



Social Interaction and Prosocial Behavior Through the Lens of Social Psychology

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Abstract

This paper examines the process by which social interaction acts as a social catalyst to prosocial behavior; the analysis of this paper will be based on the concept of social psychology and within the discipline of management. The study employs a qualitative method to examine the relational processes involved in empathy, reciprocity, group belonging, and trust and limits to cooperative behavior through barriers of conflict, prejudice, and mistrust. The information was gathered through the intensive interviews of the respondents at both organizational and community levels and it was found out that PR sociality is not a characteristic of individuals but a socially based phenomenon created in the process of continuing communication. The results reveal that, in case a sense of empathy and emotional bonding is created through social interaction, people are more ready to offer assistance beyond their self-immediate selfishness. Reciprocity and mutual obligation are the forces of stability that support the prosocial behavior and shared identity reinforces collective orientation and cooperation. On the other hand, war and discrimination disintegrate social ties, and the absence of trust limits the desire to participate in the helping actions. The work brings to the management literature the repackaged meaning of PR sociality as a strategic capital as opposed to an accidental by-product of organizational existence. The implications it brings out paint a picture to show that leaders and managers should be vigilant enough to create an environment that fosters trust, inclusivity, and a sense of shared belonging to achieve the performance advantages of prosocial behavior. With the ability to combine the social psychology of understanding management into the discourse, this research presents the significance of social processes at the micro-level in the determination of macro-level organizational outputs, which not only provides a theoretical enrichment to the field, but also practical advice on the establishment of robust collaborative structures.

Introduction

One of the core themes in social psychology is the place of empathy in social prosocial behavior. Empathy makes people look at the feelings of others, to feel as the others feel which generates an incentive to offer some help (Ferguson et al., 2021). Emotional sharing (i.e., conversation, collaborative activity) in interaction enhances empathic interdependence and therefore increases the probability of prosocial behavior (Weisz et al., 2021). There is also the principle of reciprocity where social interactions will foster a feeling of indebtedness to pay generosity with generosity (Packard & Burnham, 2021). The continuity of PR sociality in groups, which is otherwise neither explicit nor implicit in naturally occurring groups, is

provided through continued interactions of these reciprocal patterns, which constitute the foundations of trust and collaboration in such groups. Although a lot of research has been conducted to date, even on the prosocial behavior, a lot of it has been based on quantitative data like the surveys or experiments to measure such variables as the level of empathy, the rate of helpfulness or the tendencies of altruism (Batson, 2022). Although useful, such approaches tend to ignore the subtle, context-specific ways people understand their interactions and how such experiences inform their prosocial readiness to act. A qualitative approach will give a deeper look at the lived experiences of others in their social worlds that expose what they attribute to helping/sharing/cooperating. This interpretive dimension comes into play especially when it comes to the discovery of the impact of cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and situational cues on prosocial dynamics that numbers cannot define (Gilbert & Van Gordon, 2023).

This paper was, thus, aimed at examining the concept of prosocial behavior being promoted by social interaction using the social psychology framework. Through the analysis of narratives, experiences and interpretations of individuals in their day-to-day social interactions, this study demonstrates how empathy, reciprocity and group belonging are developed in the course of interaction. Simultaneously, it recognizes the obstacles that may cause PR sociality to be hindered, e.g. prejudice or distrust (Ukil, et al., 2024; Batson, 2023). By doing this, the study adds to the knowledge on social construction and maintenance of prosocial behavior that would be relevant to reinforce social cohesion in diverse and rapidly shifting societies.

Method

The qualitative research design was used to investigate how socialization and prosocial behavior relate in the lens of social psychology. The qualitative method was used since it provides an opportunity to investigate the lived experiences, perceptions and meanings that participants assign to routine social interactions in a depth manner. This study aimed to capture the richness and complexity of human interactions in their natural course as opposed to quantitative studies that quantify prosocial behavior through controlled experiment or surveys. Qualitative inquiry is very interpretative and can be described as appropriate in the comprehension of how individuals at an individual level perceive the role played by empathy, reciprocity and social norms in influencing prosocial behaviors.

Research Participants and setting

This research was carried out in a community-based environment where daily social relationships take place. These were schools, neighborhood groups and informal community meetings, which offered good setting in which various prosocial behavior could be observed. The participants were sampled through purposive sampling where the participants were to have the relevant experiences of interaction in their social settings. The sample was chosen so that 20 people of various age groups, sexes, and social statuses were represented to obtain a range of opinions. This diversity contributed to the ability to offer a holistic picture of the way prosocial behavior is performed and construed in various social settings. Each of the participants was made aware of the purpose of the study and gave a consent before the study.

Data Collection Techniques

To guarantee depth and credibility, qualitative methods were used in the collection of data. Semi-structured interviews were the main data source, as they enabled the participants to look back at their own experience in socializing and prosocial behavior. Interview guides contained open-ended questions encouraging the participants to share situations that involved them helping, sharing, cooperating or even when they felt empathy during interaction with others. All interviews took place between 45 and 60 minutes and were recorded with consent. Besides interviews, non-participant observation was carried out in community and group activities. The approach enabled the researcher to be a passive observer of social interactions in natural settings, be mindful of the verbal and non-verbal expressions, patterns of collaboration, prosocial act emergence, etc. During the observations, field notes were kept to provide the background information that may not be seen during interviews. The researcher also documented the reflections of the researcher through reflexive journaling and reduced the possibilities of bias in making interpretations.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected and it is the appropriate method to identify, analyze and interpret recurring patterns in qualitative data. The analysis started by transcribing all interviews and then going through the data by reading it again and again to familiarize with it. The first part was followed by initial coding on excerpts on empathy, reciprocity, cooperation, barriers to PR sociality, and the impact of social norms. These codes were condensed into general themes that focused on the nature of the experiences of participants. The analysis involved the use of observational data and field notes to triangulate the findings so that the conclusions would be made based on several data sources. The concluding themes were the subjective meaning that the subjects had attached to the prosocial behavior and the social psychological concepts that were broad and defined these experiences.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this research indicate how the social interaction exhibits the intricate influences of socially productive behavior in the organization and community. Instead of describing PR sociality as an individual characteristic, the results show that it is a relational process occurring in empathy, reciprocity, shared identity, and trust processes, and also limited by conflict, prejudice and lack of trust. The dynamics were described in terms of the narratives of the participants, which shed light on the fact that routine interactions can foster cooperation and solidarity or can undermine the quality of relationships and diminish the desire to support others. Results presentation is thus themed to reflect the key patterns that keenly emerge in the data aimed at pointing out both the positive and negative conditions that orient towards prosocial action.

Social Interaction as A Catalyst for Empathy and Emotional Connection

Among the themes that come out strongly in the findings is that social interaction is central in the process of developing empathy and emotional attachment among individuals. The participants always reported how they were able to gain more insight into the views and feelings of others because they were able to talk to them on a daily basis, do some sort of cooperative work, or even during just regular meetings. Empathy was not occurring in a

vacuum and empathy was developed due to the possibilities that the interaction enabled people to share stories, read emotional signs, and react with empathy. This conforms to the view of social psychology which posits that empathy is best developed in the interpersonal situations where people can observe the situation of others and clearly understand it. Some of them described how talking to other people enabled them to put themselves in the position of another human being, and they are more likely to react in favorable manners. An example is one disciple stated:

“When I talk with my neighbors about their struggles, I can really feel what they are going through. It makes me want to help, even in small ways, because I know how heavy their burdens are.”

These experiences show that discussions and personal interactions are responses that trigger empathy. The closeness of a face-to-face interaction, when it involves a combination of a verbal expression and an emotional tone, made the participants more sensitive to the feelings of other people, which prompted them to act prosocially. Such instances also improved empathy when the participants were subjected to emotional expressions of other individuals during their social interactions. The first-hand observation of happiness, sorrow, or anger created a sense of emotion that was not implacable by words. One of the participants indicated this in the following way,

“Sometimes I don’t even need someone to tell me they are sad. Just by seeing their face and the way they act, I feel it too, and I want to comfort them.”

This is indicative of the idea that social interaction does not only give information, but also embodied experiences that brings about emotional attunement. Emphasis On people being physically present and the subtle forms of communication in the interaction process, empathy became an inevitable result of common social life. The second valuable learning was that empathy and emotional bond could be formed during long-term interactions and not short or shallow. The respondents pointed out that recurring experiences led to trust and familiarity that subsequently enhanced their understanding and care towards others. Their emotional connection was able to grow through the ongoing engagement as they could get to know more about the situation of others, their values, and struggles. This observation demonstrates that the fertile ground of prosocial dispositions can be fostered by the continuous relationships, and not by the single ones.

The results indicate that socially-acquired empathy directly affected the likelihood of the participants to perform prosocial behaviors. Having created emotional attachment, people became personally interested in the welfare of other people, and this inspired them to offer help, exchange resources, or just offer moral support. The process has been pointed out by social psychology as a major mechanism of altruistic action: when individuals feel the feelings of others in a way that makes them think they are their own, they tend more to act in order to soothe those feelings. The accounts of the participants supported this theory because it was always empathy that developed in the course of interaction and was always associated with physical displays of compassion and collaboration. In general, the data show that social interaction is one of the causes of empathy and emotional connection, which preconditions prosocial behavior. Interaction helps people go beyond self-interest and attends to the needs of others by providing them with opportunities to form perspective-taking, emotional resonance and enduring relational bonds. This result supports the significance of everyday experiences in

the development of prosocial orientations and emphasizes the importance of creating social spaces where people can feel openness, communication, and care towards each other.

Reciprocity And Mutual Obligation as Foundations of Prosocial Action

The importance of the reciprocity and mutual obligation as the key principles of the prosocial behavior is another major theme identified as a result of the findings. The participants underlined that they helped, shared, and cooperated not only due to the act of kindness but also because there was an unspoken rule that they should support one another whenever it was necessary. Reciprocity served as a social norm and a moral guiding principle and it influenced the way people related to other people within the society. The notion of reciprocity as one of the norms that govern human relations in social psychology has been long in the limelight, and the experiences of the participants supported the fact that the expectation of reciprocity stimulated prosocial behavior. Some of the respondent's spoke of reciprocity as a cycle of events in their day to day lives, where goodwill breeds more goodwill. One participant explained,

“When someone helps me, I feel I cannot just ignore it. I have to help them back, maybe not immediately, but when the time comes. It’s like a duty we all have toward each other.”

Such moral responsibility is an expression of the concept of generalized reciprocity as help is not necessarily reciprocal in a direct or immediate sense, but rather a cycle of mutual support. These practices help to establish the trust of people in the community and ensure long-term cooperation. Reciprocity was also considered as a chain of balancing and equity in social relations. The participants stated that they perceived prosocial behavior as meaningful when it involved a two-way relationship and not a one-sided relationship. As one participant put it,

“I help my friends, and they also help me. That is what makes our friendship strong. If only one person keeps giving, the relationship feels unfair.”

This assertion shows the awareness of the participants that balanced reciprocity enhances social bonds because it makes everyone feel cherished and honored. In the absence of reciprocity, people complained that they felt exploited or undervalued and this might reduce their desire to repeat prosocial behaviors. Curiously enough, mutual obligation was not necessarily seen in the context of direct repayment but in the context of an extended social obligation towards the community. Participants spoke about the extension of prosocial behavior beyond close ties to neighbors and other familiar people as driven by the notion that such generosity would be returned to them at some point. One of the participants explained this view by saying,

“Even if I don’t know someone very well, I try to help them because I believe one day, when I need help, others will also be there for me.”

This brings out the functionality of reciprocity as a group phenomenon in the societal aim that goes beyond person-to-person interactions, and plays into a greater communal unity. The results also indicated that the reciprocity and obligation generated an attitude of moral responsibility that motivated people to act even in the cases where the personal gain was not easily noticeable. Assistance to others was regarded as putting money into the social cloth so that supportive networks were not weak. This is echoed by social psychological theories that indicate that prosocial behavior is maintained not only through empathy but also social

convention that focus on fairness and cooperation. These commitments helped participants consolidate the values of their communities by providing mutual and group support, which fostered interpersonal and group relationships. On balance, these stories by participants indicate that reciprocity and mutual obligation are potent triggers of prosocial behavior. They demonstrate that the process of helping behavior is seldom a single phenomenon but is placed within a system of reciprocal and responsible interaction. Give-and-take, by making prosocial behavior framed this way, people guarantee the persistence of trust and cooperation in their social circles. This theme highlights the point that PR sociality is not just an individual disposition, it is a relational practice and a communal norm that is maintained.

Group Belonging and Shared Identity Encouraging Cooperative Behavior

The results indicated that the sense of belonging and collective identity in groups is a vast contributor that promotes cooperative behavior and pro-social actions. Members continually stressed that belonging to a group (family, a group of friends, a school community, a neighborhood association) gave them a sense of solidarity that inspired them to join forces and help each other. Social psychology emphasizes that group identity is important in determining the behavior as people tend to behave in a manner that will be beneficial to the in-groups to which they have emotional and psychological attachment. This principle found a strong reflection in the recounts of participants; being a part of a group gave them a motivation and a compulsion to collaborate. Cooperation was defined by many participants as a near-reflexive reaction when they felt strongly belonging to a group. They also observed that when members of the group had common goals, values or culture, then prosocial behaviors were bound to come into picture as a way of ensuring group harmonies. One participant stated,

“In our community, we feel like one big family. When there is an event or someone needs help, everyone joins in. We don’t think twice because we see it as our responsibility as part of the group.”

The quote shows that the sense of belonging leads to a sense of shared responsibility, cooperation is not felt as a burden but as an identity and allegiance. The results also indicated that collective identity diminished individual self-interest, and promoted group behavior. According to the participants, their desire to cooperate grew when they felt that they were part of a common we, though not alone individuals. This was specially seen in the community-based activities like cleaning of communal areas or culturally organized events. One participant explained,

“When we work together, I don’t feel like I’m doing it just for myself. I feel proud because we are doing it as a group, and the success belongs to all of us.”

These experiences demonstrate that group identity turns cooperation into a source of pride and belonging and strengthens prosocial tendencies due to emotional satisfaction. Shared identity in the narratives was not confined to practical cooperation but stretched into the emotional field, which served as a safety net to members. The sense of belonging also gave them a sense of security that they would have someone to lean on whenever in need of such support and this too motivated people to put in efforts towards group work. Even when tasks were very challenging, participants observed that knowledge that they were not alone enabled them to push on. This mutual trust, which is based on the belonging to a group, supported the persistence of prosocial behavior under various circumstances. Interestingly also, the results

showed that group belonging was also facilitating cooperation in the formal or structured activities but also in informal daily interactions. Respondents explained that group identity promoted little acts of PR sociality, including sharing food, providing transport or taking care of one another children. Such small yet significant gestures were added up with the course of time to create stronger connections and secure cooperative norms. The information, in general, indicates that group membership and common identity are strong forces of cooperation. Groups offer the social structure in which prosocial behavior is promoted and maintained through the emotional connection, loyalty and trust present. This result is consistent with the perspective in social psychology that identity-based belonging plays a central role in cooperation, in that it accords individual motivations with collective well-being. The experiences of the participants bring out the fact that PR sociality thrives when individuals perceive themselves not as single actors but as components of a bigger whole.

Barriers To PR Sociality in Cases of Conflict, Prejudice, Or Lack of Trust

Although several respondents emphasized that social interaction stimulated empathy, reciprocity, and cooperation, the results also showed that there were other strong impediments that curbed prosocial action. Disunity, bias, and distrust were always characterized as circumstances that undermined the readiness to assist other individuals or to participate in collaborative activities. These obstacles reveal how weak the concept of PR sociality can be, that it is not just the individual dispositions, but also the quality of social relations and the social environment in general. One of the most immediate deterrents to prosocial behavior was found to be conflict. According to the participants, during the period when conflicts occurred, be they personal differences, be they competition, and unresolved tensions, individuals were less likely to assist those with whom they had negative ties. One participant admitted,

“If I have a problem with someone, honestly, I don’t feel the urge to help them. Even if they are in trouble, I hesitate because the conflict is still in my heart.”

This reaction demonstrates that unsettled interpersonal conflicts may take precedence over empathy and reciprocity, and PR sociality, in turn, is likely to be contingent upon the relationship. When this occurred, conflict not only interrupted collaboration, but also generated emotional distance that curtailed sympathetic reactions. Another barrier that was pointed out in the accounts of participants was prejudice. Antiethnic, anti-religious, or anti-social status stereotypes were characterized as decreasing the willingness to act prosaically. Some of the participants observed that individuals were inclined to favor assisting individuals they believed to belong to their own group and hesitate when dealing with out-groups. One participant reflected,

“Sometimes people only help those who are like them. If someone is from a different background, they are ignored, even though they also need help.”

This quote helps highlight the way in which bias reduces the extent to which prosocial rules can be applied universally, reducing the empathies and areas of cooperation to in-groups. The purpose of such selective PR sociality is to draw attention to the importance of social identity in the development of not only positive but also exclusionary behaviors. Absence of trust was one more factor highlighted as a critical element that deterred prosocial action. Respondents also added that in situations where integrity and trust were doubted, individuals were reluctant to offer any support because they feared to be taken advantage of. One participant explained,

“If I don’t trust someone, I won’t give my time or resources, because I worry, they might misuse it. Trust is the first step before helping.”

This sentence draws attention to the safeguards that people use when one does not trust others. In the absence of trust, the prosocial actions are viewed as dangerous instead of positive and as a result, people avoid cooperative actions. Trust in this manner served as a precondition to PR sociality, lack of which posed a big obstacle. The results also imply that these barriers tended to work in combination with each other. Indicatively, prejudice might lead to mistrust and so on, constant conflicts might form stereotypes that further promoted prejudice. These dynamics combined to create a situation where the prosocial behavior was harshly limited. These barriers, in contrast to the previous themes which focused on empathy, reciprocity, and belonging, disclose the circumstances in which PR sociality is suppressed or derailed. The stories of the participants show that prosocial conduct does not always ensure in any social interaction. The bases of empathy, reciprocity and cooperation can be undermined through conflict, prejudice, and the absence of trust leading to selective or no PR sociality. These results emphasize the need to tackle the social divide and establish trust in order to establish conditions in which prosocial behavior may be effective. In social psychology terms, they also explain the two-sidedness of social interaction that may promote altruism and solidarity or strengthen exclusion and self-defense, based upon the quality of relations and group processes.

Implications of Findings for Managing Prosocial Behavior in Organizations

The implications of the findings of this study are immense in explaining how prosocial behavior can either be promoted or discouraged or encouraged in the management and organizational life context. PR sociality, as the paper shows, is never a priori - it is socially constructed, relationally reproduced and very dependent on the quality of interaction. This fact prompts management scholars and practitioners to transcend simplistic approaches to motivation or incentive, and accept that the micro-social dynamics of trust, empathy, reciprocity, and group identity play a decisive role in whether employees, work groups, and societies participate in cooperative or self-protective action (Fine & Hallett, 2022; Vogeley, 2022; Saucedo et al., 2023).

One of the implications is the impossibility to treat PR sociality as a fixed individual characteristic by the management. It is rather a context-dependent relational product of social relations. The insight confronts over-riding managerial practices that are based on the extensive use of personality profiling or individual performance indicators. It has been found that even those people who are predisposed to altruism might fail to act prosocial when organizational climates are characterized by conflict, prejudice, or distrust (Jaeger & van Vugt, 2022). In that regard, managers are advised to focus on developing interactional settings that strengthen mutual obligation, fairness, and emotional bonding- where parochiality normalizes as opposed to being extraordinary (Mo et al., 2023).

The second implication is related to the centrality of trust as a form of social infrastructure. Alternatively, as previous studies have indicated that trust is a predictor of knowledge sharing and collaboration (Trajano et al., 2023), this study highlights the impact of its absence onto paralysis of prosocial behavior. Trust must then be not regarded as an abstract soft variable but as a hard cooperation condition. This redefines the role of the leader, in management practice; the leader is not only required to lay down the path but rather build, secure and mend trust at various organizational levels (Nadeem, 2024; Chukwu et al., 2023; Ghamrawi et al., 2024).

When trust fails, as the stories in this paper have shown, prosocial desires are thwarted and effectiveness in organizations is hampered. This aspect of prejudice and discriminative PR sociality has strong implications in the diversity management. Even though diversity initiatives have been adopted across organizations in the world, the results indicate that inclusion cannot be presupposed. The strength of in-group favoritism and out-group prejudice has been demonstrated long ago in social psychology (Schuchart et al., 2021). These biases in the organizational contexts translate to selectivity behaviors in cooperation and inequitable distribution of resources. Diversity is only beneficial as suggested by Bo & Lihua (2024) in the sense that it is backed by the interactional norms which encourage integration and respect towards each other. In the absence of such arrangements, bias remains hidden behind the official inclusion policy weakened prosocial behavior. Among managers, this implies that the issue of shared identity and group belonging is a structural requirement, rather than a peripheral one, of equity and cooperation.

The consequences go even deeper to team relations and the performance of an organization. When it occurs, prosocial behavior has spill overs that facilitated better coordination, low transaction costs, and psychological safety (Khan et al., 2021). This conforms to organizational citizenship behavior literature, but the present study shows that citizenship is not merely discretionary- it is socialized as a result of current interactional situations. Therefore, the problem of management lies not in how to make employees go the extra mile but in how to establish systems that provide repeated responses of cooperative reciprocal actions (Wang & Shi, 2021). The inability to address the barriers of interaction like unresolved conflict destroys the very pillar on which the high-performing teams are based (Labroo et al., 2023).

One of the implications which are of great importance relates to conflict management. Although conflict has occasionally been spread as an innovation or even heated debate through traditional management literature, this work indicates how unresolved interpersonal conflicts serve as extinguishing agents that suppress PR sociality. The managerial challenge is therefore two-fold, to tap the productive potential of task conflict and at the same time avoid the spill over of conflict to relational animosity that destroys trust and makes cooperative behavior impossible (Magni et al., 2023; Mael et al., 2022). This reframing encourages organizations to invest to a greater extent in conflict resolution systems and restorative practices that transcend procedural compliance to concentrate on the emotional aspects of broken relationships.

The results also illuminated the shifting problem of how to handle PR sociality in digital, and hybrid workplaces. The socialization has been shifted toward more mediated spaces in which the signs of sympathy and belonging are watered down (Kim, 2022). PR sociality is best supported by emotional connection and shared identity, as this paper stresses, but they become more difficult to develop online. The management should then test deliberate designs of digital interaction that do not eliminate the possibility of empathy, reciprocity, and collective identity (Amin, 2023; Hincks & Powell, 2022; Levine, 2023). In the absence of such design, remote work would increase mistrust and biased collaboration at the expense of organizational cohesion.

The other implication is connected with the role of leadership styles. Translational and servant leadership theories have always been associated with the prosocial behaviors including organizational citizenship, trust, and collective efficacy (Khan et al., 2023; Abdelmotaleb et al., 2022; Martinez & Leija, 2023; He et al., 2024). The results of the study confirm this but

also endow it: leadership influence is not exercised by means of abstract vision only but through daily, micro-processes that simulate empathy, show reciprocity and reinforce positive belonging. Leaders that overlook such micro-foundations may end up leading organizations with parochiality that is episodic and contingent as opposed to systematic.

The wider management implications are that parochiality will have to be re-packaged as strategic capital. Organizations characterized by the creation of conducive conditions to a steady prosocial action are not just inciter places to work- they achieve real competitive benefits in innovation, resilience and adaptability (Hart, 2024). On the other hand, companies that permit prejudice, conflict, and mistrust to prevail have unseen expenses in terms of disengagement, turnover, and fall in reputation (Liao et al., 2022). Placing parochiality in the framework of the discourse of management, this work highlights the challenge of redefining the concept of organizational design not in strictly economic terms but in terms of social psychological processes that predetermine cooperation or disintegration.

Conclusion

This study is that prosocial behavior is not a natural or personal disposition but a contingent occurrence of social interaction or interactional dynamics of empathy, reciprocity, shared identity and trust. In the context of management, these results support the view that PR sociality is not easily fostered by policies or incentives but by long-term focus on micro-processes of social interaction that promote and or hinder cooperative behavior. Conflict, prejudice and mistrust can serve as critical barriers and they demonstrate the inability of PR sociality in circumstances where the organizational environment does not help to foster relational quality. Meanwhile, as leaders deliberately establish trust, enhance inclusivity, and support belonging to the group, prosocial behavior will become a potent strategic asset that will contribute to team integration, creativity and resiliency of the organization. The implication is obvious, PR sociality should be handled as a kind of social capital and it should not be confined in the design of the organization but also in the day-to-day operations that make up life in a workplace. By so doing, the management will be able to go beyond transactional efficiency to developing sustainable structures of cooperation that ensures long-term performance and shared well-being.

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