RESEARCH PAPER

The Humble Leader: Understanding Perceptions and Implications of Humility in Leadership

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New paper statement

We confirm that the paper has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration in any other publication.

Declaration of conflicting interests

All studies were carried out in accordance with the research ethics recommendations of the British Psychological Society. The protocol was approved by the University of Lincoln's School of Psychology Research Ethical Committee. No competing interests exist.

Abstract

Background: Recently, research has demonstrated that leader humility enhances team performance (Rego et al., 2017) as well as employee resilience (Zhu, Zhang, & Shen, 2019). The current research extends this body of work by testing whether humility is perceived as a desirable trait in leaders and by disentangling distinct forms of humility (relational vs. intellectual).

Aims: To experimentally test perceptions of humility in leaders, specifically comparing relational and intellectual humility in leaders.

Methods: Study 1 ($N = 64$) compared explicit perceptions of humble leadership through observer-report measures and implicit perceptions of humble leadership using an Implicit Association Test. Study 2 ($N = 140$) developed four vignettes describing variants of relationally and intellectually humble leaders and used observer ratings to explore the perceptions of each leader.

Results: Study 1 showed that humility (both relational and intellectual) is perceived as a desirable strength in leaders. However, IAT scores indicated that participants associated humility with low-status roles and arrogance with high-status roles. Study 2 showed that humble leaders were rated as significantly warmer, more competent and effective than arrogant leaders. Additionally, the intellectual humility of participants moderated the relationship between the perceived humility and effectiveness of leaders. Specifically, while all participants perceived humble leaders as more effective than arrogant leaders, this difference in perceived effectiveness was stronger among participants high in self-rated intellectual humility.

Conclusions: The current research demonstrates that humble leaders are viewed as more desirable and effective, regardless of the type of humility displayed, although this was moderated by the participant's own intellectual humility.

Keywords: Relational humility, intellectual humility, humility, leadership, character strengths

Abstrait

Contexte: La science de la psychologie positive a produit des preuves pour de nombreuses interventions qui Contexte: Récemment, des recherches ont démontré que l'humilité du leader améliore la performance de l'équipe (Rego et al., 2017) ainsi que la résilience des employés (Zhu, Zhang et Shen, 2019). La recherche actuelle étend ce corpus de travail en testant si l'humilité est perçue comme un trait souhaitable chez les dirigeants et en démêlant les formes distinctes d'humilité (relationnelle vs intellectuelle).

Objectifs: Tester expérimentalement les perceptions de l'humilité chez les leaders, en comparant spécifiquement l'humilité relationnelle et intellectuelle chez les leaders.

Méthodes: L'étude 1 ($N = 64$) a comparé les perceptions explicites d'un leadership humble à travers des mesures de rapport d'observateur et des perceptions implicites d'un leadership humble à l'aide d'un test d'association implicite. L'étude 2 ($N = 140$) a développé quatre vignettes décrivant des variantes de leaders humbles sur le plan relationnel et intellectuel et a utilisé les évaluations des observateurs pour explorer les perceptions de chaque leader.

Résultats: L'étude 1 a montré que l'humilité (à la fois relationnelle et intellectuelle) est perçue comme une force souhaitable chez les dirigeants. Cependant, les scores IAT ont indiqué que les participants associaient l'humilité à des rôles de statut inférieur et l'arrogance à des rôles de statut élevé. L'étude 2 a montré que les dirigeants humbles étaient considérés comme nettement plus chaleureux, plus compétents et efficaces que les dirigeants arrogants. De plus, l'humilité intellectuelle des participants a modéré la relation entre l'humilité perçue et l'efficacité des dirigeants. Plus précisément, alors que tous les participants percevaient les leaders humbles comme plus efficaces que les leaders arrogants, cette différence d'efficacité perçue était plus forte chez les participants élevés en humilité intellectuelle auto-évaluée.

Conclusions: La recherche actuelle démontre que les dirigeants humbles sont considérés comme plus souhaitables et efficaces, quel que soit le type d'humilité affiché, bien que cela ait été modéré par la propre humilité intellectuelle du participant.

Mots clés: humilité relationnelle, humilité intellectuelle, humilité, leadership, forces de caractère

INTRODUCTION

Leaders hold a vital role in organisations, and their attitudes and behaviours have significant impacts on employees' wellbeing, ethics, and performance (Skakon, Nielsen, Borg & Guzman, 2010; Erdogan & Enders, 2007). While the scientific study of humility has increased significantly in the last decade, its value in leadership has been a subject of debate (Exline and Geyer, 2004; Lawrence 2008). In this paper, we report the results of two empirical studies that examine the impact of leader humility on perceived leader effectiveness.

Humility

Humility belongs to the 'temperance' category of Peterson & Seligman's framework of character strengths and virtues (2004), as a corrective strength which protects against arrogance. Humility involves the ability to have an accurate view of oneself, acknowledge limitations and mistakes whilst also keeping a clear perspective of one's own achievements, holding a secure and accepting sense of identity, demonstrating openness to new and contrasting information, being other-orientated and having an egalitarian belief (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Tangney, 2000). Four subtypes of humility have been outlined in the literature: relational, intellectual, spiritual, and cultural humility (Davis et al., 2010; McElroy et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This paper specifically focuses on the intellectual and relational dimensions of humility.

Relational humility (RH) reflects humility in the context of interpersonal relations as well as self-reflection. Two key components of relational humility are: (a) an other-oriented (rather than self-focused) tendency, and (b) an accurate view of self – neither grandiose nor inferior (Davis et al., 2011). Intellectual humility (IH) reflects humility regarding one's knowledge, intellectual abilities, or influence over ideas (Davis et al, 2016). A key component of intellectual humility is 'limitation-owning' (Battaly, Baehr & Howard-Snyder, 2017). Whereas relational humility requires the moderation of one's ego, intellectual humility involves the ability to present and mediate ideas fairly and demonstrates openness to contrary opinions, knowledge, and beliefs. It therefore to some extent resembles the 'openness to experience' factor of the five factor model of personality (Davis et al, 2016), but whereas the trait of openness has been thematically linked to the character strengths of curiosity and creativity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.69), the 'Intellectual Openness' subscale specifically denotes receptivity to new ideas and perspectives.

The empirical evidence to date shows that humility helps to promote successful relationships (Van Tongeren, Davis & Hook, 2014; Farrell et al, 2015) and helps to buffer against existential anxiety (Kesebir, 2014). In addition to this, significant associations have been found between people's humility and their patience (Lavelock & Worthington, 2014), forgiveness (Davis et al, 2010), helpfulness (LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang, & Willerton, 2012), gratitude (Kruse, Chancellor, Ruberton, & Lyubomirsky, 2014), and openness to contrary opinions of religion (Van Tongeren et al, 2016). Moreover, Hagá and Olson (2017) showed that intellectually humble people are viewed as more intelligent and personable than intellectually arrogant people.

Humility in Leadership

While researchers have argued that leader humility promotes positive organisational outcomes (e.g., Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005; Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010; Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011), there are relatively few empirical studies (e.g. Liu, Mao & Chen, 2017; Qian et al, 2018), and only two experimental studies (Rego et al, 2017; Zhu, Zhang & Shen, 2019), that have directly tested these theorised impacts of leader humility. This small body of empirical evidence demonstrates that leader humility positively affects employee voice, trust in leaders, positive workplace affect (Liu., 2016), empowering and innovative organisational climate (Ou et al, 2014; Owens et al, 2013; Zhang et al, 2017), business and team performance (Ou et al, 2018; Rego et al, 2017), perceived team effectiveness (Rego & Simpson, 2018), employee resilience (Zhu et al, 2019), employee wellbeing (Zhong, Zhang & Li, 2019) and follower engagement (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

The Current Research

A small body of research shows that there is a positive relationship between perceived leader humility and positive workplace outcomes. However, no research has explored people's attitudes to leadership humility. In other words, it is unclear if, in general, people actually value, like, or appreciate humility in their leaders. This is an important question because if humility is not valued then it is unlikely that humility will be fostered, nurtured, or rewarded across organisations.

The current study will draw from and extend past research on this topic (Rego et al, 2017; Zhu et al, 2019). First, like previous research we will use vignettes to manipulate leader humility.

However, we will extend previous research by directly measuring attitudes (both implicit and explicit) to leader humility rather than outcomes of leader humility. The latter finding has already been established, while the former has not. Moreover, we will extend past research by independently exploring attitudes to relational and intellectual leader humility. These are two distinctive concepts (Davis et al., 2011), and therefore it is important to examine their independent effects.

Study 1 examined the extent to which participants perceived humble leaders as good leaders and examined the implicit associations between humility and leadership status.

Study 2 extended Study 1 by using an experimental design. Specifically, Study 2 used a 2 (relationally humble: low/high) x 2 (intellectually humble: low/high) between participants design to examine the extent to which leader humility affects perceived leader effectiveness. Study 2 also examined the moderating role of participants' own humility. Our research questions were as follows:

RQ1: To what extent is humility (vs. arrogance) implicitly associated with leadership?

RQ2: To what extent are humble (vs. arrogant) leaders viewed as effective?

RQ2b: To what extent are relationally humble versus intellectually humble leaders viewed as effective?

RQ3: Does the humility of participants moderate the relationships between leader humility and leader effectiveness?

STUDY 1

The aims of Study 1 were to test (1) the extent to which humility is seen as a desirable characteristic in leaders, and (2) the extent to which humility versus arrogance are implicitly associated with leadership.

Methods

Participants and design. 64 participants between the ages of 18 and 37 years (M = 21.55, SD = 3.24, 37.5% = male) were recruited electronically through the departmental participation scheme and through social media.

Procedure. Participants were fully briefed upon their arrival to the lab and once they provided informed consent, completed an implicit association test (IAT) and a questionnaire measuring perceived desirability of relational and intellectual humility in leaders.

Materials and measures.

Implicit association test (IAT). We created an IAT using PsychoPy software (Peirce, 2007). Participants sorted leadership vs. subordinate-status roles and humility vs. arrogance terms into the correct category using terms from previous IATs (Rowatt et al., 2006; Gündemir et al., 2014) (see table 1). A 'd' score was calculated from the response times of correct associations, using the script by Gray and Pasmanter (2013), built on a scoring algorithm for IATs (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003). A positive 'd' score indicated a bias for associations between leadership-status roles and arrogant words, and between subordinate-status roles and humble words.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	M	SD	1	2
1. IAT result	0.31	.34		
2. Intellectual Humility	4.59	.33	.02	
3. Relational Humility	4.34	.62	-.12	.27*

$N = 64$; $*p < .05$

Perceived effectiveness of relationally humble leaders. We employed the subscale 'Superiority' from the relational humility scale (Davis et al, 2011) which is comprised of 7 items (e.g., certain tasks are beneath them). All items were modified with the stem "a good leader …" and participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Cronbach's Alpha for this measure was .86.

Perceived effectiveness of intellectually humble leaders. We employed the subscale 'Intellectual Openness' from the intellectual humility scale (McElroy et al, 2014) which is comprised of 7 items (e.g. enjoys diverse perspectives). All items were modified with the stem "a good leader …" and participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Cronbach's Alpha for this measure was .74.

Results

Implicit association. Three participants were excluded from the analysis due to insufficient IAT completion as recommended by Gray and Pasmanter (2013). Specifically, if the analysis script provided a performance warning, which occurred in this experiment when participants made 40% errors in any one critical block, 40% errors across all of the practice blocks, or 50% errors in any one of the practice blocks.

A one-sample t-test was conducted to investigate whether the IAT results differed significantly from the midpoint of 0. A d-score of zero would suggest no implicit association between humility terms and leadership terms, a d-score of -1 would suggest a complete association between humble-leadership status terms and between arrogant-subordinate status, and a d-score of 1 would suggest a complete association between humble-subordinate status terms and between arrogant-leadership status terms.

Results revealed that participants demonstrated a significant bias for humble-subordinate status pairings and arrogant-leadership status pairings, $t(60) = 7.20$, $p < .001$, $d = .92$, ($M = .31$, $SD = .34$).

Explicit measure. While this effect size ($d = .92$) is large according to Cohen's guidelines, explicit measures of humility in leadership revealed that humility was highly valued in leadership. Humility ratings of 'a good leader' were significantly higher than the mid-point of 2.5 for both measures, $t^{IH}(56) = 47.53$, $p < .001$; $t^{RH}(58) = 22.63$, $p < .001$, and all mean scores were above 4 on 5-point scales ($M^{IH} = 4.59$, $SD = .33$; $M^{RH} = 4.34$, $SD = .62$).

Correlations. Bivariate correlations revealed a significant correlation between humility measures, $r = .28$, $p = .037$, $N = 55$, but not between implicit and explicit measures $r^{IH} = .02$, $p = .899$, $N = 57$, $r^{RH} = -.12$, $p = .387$, $N = 59$ (see Table 2).

Table 2: All words used in the humility in leadership IAT

Category			
Leadership	Non-Leadership	Humility	Arrogance
Boss	Helper	Humble	Arrogant
Supervisor	Assistant	Modest	Immodest
Leader	Subordinate	Tolerant	Egotistical
Executive	Aid	Down-to-earth	High and Mighty
Authority	Follower	Respectful	Closed-Minded
		Open-Minded	Conceited

Discussion

The results show that participants demonstrated an implicit association for humility-subordinate-status pairings and for arrogance-leadership-status pairings, with a large effect size. Nevertheless, when responding to the explicit measures participants demonstrated a clear preference for both intellectually and relationally humble leaders. Results revealed no correlation between the implicit and explicit measures. Overall, this suggests that while people consciously believe humility to be a desirable characteristic of leaders, they implicitly associate humility with subordinate-status roles.

STUDY 2

Study 2 extends Study 1 by using an experimental design to test the core research question (are humble leaders perceived as more effective?), and tests the moderating role of participants' own humility.

As research shows that people perceive leaders who are prototypical of their group as more effective (Hogg, 2001), we expect that participants who are higher in humility themselves will be more likely to view humility as a strength in leaders.

STUDY 2 PILOT

We conducted a pre-test in order to create and pilot the stimuli for use in Study 2, which we briefly describe below.

Method

Participants and design. 25 undergraduate students (12% male) were recruited through university study participation software, were fully briefed and provided consent prior to the experiment. The study employed a 2 (relational humility: high/low) x 2 (intellectual humility: high/low) repeated measures design.

Materials. Vignettes were used in the current study so that the leaders' humility could be carefully manipulated. The vignettes were created by modifying two qualities of relational humility (acknowledging limitations and other-focus) and intellectual humility (openness to contrary ideas and encouraging others to share their opinions) to create fictional leaders who demonstrated varying degrees of humility. Each vignette comprised of five sentences. The first introduced the character's name and the number of people he oversees. To reduce influencing variables such as age, gender and business responsibility, all leaders were 42-year-old males in charge of 40 people. The second sentence described the leader's response to team suggestions and the third described whether he encourages sharing of knowledge and opinions. The final two sentences described the leader's response to his own mistakes and his response to success (see supplementary materials for full vignettes).

Measures. To measure perceptions of the leader, we employed the 9-item Warmth/Competence scale from Fiske and colleagues (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Participants read all 4 vignettes and were asked to rate the extent each leader was: competent, confident, independent, competitive, intelligent, tolerant, warm, good-natured, and sincere. The first five items were mean scored to produce a measure of perceived competence. The last four items were mean scored to produce a measure of perceived warmth. Participants responded from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*). Reliability analysis for each measure can be found in Table 3.

Results

A 2 (relational humility: high/ low) x 2 (intellectual humility: high/ low) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to explore the effect of manipulated leader humility on perceived leader warmth and competence. Results revealed a significant main effect of both relational and intellectual humility on warmth and competence. Leaders who were relationally humble had greater perceived warmth, $F(1,21) = 224.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .91$, and competence, $F(1, 21) = 21.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .51$, than leaders who were relationally arrogant (see table 3 for descriptive statistics).

Similarly, leaders who were intellectually humble were also rated higher on warmth, $F(1, 62.23) = 263.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .93$, and competence, $F(1, 19.10) = 19.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .49$, than intellectually arrogant leaders. A significant interaction effect between humility subtypes was also found for both warmth, $F(1,1.98) = 8.66$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .29$, and competence ratings, $F(1, .82) = 4.69$, $p = .042$, $\eta^2 = 0.18$, (see table 2 for descriptive statistics).

Post-hoc pairwise t-tests revealed that all leaders differed significantly from each other on warmth and competence ratings after applying Bonferroni correction, $p^{ADJ\_CRITICAL} = .008$, except for the leaders who were high in one type and low in another type of humility, $t^{WARM} (21) = -2.54$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.54$; $t^{COMP}(21) = -1.72$, $p = .101$, $d = 0.49$ (see table 3 for descriptive statistics).

Discussion

Results showed that manipulated leader humility affected perceived warmth and competence. Specifically, replicating Study 1, the more humble the leader, the more positively they were rated, both in terms of warmth and competence. Interestingly, the two leaders who were portrayed as humble in one subtype but arrogant in another did not differ in warmth nor competence ratings from one another. This suggests that humility subtypes may not be independent from one another and that humility (in either intellectual or relational form) is perceived as a strength which affects both perceived warmth and competence of leaders.

Table 3: Warmth and competence ratings (means and standard deviations) for each leader

Subscale		Intellectual Humility	Relational Humility	M	SD	α =	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Warmth	1	High	High	4.62	0.41	.88							
	2	Low	Low	1.57	0.46	.86	-.22						
	3	High	Low	2.60	0.60	.76	-.16	.50*					
	4	Low	High	2.90	0.51	.70	-.22	.29	.46*				
Competence	5	High	High	4.22	0.59	.85	.63**	-.22	-.37	-.11			
	6	Low	Low	2.58	0.92	.89	-.38	.19	.25	.31	-.47*		
	7	High	Low	3.00	0.77	.86	-.19	.33	.45*	.09	-.53**	.76**	
	8	Low	High	3.36	0.71	.92	-.03	.09	-.36	.08	.20	.47*	.24

N = 25; *p<.05 **p < .001

STUDY 2B

Method

Participants and design. 140 participants between the ages of 19 - 78 years (M = 32.46, SD = 15.09, 30% male) took part in this study and were recruited through social media and the departmental participation scheme. The study employed a 2 (relationally humble: low/high) x 2 (intellectually humble: low/high) between participants design.

Materials. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four leader vignettes from the pilot study (see appendix, page 12).

Measures.

Perceived leader effectiveness. To measure perceived effectiveness, participants completed the leader effectiveness scale (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie and Reichard, 2008). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following items: '[Leader] will be effective', '[Leader] will succeed at his company', and '[Leader] will improve performance at his company'. Participants responded from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Cronbach alpha was .91.

Participant humility. Participants then completed self-report humility questionnaires. These were the same humility measures used in study 1 (Davis et al, 2011; McElroy et al, 2014; see Study 1). Cronbach's alphas were .73 and .72 respectively.

Results

A 2 (relational humility: high/low) x 2 (intellectual humility: high/low) ANOVA was conducted to explore the influence of manipulated humility on perceived leader effectiveness. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of relational, $F_{(1,136)}$ = 56.29, p < .001, η^2 = .293), and intellectual, $F_{(1,136)}$ = 70.83, p < .001, η^2 = .34, humility on perceived effectiveness. Specifically, leaders high in relational or intellectual humility were perceived as significantly more effective than those low in humility.

There was also a significant interaction effect between relational and intellectual humility, $F_{(1,136)}$ = 13.38, p < .001, η^2 = .09. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons revealed that the effect of relational humility (low/high) was significant regardless of whether leaders demonstrated high, p < .001, or low, p = .008, intellectual humility. Likewise, pairwise comparisons also showed that the effect of intellectual humility (low/high) was significant regardless of whether leaders demonstrated high, p < .001, or low, p = .001, relational humility (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics).

Table 4: Means and standard errors for the effect of leader humility on perceived leader effectiveness

Relational humility	Intellectual humility	Perceived leader effectiveness	
		Mean (SD)	*95% CI*
High	High	5.99 (1.14)	[5.60, 6.38]
	Low	3.56 (1.19)	[3.16, 3.96]
Low	High	3.74 (1.32)	[3.35, 4.14]
	Low	2.78 (1.10)	[2.38, 3.19]

N = 140

Moderation analyses. Moderation analyses were conducted to test whether participants' own intellectual and/or relational humility moderated the effect of leader humility on perceived leader effectiveness (using Hayes' process macro, model 1, 1000 bootstraps). We recoded our 2x2 design into one variable (termed "condition") where 1 = low RH, low IH, 2 = low RH, high IH, 3 = high RH, low IH, and 4 = high RH, high IH. Category 1 (low RH, low IH) was used as the reference category.

Intellectual humility. Results revealed a significant humility condition (category 1 vs. 2) x own intellectual humility interaction, b = 1.65, SE = .59, t = 2.80, 95% CI = [0.49, 2.82], p = .006, a marginally significant humility condition (category 1 vs. 3) x own intellectual humility interaction, b = 0.97, SE = .51, t = 1.91, 95% CI = [-0.03, 1.98], p = .058, and a significant humility condition (category 1 vs. 4) x own intellectual humility interaction, b = 2.32, SE = .58, t = 4.00, 95% CI = [1.17, 3.47], p < .001.

Conditional effects for the first interaction (low RH, low IH vs. low RH, high IH) revealed that condition affected perceived effectiveness among those high in intellectual humility, b = 1.75, SE = .40, t = 4.31, 95% CI [0.95, 2.55], p < .001, but not among those low in intellectual humility, b = -0.01, SE = .44, t = -0.01, 95% CI = [-.88, .86], p = .998.

Conditional effects for the second interaction (low RH, low IH vs. high RH, low IH) revealed that condition affected perceived effectiveness among those high in intellectual humility, b = 1.18, SE = .40, t = 2.98, 95% CI = [.40, 1.96], p = .004, but not among those low in intellectual humility, b = 0.15, SE = .39, t = 0.39, 95% CI = [-.61, .92], p = .69.

Conditional effects for the third interaction (low RH, low IH vs. high RH, high IH) revealed that condition affected perceived

effectiveness among those high in intellectual humility, b = 4.32, SE = .40, t = 10.77, 95% CI = [3.53, 5.12], p < .001, and among those low in intellectual humility, b = 1.87, SE = .43, t = 4.37, 95% CI = [1.02, 2.71], p < .001, although the latter was much weaker.

Conditional effects also showed that participants' own intellectual humility negatively predicted perceived leader effectiveness among participants in category 1 condition (low IH, low RH), b = -1.22, SE = .40, t = -2.99, 95% CI = [-2.03, -.41], p = .003, and positively predicted perceived leader effectiveness in category 4 condition (high RH, high IH), b = 1.10, SE = .41, t = 2.67, 95% CI = [.28, 1.91], p = .009, but did not predict leader effectiveness in category 2 condition (low RH, high IH; b = 0.43, SE = .43, t = 1.01, 95% CI [-0.41, 1.28], p = .313, or in category 3 condition (high RH, low IH; b = -0.25, SE = .30, t = -0.8351, 95% CI = [-.85, .35], p = .41. Conditional effects are visualised in Figure 1.

Relational humility. Results revealed no significant condition (category 1 vs. 4) x own relational humility interaction, b = .56, SE = .54, t = 1.03, 95% CI = [-.52, 1.64], p = .305, no significant condition (category 1 vs. 3) x own relational humility interaction, b = -.00, SE = .51, t = -.00, 95% CI = [-1.02, 1.01], p = .998, and no significant condition (category 1 vs. 2) x own relational humility interaction, b = .13, SE = .49, t = .26, 95% CI = [-.84, 1.10] , p = .792.

Discussion

Study 2, again indicates that the more humble the leader, the more positively they are rated. Specifically, humble leaders were rated as more effective than arrogant leaders. Extending results from Study 1, participants' own intellectual (but not relational) humility moderated the effect of leader humility and perceived effectiveness. The simple slopes analyses show that, among those low in intellectual humility, leader humility did not promote perceived effectiveness except for leaders who were high in both relational and intellectual humility, and even then, the increase was relatively small. In contrast, among those high in intellectual humility, leader humility promoted perceived leader effectiveness incrementally – the more humble the leader, the more the leader was perceived as effective.

Figure 1: Simple slopes for the own humility x leader humility interaction on perceived leader effectiveness
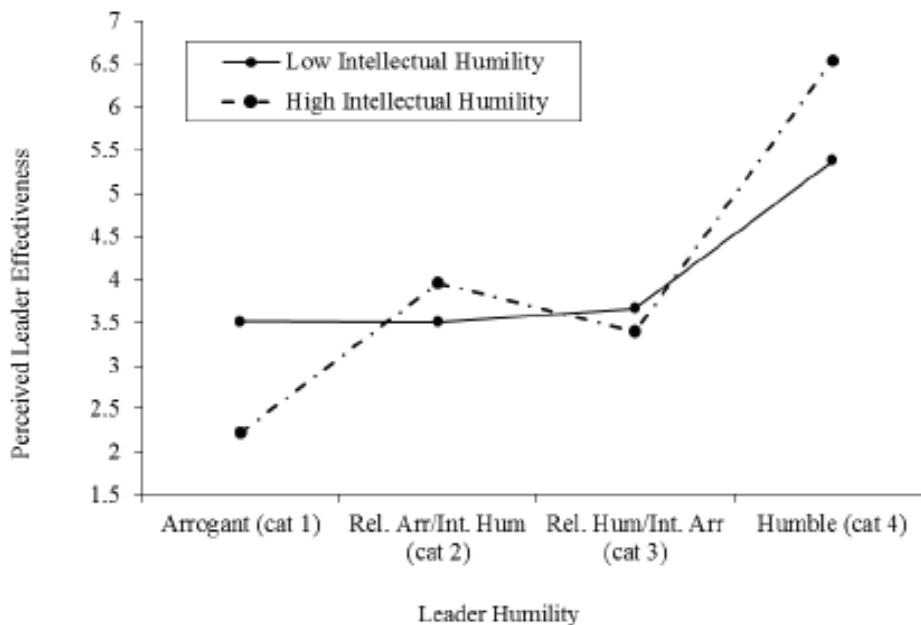
GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current research was the first to empirically test the impact of intellectual and relational humility on perceived leader effectiveness. Results from both studies indicated that humble leaders were generally rated more positively than arrogant leaders. Study 1 showed that humble leaders were rated as more effective, though this was not mirrored in the implicit measure. Study 2 *experimentally* showed that humble leaders were rated as more effective than arrogant leaders and that this was moderated by participants' own levels of intellectual humility.

While the current research consistently showed that humble leaders are preferred to their low humility opponents, results for the implicit measure used in Study 1 revealed that participants demonstrate an implicit association between humility and subordinate-status roles, rather than leadership-status roles. This divergence between results for explicit and implicit measures is not uncommon in research (Payne, Burkley and Stokes, 2008). It seems likely that while participants do prefer humble leaders, they may implicitly associate humility with subordinate-status roles because of the societal exemplars to which they are exposed (Gawronski, LeBel, & Peters, 2007). Perhaps the desirability of humility in leadership is a result of these exemplars, in that humility is viewed as a rarer quality in leaders. These subconscious associations may play some part in perpetuating demonstrations of arrogance in leaders, or in those who aspire to become leaders.

We also explored whether subtypes of humility (relational and intellectual) were valued differently in leadership, finding that subtypes of humility were not easily distinguishable from one another and appear to have an additive effect on measures of warmth, competence, and perceived leader effectiveness. In other words, while it should be noted that leaders demonstrating both subtypes of humility were valued the highest, results suggest that if leaders demonstrate either form of humility, they will be perceived as warmer, more competent, and more effective than arrogant leaders.

Finally, our research showed that participants' own intellectual (but not relational) humility moderated the effect of leader humility on perceived effectiveness. This preference could indicate that intellectually humble individuals are more aware of the benefits of humility and problems of arrogance in leadership, and so place a higher value on humility as a strength. An alternative viewpoint could suggest that humble participants prefer humble leaders because these leaders are perceived as more prototypical of the group (or in this case the individual), in line with the social identity theory of leadership (Hais, Hogg and Duck, 1997; Hogg, 2001).

Our findings compliment past research indicating that organisations led by humble leaders have higher levels of follower engagement (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017), increased information sharing within teams, and higher levels of creativity in comparison to organisations led by leaders low in humility (Hu, Erdogan, Kiang, Bauer & Liu, 2018). Future research should explore the impact of humility interventions already offered by positive psychology (e.g., Lavelock et al, 2014), tools previously linked to cultural humility such as active listening (Chang, Simon & Dong, 2010), and even spiritual humility (a moderator between leader humility and follower outcomes; Naseer et al, 2019) in leadership development on work-place outcomes and team cohesion

Limitations

Self-report measures of humility can be problematic as perhaps the more humble a participant, the less likely they are to report their humility or the less likely they are to use the extreme ends of the scale. Nevertheless, we employed well-established psychometric scales. As study 1 was cross-sectional in design it is possible that a third unmeasured variable explained the relationship between leader humility and perceived leader effectiveness. However, our findings replicated well across both cross-sectional and experimental designs. The participants in these studies were largely recruited from the University student population, and may therefore indicate the leadership form preferred by the next generation of graduate employees.

Conclusion

This research was the first to empirically test the impact of leader humility and perceived leader effectiveness. The results demonstrate that humble leaders are viewed as more desirable, competent, warm, and effective as suggested by theoretical papers (e.g., Morris et al, 2005). Moreover, participants high in intellectual humility are more likely to value humility in leaders. Nevertheless, while humble leaders are generally preferred, people continue to implicitly associate humility with subordinate-status roles. ■

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Appendix: Vignettes

HIGH RELATIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Paul is a 42 year old leader who is responsible for a team of 40 people. When a member of his team has a suggestion, Paul listens, is open to their new ideas and admits that they may have better ideas than him. Paul regularly builds up his team and compliments them on their strengths. If Paul is particularly unfair or makes a mistake, he admits responsibility instead of blaming the team. When the team is successful and achieves greatly, Paul is sure not to take all the credit for himself, but to celebrate the team for their hard work and success.

HIGH RELATIONAL AND LOW INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Joe is a 42 year old leader responsible for a team of 40 people. Joe puts his colleagues before himself and thinks of himself as being equal with his team when interacting with them in the office. When Joe holds a team meeting, he tells the team what the issues are and what the next project is, without taking time to listen to suggestions. He is often unaware of when he is wrong or has presented incorrect facts, but becomes defensive when faced with other opinions. Joe avoids debates and discussion of other ideas unless he is sure that he has the correct answer, and that others will agree with him. When the team succeeds, Joe celebrates the team's hard work and congratulates them individually for their contributions.

LOW RELATIONAL AND HIGH INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Frank is a 42 year old leader responsible for a team of 40 people. Frank listens to the opinions of his team in terms of ideas and accepts criticism of ideas from his team members. Frank willingly instigates debates with his co-workers to discover alternative viewpoints and tries to challenge his beliefs and knowledge to develop it. However, if a team member makes a criticism of Frank's character, Frank becomes defensive and hurt. Frank takes an objective stance when evaluating thoughts of his work, thinking critically of his own ideas to determine a better way of thinking but when the team is unsuccessful in their projects, Frank blames the team and does not accept any responsibility for the failure.

LOW RELATIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Steve is a 42 year old leader responsible for a team of 40 people. Steve thinks that as the one in charge, he should make all the decisions and so does not offer time for suggestions from his team. If someone begins to make a suggestion, Steve stops them and does not take it on board, in some situations telling them it's a bad idea and believes that he knows best. When the team succeeds he becomes proud and takes the credit, but when things go wrong and poor results are had, Steve blames the team, becomes angry and claims it would've been better if only he had a different team. Steve is sure he is leading the company in the right direction as long as he takes his position as leader by making his own decisions and not being influence by his team.