptability.

Relevance and Impact of Confucian Values on Organizational Performance and Harmony

The second research question asks about the relevance and impact of integrating Confucian values into contemporary leadership, particularly in relation to organizational performance and harmony. The reviewed literature shows four major impacts: stronger ethical culture, higher trust and loyalty, greater organizational harmony, and long-term orientation. At the same time, the review also identifies several constraining effects, including reduced dissent, excessive conformity, nepotism, and limited innovation.

First, Confucian values contribute to ethical culture by positioning leaders as moral exemplars. The concept of leadership by example appears frequently in the reviewed literature. A Confucian leader is expected to demonstrate virtue before demanding ethical behavior from others. This idea has strong relevance to modern ethical leadership theory, which emphasizes the leader's role in modeling appropriate behavior and encouraging followers to act ethically. Wang and Xiang (2025) argue that ethical leadership from a Chinese cultural perspective is closely related to moral cultivation, role modeling, and virtue-based governance.

This finding is theoretically significant because it shows that Confucian leadership expands ethical leadership theory beyond rule-based or compliance-based ethics. It emphasizes character formation, self-cultivation, and moral influence. However, the evidence remains uneven. Some studies provide empirical support for the positive relationship between ethical leadership, job satisfaction, and employee performance, while others are mainly conceptual or culturally specific. This means that the positive effect of Confucian ethical leadership should not be generalized without considering sector, organizational size, national culture, and governance system.

Second, Confucian leadership may strengthen trust, loyalty, and employee commitment. The values of *ren* and *xin* are particularly important in this regard. Leaders who show care, fairness, and trustworthiness tend to build stronger emotional bonds with employees. Poon

(2013) shows that trust in supervisors can support helping behavior among coworkers, while Ding and Hao (2014) argue that Confucian people-oriented management can increase loyalty and commitment. In paternalistic leadership literature, benevolence is often associated with stronger subordinate loyalty and respect for leaders (Cheng et al., 2004; Farh et al., 2008).

Yet, this effect is not automatic. The review indicates that loyalty can become problematic when it is based on personal dependence rather than professional commitment. In paternalistic systems, employees may feel obligated to obey leaders because of personal favors, seniority, or emotional debt. This can blur the boundary between ethical loyalty and personal dependency. In such cases, loyalty may reduce criticism and encourage silence, especially when leaders make questionable decisions. This finding suggests that Confucian-based loyalty should be balanced with accountability, transparency, and formal protection for employee voice.

Third, Confucian values contribute to organizational harmony and conflict reduction. Harmony is one of the most central themes in the reviewed literature. Confucian values can foster workplace harmony by encouraging cooperation, mutual respect, and relational balance. Leung et al. (2002) also distinguish between constructive harmony and superficial harmony in Asian conflict management. This distinction is important because it helps avoid the assumption that all forms of harmony are beneficial.

Constructive harmony supports cooperation, trust, and collective problem-solving. It allows differences to be managed respectfully without destroying relationships. Superficial harmony, however, may conceal conflict, suppress disagreement, and discourage honest feedback. In organizations with high power distance, employees may avoid expressing disagreement in order to protect face or maintain relational order. This may produce short-term stability but weaken long-term learning and innovation. The review therefore suggests that harmony should not be understood as the absence of conflict. In modern management, harmony is more productive when it is combined with psychological safety and open communication.

Fourth, Confucian values support long-term orientation and sustainable performance. Confucian dynamism with perseverance, thrift, respect for order, and long-term thinking. These values are relevant to organizations that prioritize sustainability, gradual development, and intergenerational continuity. In business contexts, long-term orientation may support patient investment, employee development, and stable stakeholder relationships.

However, the use of Bond and Hofstede's work also requires caution. Although their study is influential, it represents a broad cultural analysis and was developed in a particular historical context. Its findings should not be treated as a complete explanation of contemporary Asian management. Modern organizations in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, and other cultural contexts differ significantly in governance systems, labor relations, digital transformation, and exposure to global management norms. For this reason, Confucian values should be analyzed as dynamic cultural resources rather than fixed cultural determinants.

The findings of this review suggest that Confucian values can enrich modern leadership theory, but only when they are interpreted critically and contextually. The contribution of Confucianism lies not in replacing Western management theories, but in expanding the ethical and relational foundations of leadership. Modern leadership theories often emphasize effectiveness, motivation, performance, and organizational change. Confucian thought adds a stronger concern for moral character, relational responsibility, social harmony, and self-cultivation.

The first theoretical insight from this review is that Confucian leadership operates through moral relationality. Leadership is not understood merely as a formal position or behavioral style, but as a moral relationship between leader and followers. Values such as *ren*, *yi*, *xin*, and *li* show that leaders are expected to care, act fairly, maintain trust, and behave appropriately according to their role. This perspective helps broaden leadership theory by showing that effectiveness cannot be separated from ethical conduct and relational responsibility.

The second insight is that Confucian leadership contains an internal tension between hierarchy and care. Many reviewed studies show that Confucianism supports benevolent leadership and employee welfare. At the same time, the same tradition also legitimizes hierarchy, obedience, and seniority. This dual character explains why Confucian leadership may produce both positive and negative outcomes. When hierarchy is combined with benevolence, fairness, and moral accountability, it can create stability and loyalty. When hierarchy is combined with authoritarianism and weak accountability, it can produce silence, dependency, and abuse of power.

This tension is especially important for contemporary organizations. Modern workplaces increasingly require creativity, collaboration, employee participation, and rapid adaptation. A leadership system that overemphasizes obedience may struggle to support these demands. Confucian leadership can remain relevant only if hierarchy is reconstructed as ethical responsibility rather than domination. Seniority should not be used to block competence, and respect for leaders should not prevent employees from raising concerns. In this sense, the future relevance of Confucian leadership depends on its ability to support what may be called participatory hierarchy: a structure that preserves respect and role clarity while allowing dialogue, voice, and innovation.

The third insight concerns the ambivalent meaning of harmony. The reviewed literature often treats harmony as a positive organizational outcome. This is valid to some extent because harmony can reduce destructive conflict and strengthen cooperation. Yet, harmony can also become a mechanism of control when employees are pressured to avoid disagreement. The distinction between constructive and superficial harmony is therefore crucial. Constructive harmony accepts difference and manages it ethically. Superficial harmony hides difference and protects appearances. For modern organizations, the most useful interpretation of Confucian harmony is not conflict avoidance but relationally responsible conflict management.

The fourth insight concerns the relationship between Confucian values and innovation. The reviewed sources show that Confucianism may support innovation through zhi, learning, discipline, and long-term orientation. At the same time, values such as seniority, face-saving, and respect for authority may reduce open experimentation and risk-taking. This contradiction shows that Confucianism cannot be classified simply as either supportive or obstructive toward innovation. Its effect depends on which values are emphasized. When zhi and self-cultivation are prioritized, Confucianism can support learning and improvement. When hierarchy and conformity dominate, it may restrict creativity.

The fifth insight relates to cross-cultural management. The integration of Confucian and Western management principles should not be understood as a simple combination of Eastern values and Western efficiency. Such a view risks oversimplifying both traditions. The review shows that Confucian values are most useful when they are translated into concrete governance mechanisms. For example, benevolence should be linked with employee well-being policies, integrity with transparent decision-making, harmony with psychological safety, and hierarchy with accountable leadership. Without institutional support, Confucian values may remain rhetorical or become tools for legitimizing unequal power relations.

From a practical perspective, this review indicates that organizations can integrate Confucian values in four ways. First, leadership development programs can include moral reflection, ethical decision-making, and self-cultivation. Second, human resource policies can translate benevolence into fair welfare systems, mentoring, and employee development. Third, organizational culture programs can use rituals and symbols to reinforce shared values, but these must be supported by transparent governance. Fourth, organizations should build channels for employee voice so that harmony does not become silence.

This review also shows that the empirical foundation of Confucian leadership research remains uneven. Some studies provide strong empirical insights into paternalistic leadership, trust, harmony, and organizational behavior, especially in Chinese contexts. Other studies are

conceptual and normative, relying on philosophical interpretation rather than organizational data. This creates a gap between conceptual richness and empirical verification. Future research should examine how Confucian values operate across different industries, generations, organizational types, and national contexts. Comparative studies between East Asian and non-East Asian organizations would also help clarify whether Confucian leadership has universal relevance or primarily context-specific value.

Overall, the results of this review indicate that Confucian values remain relevant to modern management, but their contribution should be understood critically. Confucianism offers valuable insights into ethical leadership, employee care, trust, harmony, and long-term orientation. Yet, it also carries risks when hierarchy, obedience, and harmony are applied without participation and accountability. The main scholarly contribution of this review is the identification of Confucian leadership as a paradoxical framework: it can humanize modern management through moral care and relational ethics, but it can also constrain modern organizations when interpreted rigidly. Its contemporary value depends on contextual adaptation, institutional safeguards, and the ability to balance virtue with transparency, harmony with voice, and hierarchy with participation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the core values of Confucianism demonstrate a high degree of relevance and can be constructively integrated into contemporary management and leadership practices. Values such as ren, yi, li, zhi, xin, and xiao provide an ethical and humanistic foundation that enriches modern leadership approaches. The integration of these values contributes to the enhancement of organizational ethics, employee loyalty, long-term performance, and internal harmony.

SUGGESTION

As a recommendation, organizations are encouraged to integrate Confucian values into leadership development, human resource policies, and governance systems in a contextual and adaptive manner. Further empirical research is also needed to examine the effectiveness of Confucian value integration across diverse cultural and industrial contexts. With a thoughtful and prudent approach, Confucianism may serve as a relevant source of wisdom for fostering ethical, human-centered, and globally competitive modern leadership.

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