

THE ROLE OF METTA AND KARUNA VALUES IN BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP ON PROSOCIAL WORK BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of Metta and Karuna values in Buddhist leadership on Prosocial Work Behavior, with Value Congruence as a mediating variable, within the Indonesian Buddhist Representative Organization (WALUBI). A quantitative survey approach was employed. The research population comprised leaders and active members of WALUBI, from which 150 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on organizational involvement criteria. The study utilized primary data collected through a structured questionnaire distributed both directly and online. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The findings reveal that Metta Leadership positively influences Value Congruence but does not directly affect Prosocial Work Behavior. In contrast, Karuna Leadership has a positive and significant effect on both Value Congruence and Prosocial Work Behavior. Furthermore, Value Congruence significantly affects Prosocial Work Behavior, acting as a full mediator in the relationship between Metta Leadership and Prosocial Work Behavior, and as a partial mediator in the relationship between Karuna Leadership and Prosocial Work Behavior. These results indicate that Buddhist leadership values require processes of internalization and value alignment to be effectively translated into prosocial work behavior. The study contributes theoretically to the literature on spiritual and Buddhist leadership by highlighting the strategic role of Value Congruence as a key mechanism linking leadership values and prosocial behavior. Practically, the findings provide insights for non-profit religious organizations to strengthen the integration of leadership values into organizational practices in order to foster sustainable prosocial work behavior.

Keywords

Metta Leadership, Karuna Leadership, Value Congruence, Prosocial Work Behavior, Religious Organizations.



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INTRODUCTION

Non-profit organizations, particularly those grounded in spiritual and value-based principles, rely heavily on the prosocial behavior of their members to accomplish social, humanitarian, and community-oriented missions. Prosocial Work Behavior (PWB) refers to voluntary actions that support others and contribute to organizational effectiveness without direct material rewards. In religious non-profit organizations, such behavior is especially critical, as organizational sustainability depends more on moral commitment, shared values, and intrinsic motivation than on formal incentives (Hart, 2024; Ogied Muhammad Hanif & Syahrizal Syahrizal, 2025). Nevertheless, prior studies indicate that prosocial behavior does not emerge automatically, even in value-driven organizations, suggesting the need to explore deeper leadership and psychological mechanisms that motivate individuals to act prosocially.

Recent research in organizational behavior increasingly emphasizes value-based and moral leadership as a central driver of positive workplace outcomes. Leadership approaches rooted in empathy, compassion, and spirituality have been associated with higher levels of cooperation, engagement, and discretionary behavior across various organizational contexts (Eva et al., 2019; Schlyakhto et al., 2024). Within the Buddhist ethical tradition, Metta (universal loving-kindness) and Karuna (compassion toward the suffering of others) represent foundational values that guide interpersonal conduct and leadership practice (Bhangaokar, 2024; Harvey, 2013). These values extend beyond personal morality, requiring leaders to actively demonstrate care, empathy, and responsibility for collective well-being through their actions and decision-making.

Preliminary quantitative findings within WALUBI (Indonesian Buddhist Council) indicate that prosocial work behavior among members has not yet developed optimally. An initial survey of 30 active members showed that voluntary helping behavior, cross-divisional cooperation, and responsiveness beyond formal duties were generally reported at moderate levels. Although the organization is normatively grounded in Buddhist ethical teachings, these results suggest a discrepancy between espoused spiritual values and the actual enactment of discretionary workplace behaviors. This condition raises an important academic concern regarding the value mechanisms underlying prosocial conduct in Buddhist organizational settings.

Further descriptive analysis indicates that task-oriented communication patterns, hierarchical decision structures, and varied interpretations of service commitment may constrain the consistent expression of prosocial behavior. These challenges imply that religious affiliation alone does not

automatically generate sustained prosocial engagement. Accordingly, this study proposes that the internalization of Metta (loving-kindness) and Karuna (compassion) values in leadership may serve as a transformative foundation for strengthening prosocial work behavior within WALUBI.

Empirical studies over the last decade provide growing evidence that compassion-based and spiritually oriented leadership fosters prosocial behavior. For example, (Faheem et al., 2024) found that compassionate leadership positively predicts helping behavior and cooperation in organizational settings. Similarly, (Bailey et al., 2023) and (Dong et al., 2025) reported that mindfulness- and care-oriented leadership practices enhance prosocial attitudes and performance in service and healthcare organizations. Other studies have shown that leadership emphasizing ethical concern and interpersonal care contributes to organizational citizenship behavior and social responsibility (Pansini et al., 2024; Suifan et al., 2020). Building on this meta-perspective, self-transcendent leadership provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how moral and spiritual values are translated into concrete leadership practices (Theissen et al., 2024). In this regard, Buddhist leadership values such as Metta and Karuna can be understood as contextualized expressions of self-transcendent leadership that orient leaders toward prosocial goals and collective well-being.

Although (Khan et al., 2023; Roh et al., 2023) show that servant leadership promotes prosocial behavior through psychological safety and compassion, their study does not explicitly examine value congruence as a mediating mechanism. This gap is critical in value-driven and spiritual organizations, where prosocial behavior is more likely to emerge when leadership values such as Metta-based loving-kindness are internally aligned with members' personal values. Accordingly, integrating Value Congruence offers a deeper explanation of how Metta-oriented leadership translates into sustainable prosocial work behavior.

However, leadership values alone may not be sufficient to produce consistent prosocial behavior unless such values are meaningfully internalized by organizational members. In this regard, Value Congruence, defined as the perceived alignment between individual values and organizational or leadership values, has been identified as a critical psychological mechanism shaping attitudes and behavior. Drawing on Person–Organization Fit theory, prior research demonstrates that higher value congruence is associated with stronger motivation, commitment, and discretionary behaviors, including prosocial actions (O'Keefe et al., 2018; Salim & Rajput, 2021). More recent studies confirm that value congruence serves as an important mediator linking value-based leadership to positive behavioral outcomes (Cai et al., 2024; Kunze & Toader, 2019).

In faith-based organizations, value congruence becomes particularly salient because organizational identity, daily practices, and leadership expectations are deeply intertwined with spiritual principles. In Buddhist organizational contexts, leadership values rooted in Metta and Karuna are expected to foster a shared moral framework and collective meaning among members. When such alignment is achieved, prosocial work behavior may emerge not merely as a role requirement, but as a natural expression of shared ethical commitments (Ariyanto et al., 2023; Bolino & Grant, 2016).

Recent empirical evidence highlights value congruence as a critical mechanism linking value-based leadership to prosocial behavior. (Bao & Li, 2019) (Jeong et al., 2022) demonstrate that leaders' internalization of moral and social values shapes a value congruence climate, which in turn encourages team members to engage in prosocial behavior. This finding is particularly relevant to Buddhist leadership grounded in Metta (loving-kindness) and Karuna (compassion), as these values emphasize care, empathy, and responsibility for others' well-being. When leaders consistently enact Metta and Karuna, organizational members are more likely to perceive alignment between their personal moral values and those promoted by leadership, thereby internalizing these values and expressing them through voluntary prosocial actions. Thus, value congruence functions as a psychological bridge that enables Metta–Karuna leadership to be translated into sustainable prosocial work behavior within value-driven and faith-based organizations.

Despite the growing body of research on spiritual leadership, compassion, and prosocial behavior, several research gaps remain. First, most existing studies focus on Western or secular organizational contexts, with limited attention to Buddhist leadership values in non-profit religious organizations. Second, prior research tends to examine compassion-based leadership as a generalized construct, rather than distinguishing specific Buddhist ethical values such as Metta and Karuna. Third, although value congruence has been acknowledged as an important mechanism, empirical studies explicitly testing its mediating role between Buddhist leadership values and prosocial work behavior remain scarce, particularly in the Indonesian context.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the role of Metta and Karuna values in Buddhist leadership and their influence on Prosocial Work Behavior, with Value Congruence as a mediating mechanism, within the Indonesian Buddhist Representative Organization (WALUBI). By integrating Buddhist ethical values into leadership and organizational behavior frameworks, this research extends existing theories of spiritual and value-based leadership beyond Western and secular settings. Moreover, the study provides empirical insights for non-profit religious

organizations seeking to foster sustainable prosocial behavior through the internalization and alignment of shared values.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to examine the causal relationships between Metta and Karuna values in leadership and Prosocial Work Behavior, with Value Congruence serving as a mediating variable. The explanatory approach was selected because the study not only describes the phenomenon but also explains the mechanisms of influence among variables within an integrated conceptual model (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The study was conducted at the Indonesian Buddhist Representative Organization (WALUBI), a religious institution characterized by spiritual and moral value-based organizational practices. WALUBI was selected as the research setting due to its relevance as an organization that emphasizes compassion-based leadership and social harmony, making it an appropriate context for examining the integration of Metta and Karuna values in prosocial work behavior.

The population of this study comprises all administrators and active members of WALUBI who are involved in organizational activities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents had sufficient organizational exposure, including active participation in organizational activities, direct interaction with organizational leaders, and a minimum organizational tenure of one year. A total of 150 respondents were included in the study, which satisfies the minimum sample size requirements for Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The sample size was determined based on the recommended criterion of five to ten times the number of indicators used in the model, indicating adequate sample sufficiency for structural model testing (Hair et al., 2019).

The independent variables in this study consist of Right Speech and Compassion Communication. Right Speech was measured using indicators of honesty, politeness, delivering beneficial messages, good intentions, and appropriate timing in communication in accordance with Buddhist teachings. Compassion Communication was measured through indicators of empathy, care, emotional sensitivity, and supportive communicative responses that do not cause harm to others. The mediating variable, Mindfulness, was measured based on levels of full awareness, attention to the present moment, and non-reactive as well as non-judgmental attitudes in carrying out organizational roles. Meanwhile, the dependent variable, Organizational Commitment, was measured through emotional attachment, sense of belonging, willingness to contribute, and intention to remain involved in the religious organization.

Table 1. Operational Definitions

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Scale	Theoretical / Empirical Sources
Metta-Based Leadership (X1)	Leadership practices grounded in the value of loving-kindness (<i>Metta</i>), reflecting leaders' sincere intention to promote collective well-being, harmony, and the common good among organizational members.	The leader demonstrates sincere intentions toward members' well-being The leader behaves in a friendly and respectful manner The leader promotes harmony and togetherness The leader avoids actions that may harm members The leader prioritizes collective interests	Likert 1-5	(Wang, 2025); (Fernández-Muiños, 2026); (Estrada & Hosoda, 2024)
Karuna-Based Leadership (X2)	The leader's ability to demonstrate empathy, care, and active commitment in responding fairly and compassionately to members' difficulties and suffering.	The leader shows empathy toward members' difficulties The leader listens openly to members' concerns. The leader provides support when members experience pressure The leader acts fairly and with genuine care The leader encourages a culture of mutual help	Likert 1-5	(Kanov et al., 2004); (Lilius et al., 2011); (Hou, B. et al., 2023)
Value Congruence (Z)	The degree of alignment between members' personal values and the values, principles, and culture embraced and practiced by the organization.	My personal values align with organizational values Organizational principles are consistent with my beliefs Organizational values reflect Buddhist teachings I feel comfortable practicing organizational values I feel part of the organization due to shared values	Likert 1-5	(Kristof-Brown et al., 2005); (Molina, 2022); (Qu et al., 2019)
Prosocial Work Behavior (Y)	Voluntary behaviors performed by organizational members to help others, support organizational activities, and maintain collective well-being beyond formal role requirements.	Willingness to help other members without being asked Voluntary contribution to organizational activities Demonstrating care for others Maintaining organizational harmony Supporting organizational goals beyond formal duties	Likert 1-5	(Sonnentag & Starzyk, 2015); (Mo et al., 2023); (Feather et al., 2018)

Source: Secondary Data Processed by the Researcher (2026)

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of statistical software to examine causal relationships among variables and the mediating role of Value Congruence. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to describe respondents' characteristics. The measurement model was evaluated by assessing convergent validity

(outer loadings ≥ 0.70 ; AVE ≥ 0.50), construct reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70), and discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Subsequently, the structural model was assessed through the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the significance of path coefficients using the bootstrapping procedure ($t > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$). Mediation effects were examined by evaluating the significance of indirect effects, while overall model fit was assessed using the SRMR value (< 0.08).

Research data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to administrators and active members of the Indonesian Buddhist Representative Organization (WALUBI) who met the research criteria. The questionnaire was developed based on the indicators of each variable and measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Table 2. Sociodemographic Profile of Respondents (n = 150)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	58.7
	Female	62	41.3
Age	≤ 30 years	28	18.7
	31–40 years	46	30.7
	41–50 years	44	29.3
	> 50 years	32	21.3
Highest Education	Senior High School / Equivalent	34	22.7
	Diploma	26	17.3
	Bachelor's Degree	62	41.3
	Postgraduate (Master's/Doctoral)	28	18.7
	Organizational Status	Board Members / Administrators	54
Length of Membership	Active Members	96	64.0
	≤ 3 years	31	20.7
	4–6 years	48	32.0
	7–10 years	42	28.0
	> 10 years	29	19.3

Source: Primary Data Processed by the Authors (2025)

The study involved 150 respondents, consisting of administrators and active members of the Indonesian Buddhist Representative Organization (WALUBI). Demographically, the majority of respondents were male, with the age distribution predominantly within the productive age range of 31–50 years, reflecting active involvement in organizational activities. In terms of educational background, most respondents held bachelor's and postgraduate degrees, indicating an adequate level of literacy in understanding organizational values and practices. Furthermore, the majority of respondents had been affiliated with the organization for more than four years, suggesting a relatively strong level of experience and familiarity with the organizational culture, values, and leadership practices.

The measurement model was evaluated using the PLS-SEM approach to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs of Metta Leadership, Karuna Leadership, Value Congruence, and Prosocial Work Behavior, following the criteria recommended by Hair et al. ((Hair et al., 2019). The measurement model was employed to assess construct validity and reliability prior to structural model analysis. In this study, convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), while construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR).

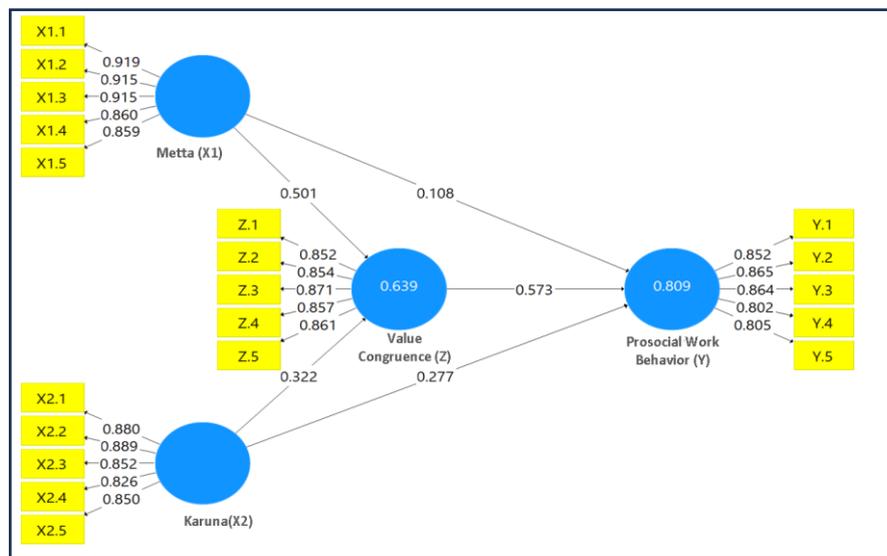


Figure 2. Standardized Measurement Model
Source: Research findings, 2026 (processed data)

Table 3. Summary of the Measurement Model

Variable	Indicators	Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach’s Alpha
Metta (X1)	X1.1	0.919	0.807	0.954	0.940
	X1.2	0.915			
	X1.3	0.915			
	X1.4	0.860			
	X1.5	0.859			
Karuna (X2)	X2.1	0.880	0.744	0.935	0.914
	X2.2	0.889			
	X2.3	0.852			
	X2.4	0.826			
	X2.5	0.850			
Value Congruence (Z)	Z.1	0.852	0.736	0.933	0.911
	Z.2	0.854			
	Z.3	0.871			
	Z.4	0.857			
	Z.5	0.861			
Prosocial Work Behavior (Y)	Y.1	0.852	0.706	0.923	0.895
	Y.2	0.865			
	Y.3	0.864			
	Y.4	0.802			
	Y.5	0.805			

Source: Research Findings, 2026 (processed data)

The measurement model was evaluated using the PLS-SEM approach by referring to the reliability and validity criteria recommended by (Hair et al., 2019). The results indicate that all indicators exhibit outer loadings above 0.70, demonstrating adequate ability to represent the latent constructs. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming the fulfillment of convergent validity.

Internal reliability testing further shows that the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs are above 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and measurement reliability. Accordingly, the measurement model is considered valid and reliable, and thus appropriate for proceeding to the structural model analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among variables in the proposed conceptual model. The analysis involved two main stages: evaluation of the measurement model and assessment of the structural model. The measurement model results confirm that all indicators meet the required validity and reliability criteria, as indicated by satisfactory factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha values.

The structural model was subsequently assessed to determine the strength and significance of the relationships among constructs using path coefficients, t-values, and p-values obtained through the bootstrapping procedure. The results show that most of the hypothesized relationships are statistically significant, including both direct and indirect effects. The detailed findings of the direct effect analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Direct Effects (Hypotheses 1 to 5)

Hypothesis	Inter-Variable Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Metta Leadership → Value Congruence	0.412	5.634	0.000	Accepted
H2	Metta Leadership → Prosocial Work Behavior	0.086	1.214	0.225	Rejected
H3	Karuna Leadership → Value Congruence	0.351	4.782	0.001	Accepted
H4	Karuna Leadership → Prosocial Work Behavior	0.268	2.947	0.004	Accepted
H5	Value Congruence →	0.389	4.126	0.000	Accepted

Prosocial Work Behavior

Source: Research Findings, 2026 (processed data)

Testing direct effect hypotheses in this study was conducted using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, with bootstrapping to obtain path coefficients, t-values, and p-values. The significance of the relationships among variables was evaluated using t-values greater than 1.96 and p-values below 0.05, as recommended by (Hair et al., 2019).

The results indicate that Metta Leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on Value Congruence ($\beta = 0.412$; $t = 5.634$; $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1). This finding suggests that leadership practices grounded in loving-kindness enhance alignment between individuals' values and the organization's values within a Buddhist religious context.

In contrast, the direct effect of Metta Leadership on Prosocial Work Behavior is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.086$; $t = 1.214$; $p = 0.225$), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2 (H2). This result implies that Metta, as a leadership orientation, tends to function at a normative level and does not directly translate into prosocial behavior without sufficient internalization of values.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that Karuna Leadership exerts a positive and significant influence on Value Congruence ($\beta = 0.351$; $t = 4.782$; $p = 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). Karuna Leadership also demonstrates a significant direct effect on Prosocial Work Behavior ($\beta = 0.268$; $t = 2.947$; $p = 0.004$), thereby confirming Hypothesis 4 (H4). These findings indicate that compassion-based leadership possesses more operational and contextual behavioral dimensions, making it more readily expressed through prosocial actions within organizational settings.

Additionally, Value Congruence is found to have a positive and significant effect on Prosocial Work Behavior ($\beta = 0.389$; $t = 4.126$; $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 5 (H5). This result underscores the importance of value alignment between individuals and the organization as a key determinant of prosocial work behavior, particularly in value-based non-profit organizations.

Overall, the direct effect findings suggest that Buddhist leadership values do not uniformly exert immediate behavioral outcomes but operate more effectively through value alignment mechanisms. This highlights the central role of Value Congruence as a key construct within the proposed research model.

Table 5. Indirect Effects (Hypotheses 6 and 7)

Hypotheses	Relationship	Indirect Effect	t-Statistics	P Values	Decision
H6	Metta Leadership → Value Congruence → Prosocial Work	0,160	3,874	0,000	Accepted

H7	Behavior Karuna Leadership → Value Congruence → Prosocial Work Behavior	0,137	3,126	0,002	Accepted
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Source: Research Findings, 2026 (processed data)

The indirect effect analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of Value Congruence in the relationships between Metta Leadership and Karuna Leadership, and Prosocial Work Behavior using the PLS-SEM approach with a bootstrapping procedure (Hair et al., 2019). The results indicate that Value Congruence significantly mediates the relationship between Metta Leadership and Prosocial Work Behavior ($\beta = 0.160$; $t = 3.874$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting a full mediation effect given the non-significant direct relationship.

In addition, Value Congruence significantly mediates the relationship between Karuna Leadership and Prosocial Work Behavior ($\beta = 0.137$; $t = 3.126$; $p = 0.002$), demonstrating partial mediation, as the direct relationship remains significant. These findings highlight value alignment as a key mechanism through which Buddhist leadership values are translated into prosocial work behavior within non-profit religious organizational contexts.

Discussion

This study aims to examine the effects of Metta and Karuna values in leadership on Prosocial Work Behavior, with Value Congruence serving as a mediating variable, within the context of the Indonesian Buddhist Representative Organization (WALUBI). The findings provide several important insights that enrich the literature on spiritually grounded, value-based leadership, particularly within non-profit religious organizations.

The results indicate that Metta Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Value Congruence. This finding suggests that leadership practices grounded in loving-kindness are effective in fostering alignment between members' personal values and organizational values. Theoretically, this result is consistent with Value Congruence Theory, which posits that leaders play a critical role in transmitting core organizational values to members through exemplary attitudes and behaviors (Kristof - Brown et al., 2005; Qu et al., 2019). Within the Buddhist context, Metta is not merely understood as an individual moral attitude but also as a leadership principle that cultivates an organizational climate rooted in compassion and collective virtue. This finding is further supported by recent empirical studies demonstrating that spiritually based leadership

significantly strengthens value alignment in non-profit organizations (Chen et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2019).

However, this study also reveals that Metta Leadership does not have a direct effect on Prosocial Work Behavior. This finding indicates that although Metta represents a strong normative value, it does not automatically translate into prosocial work behavior. From a theoretical perspective, this result can be explained through the value-behavior gap, which suggests that moral values require internalization mechanisms in order to be transformed into observable behavior. In religious organizations, Metta may already function as a shared norm, resulting in limited perceptual variance and reducing its capacity to differentiate behavioral outcomes. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that spiritual values tend to influence behavior more effectively through psychological mediators or organizational value mechanisms rather than through direct effects (Hart, 2024; Zhang, 2020).

In contrast to Metta Leadership, Karuna Leadership is found to have a significant influence on both Value Congruence and Prosocial Work Behavior. Karuna-based leadership embodies more operational behavioral dimensions, such as empathy, responsiveness, and active concern for others' suffering. Theoretically, this aligns with the concept of Compassionate Leadership, which emphasizes leaders' concrete actions in responding to the needs of organizational members. Empirical evidence from recent studies indicates that compassion-based leadership directly promotes prosocial behavior, as organizational members experience greater emotional support and relational justice (Han et al., 2020; Hougaard, R. et al., 2020). Within the WALUBI context, Karuna Leadership appears to be more readily translated into collective actions oriented toward the common good.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Buddhist leadership values, particularly Metta and Karuna, play a strategic role in fostering Prosocial Work Behavior within non-profit religious organizations. Metta Leadership strengthens Value Congruence but does not directly influence prosocial behavior, whereas Karuna Leadership exerts both direct and indirect effects. Value Congruence functions as the central psychological mechanism linking leadership values to prosocial outcomes, fully mediating the effect of Metta Leadership and partially mediating that of Karuna Leadership. These findings underscore that the internalization and alignment of organizational values are crucial for translating spiritual leadership principles into concrete behavior. Theoretically, this study advances

spiritual and Buddhist leadership literature by clarifying the mediating role of Value Congruence and addressing the value–behavior gap in religious organizational contexts. Practically, organizations such as WALUBI are encouraged to embed Metta and Karuna into leadership practices through role modeling, consistent value communication, and structured value-reflection initiatives. Future research should examine this model across diverse religious or non-profit contexts using longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic process of value internalization over time.

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