

Exploring Humility to Address the Need for Authentic Leadership

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A focus on the role of virtues in leadership, particularly humility, is gaining steam among leadership circles. However, despite the increase in scholarship, many questions remain. The purpose of the current paper was to explore how identified humble leaders within five organizations were perceived by themselves and their followers. Results showed humble leaders identify themselves as self-aware and open in their leadership. Followers perceive humble leaders to build trusting relationships, are oriented toward others, lead by example, focus on the bigger picture, and possess integrity (authenticity/honesty). The findings revealed humility plays a role in the expression of authentic leader behaviors.

Keywords: virtues, humility, authentic leadership, narcissism

INTRODUCTION

There is a connection between narcissistic leaders and the introduction of theories like authentic leadership to address self-centered, more abusive forms of leadership (Diddams & Chang, 2012; Harvey, Martinko & Gardner, 2006; Novicevic, Harvey, Ronald & Brown-Radford, 2006). Bill George (2006), one of the most prominent scholars on authentic leadership once wrote, “To be effective leaders of people, authentic leaders must first discover the purpose of their leadership. If they don’t, they are at the impulses of their egos and narcissistic impulses” (p. 1). This connection has also been extended to address the need for more positive forms of leadership, which include virtues, values, and transparency. Scholars writing on the topic, like Arjoon (2010), suggest the moral failings caused by narcissistic behaviors can be remedied through developing the moral and intellectual virtues in one’s self. Further, Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006) noted that one of the main downfalls of narcissistic leaders is their lack of morality. In an effort to better understand how to address, and possibly mitigate narcissistic leadership, the virtue of humility has received significant attention in leadership research over the past two decades. Following this line of thought that suggests both authentic leadership and humility have an important role in addressing narcissistic leader tendencies, one could assume that humility might also be a critically important tenant of authentic leadership theory and practice.

Arguments have been made by scholars writing about authentic leadership, which suggest humility is a necessary component. May, Chan, Hodges and Avolio (2003) noted that “authentic leaders are humble and are less likely to feel the need to take center stage or demand anyone’s attention” (p. 249). Further, authentic leaders are “...those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by

others as being aware of their own and others values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Luthans & Walumbwa, 2004, p. 4). Moreover, Chang and Diddams (2009), in their article *Hubris or Humility: Cautions Surrounding the Construct and Self-definition of Authentic Leadership* argued that authentic leadership should be an aspirational process involving a “realistic evaluation of one's' ability and achievements” (p. 4) similar to humility. Without humility, the authors noted, authentic leaders could become wrapped up in themselves and their own sense of morality, leading to hubris and inauthentic leadership. Having reviewed some theoretical connections between humility and authentic leadership, it is equally important to explore what the research says.

While research linking humility and authentic leadership is somewhat scarce, there have been findings pointing to a potential relationship. For example, Rego, Cunha and Simpson (2018) found leaders with humility (as identified by peers) indirectly demonstrated balanced processing, a component of authentic leadership involving the leader's ability to objectively process both positive and negative information about themselves and others in a “balanced,” egoless way (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa, 2005). Based on these findings, Rego et al. (2018), recommended that humility be considered in the research agenda for authentic leadership. Oc, Daniels, Diefendorff, Bashur and Greguras (2020) developed a theoretical model positing that followers feel less vulnerable when their leaders express humility. However, that same vulnerability increases when the leader's humility is perceived by followers as less authentic. Through four studies the researchers found that their model was supported and noted the “important role that authentic leader humility can have on followers” (p. 123). Additionally, a study conducted by Akdol and Arikboga (2015) found humility and authenticity among several leader characteristics that contributed to employee job satisfaction.

Despite the connections between humility and authentic leadership through theoretical writings and empirical research, a tremendous lack of knowledge still exists. The current paper was a step in that direction. Perceptions of leadership were explored from the perspective of identified humble leaders and followers which drew connections to authentic leadership. The findings suggest a number of practical prosocial qualities and behaviors that are aligned with the theory of authentic leadership. Overall, the outcomes of the research provided a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between humility and authentic leadership. The findings also point to the need for further inquiry around the role humility plays in the application of this prominent leadership theory.

THE PROBLEM OF NARCISSISM

Like all behavior and skills, the ones associated with narcissistic leadership have both positive and negative outcomes. On the one side, narcissistic leaders have certain behaviors and skills that naturally lead to the acquisition of power positions. For example, narcissistic leaders are often seen as confident and capable, which allows for upward movement in the corporate ladder because of confidence in self-promotion (Maccoby, 2004). Narcissistic leaders often tend to be big picture thinkers who can communicate a great vision for their organization, which is especially useful during rapidly changing and complex times. Additionally, the narcissistic leader is strong willed, extremely tenacious and gifted in communicating goals despite any adversity that may arise. Finally, as a direct result of being confident, charismatic, and gifted communicators, narcissistic leaders can attract followers with ease (Maccoby, 2004).

On the other hand, narcissistic leadership presents a number of issues when it comes to leading others. For example, narcissistic leaders only listen when wanting something or when follower ideas match their pre-established plan (Maccoby, 2004). In addition, narcissistic leaders tend to be surrounded by people who constantly give praise which blinds the recognition of pressing organizational issues (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Narcissism also appears to have an effect on groups and teams. Nevicka, Ten Velden, De Hoogh and Van Vianen (2011) found that because narcissistic leaders show authority in a group setting, group members tend to perceive effective leadership. However, narcissism ultimately has a negative impact on group performance because it hinders the exchange of information between members of the group

(Nevicka et al., 2011). Maccoby (2004) noted that the main consequence of leader narcissism is an organization full of internal competitiveness.

These perspectives present an interesting question: Does narcissism have a negative or positive effect on leadership? Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis and Fraley (2015) explored different levels of narcissism in individuals and the effect these levels of narcissism had on effective leadership. Personality assessments and performance evaluations were analyzed from six data sets and found that there was a moderate level of narcissism that accounted for more effective leadership (Grijalva et al., 2015). This relationship between narcissism and leadership effectiveness took on the shape of an upside-down U (Grijalva et al., 2015). Ultimately it was found that low levels of narcissism on one side led to leaders without the necessary confidence to be effective, while individuals with an excess of narcissism on the other extreme ran the risk of creating an abusive, unethical leader with a superiority complex (Grijalva et al., 2015).

This notion of two extremes of excess provides insight into the role a potential moderating force could play to address the negative traits and behaviors of narcissistic leaders to enable effectiveness. In a study completed by Owens, Wallace and Waldman (2015) humility was found as a moderator which made narcissistic leaders excel in terms of leader effectiveness and follower outcomes, which means leaders who demonstrate humble behaviors may prevent certain narcissistic tendencies from tarnishing their success (Owens et al., 2015). This notion of mediating excess points to the connection between humility and authentic leadership. According to Chang and Diddams (2009) spending too much time focusing exclusively on the positive aspects of oneself could lead to a highly inflated self-concept, which is the antithesis of authenticity. In this context, humility would act as the mediator for excessive positivity, an attribute the authors critique as part of an unrealistic concept of authentic leadership (Chang & Diddams, 2009). Due in part to the increasing amount of attention given to humility, understanding what the virtue is and where it came from is critical.

UNDERSTANDING HUMILITY

Similar to the continual argument of how to best define leadership, there is no shortage of definitions for the virtue of humility. Historically, humility had many negative connotations (Tangney, 2000). At times, a humble person was seen as meager and submissive, lacking confidence and self-esteem (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Some definitions associated humility with disgrace, lending the virtue to images of shame, embarrassment, or disgust with oneself (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Despite these negative assessments, emerging theories define humility in a more positive light (Tangney, 2000). Often these definitions focus on three important tenets of humility: accurate view of self, accurate view of others and an accurate view of one's place in something bigger.

The first of these tenets is an accurate view of the self (Argandoña, 2015; Davis & Hook, 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). For example, Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined humility as one's overall willingness to see one's self in an accurate light, including both strengths and weaknesses. The second tenet of humility is an interpersonal or other-oriented aspect of the virtue (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, Jennings & Emmons, 2011; Davis, Placeres, Choe & DeBlaere, 2017). Van Tongeren and Myers (2017) noted that humility involves a focus on others, which includes an interest in others' welfare and the ability to place the needs of others above the self. This is in line with Argandoña (2015), who argued that although humility is innate within each individual, it is cultivated, set in motion and strengthened through interpersonal engagement.

Finally, the last tenet of humility is an accurate perspective of one's life within the bigger picture. Often referred to as transcendence, according to Bollinger and Hill (2012), this is "a state of being beyond the limits of normal experience, such as a larger vision or sense of purpose beyond what is materially perceptible" (p. 34). This closely aligns with Tangney's (2000) writings on humility, where humility is seen as letting go of the self while understanding that one is part of a bigger universe. These three tenets align with the definition of humility used in this study. Humility is "*the ability of an individual to have a proper perspective of themselves, their relationship with others, and of their place in the larger environment*"

(Sowcik, Andenoro & Council, 2017, p. 170). Due in part to the evolution of thinking around what humility means, attention toward how this virtue connects to leadership has grown.

CONNECTING HUMILITY TO LEADERSHIP

Following the shift in leadership thinking at the turn of the 21st century toward positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), humility research has flourished. The virtue has shown to have a variety of prosocial benefits, particularly for leadership theory and practice. Exline (2012) found that humility is associated with one's capacity to accept and receive from other people. Exline and Hill (2012) discovered that humility is a reliable way to predict generosity. Powers, Nam, Rowatt and Hill (2007) found an important link between humility and attitudes of forgiveness. Davis, Worthington, Hook, Emmons, Hill, Bollinger and Van Tongeren (2013) discovered that humility can assist with repairing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Additionally, Labouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang and Willerton (2012) found a connection between humility and helpfulness.

In *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) found a strong relationship between leadership effectiveness and humility. Through an examination of leaders from the most successful companies, over a fifteen-year period it was noted that "Level 5 Leaders" innately held a blend of deep individual humility and profound determination (Collins, 2001). One of the main features of "Level 5 Leaders" was the capacity to deal with the harsh facts of reality, while keeping consistent faith in future success. Collins (2001) also explained that leaders without the seed of "Level 5 Leadership" often had inflated egos and could never submit to a larger influence. However, leaders with the seed of humility "never wanted to become larger-than life heroes," and were "seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results" (Collins, 2001, pp. 27-28).

In research conducted on humility in an organizational leadership context, Owens, Rowatt and Wilkins (2011) argued that because of the turbulence and uncertainty that comes with being a leader in complex environments, organizations need humility to thrive. Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) noted that humble leaders have a more grounded viewpoint both relationally and of the self. Humility allows leaders to accurately evaluate achievements, letdowns, work ethic and life in general (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Furthermore, the virtue of humility allows leaders to distinguish traits like confidence, self-image, and self-appraisal from brashness, narcissism and inflexibility (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). In addition, leaders who practice humility are more open to different perspectives, have a more accurate outlook of the world's complexity, and recognize personal limitations in leadership settings (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). These connections drew inspiration to investigate further what relationship exists between humility and leadership.

METHODS

In an effort to explore a deeper understanding of the relationship between humility and leadership, two key questions were investigated in the study: (1) how do identified humble leaders perceive leadership, and (2) how do followers perceive that same leadership? A qualitative case study approach was used to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding of these two questions (Creswell, 2013). A "case" was defined as an identified humble leader and two of the humble leaders' followers within the context of their organizations. There were a total of five cases, bringing the total number of participants to $n=15$. The humble leaders were selected with the assistance of a key informant, who was a person of influence in the larger community based on their status, knowledge and expertise, and willingness to communicate (Marshall, 1996). The key informant who assisted with the study was, at the time, the Director of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute (WLI), a cohort-based agricultural leadership development program which "...develops and refines the leadership capabilities of leaders in Florida agriculture and natural resources" (Program Overview, 2020, p. 1). The followers for each case were selected with assistance from each humble leader.

Based on guidance from the key informant, the humble leaders were selected using specific requirements that reflected both the overarching goals and general context of the study: (a) the individual must have been recommended by a key informant as a leader who practices humility based on the definition

used in the study, (b) the individual must have held a high ranking leadership position in the Florida agriculture industry, and (c) the individual must have maintained a positive reputation within their organization and throughout the industry.

After agreeing upon a selection criterion the key informant provided a recommended list of 20 candidates who were contacted about participation in the study. From the list, five leaders were available and agreed to participate. These five identified humble leaders were all male. Out of the five, three identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. After the humble leaders agreed to participate in the study, they assisted the researchers in selecting two of their followers. In total there were four female followers and six males. Out of the ten followers, five identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. For confidentiality purposes, each participant was given a pseudonym and the organizations they worked for were not revealed.

Each case study took place in a different area of the Florida agriculture and natural resources industry. Case study one took place in the context of an agricultural advocacy and insurance organization and included Gilbert (48 years old, white male, of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin), the Executive Director, and two of Gilbert's followers: Heather and Jenny. Case study two took place in a Florida landscaping and nursery company, which consisted of John (46 years old, white male), a Senior Level Manager, and two of John's followers: Luke and Jason. The context of case study three was a forestry company and included Roy (47 years old, white male), the Vice President, and Roy's two followers: Sam and Danny. Case study four took place in an agrochemical business and featured Owner and Operator David (52 years old, white male, of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin), and two of David's followers: Amy and Ted. Finally, the context of case study five was an agricultural finance and lending company and involved the identified humble leader Cole (41 years old, white male, of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin), a Senior-level Manager, and Cole's two followers, Gladys and Corbin.

The primary investigator of the study physically traveled to each organization to conduct semi-structured, in-person interviews. Each leader interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Each follower interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. The leaders were asked questions like, "How would you describe your leadership?" and "What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?" Followers were asked questions such as, "What kinds of leadership behaviors does [identified humble leader] demonstrate?" Also, "What do you appreciate the most about [identified humble leader]?" In order to counteract any self-report humility bias (i.e., through downplaying or exaggerating one's humility), the word "humility" was not used in any of the interview questions.

During each interview field notes were taken which included notes from the interviews and observations from each experience. These were compiled and used in the data analysis process. The use of multiple methods of data collection (observations, field notes and interview audio) and multiple sources (leaders and followers) triangulated the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview was recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed using an external transcription service, NoNotes.com. Each transcript and the resulting themes were reviewed by the participants for accuracy, which added to the reliability of the study.

The data analysis process was inductive and completed by hand. The primary investigator made sense of the data by using the constant comparative method. In the initial coding phase, "in vivo" codes were created using phrases and language directly from the interview transcripts (Manning, 2017). The process of selecting codes was repeated multiple times until data saturation was achieved, and no new codes surfaced to address the research questions (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs & Jinks, 2017). The "in vivo" codes were then grouped into larger themes based on observed patterns. The process of naming each theme resulted from intuition based on the data, language used by the participants, and the body of literature that informed the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Both the codes and later themes were agreed upon by both the primary investigator and a secondary researcher, who had knowledge of humility, leadership development, and qualitative research methods. This also contributed to the overall reliability of the study (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler & Ranganathan, 2015).

FINDINGS

The main area of investigation of this paper was the perception of leadership among identified humble leaders and the expression of that same leadership from the perspective of followers. As a result, data that surfaced highlighted the lived experiences of humble leaders in the context of the Florida agriculture and natural resources as well as the phenomena of their leadership as experienced by followers. The first research question asked: How do identified humble leaders perceive leadership? Two major themes emerged from this research question: (a) openness and (b) self-awareness.

Openness

All five identified humble leaders expressed an approach to leadership that included openness, which was conceptualized from data showing humble leaders were open to others' perspectives. For example, Gilbert mentioned "...it's not about me it's about what we've done." He also explained that it is particularly important to "find the right person to help you out." John described how his leadership involved bringing people together:

I think of myself as less an authoritarian leader and more of a maybe collective and even if it's not a true collective at least the appearance of it being so. I really do-- whether it's our staff in [the organization] or paid staff, our committee members, board of directors, I really try to leave that space for others to come in and impart their wisdom, experiences and opinions so that collectively we come up with the policies and directions to move forward.

Additionally, Cole explained how some of the best advice he received was to always "ask for help" which he practices in his leadership: "You have to [ask for help] – I mean, you'll kill yourself. I tried the other way."

Self-Awareness

A majority of the identified humble leaders expressed a personal awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, which demonstrated a more accurate leadership portrayal. For example, Gilbert explained, "One of my faults is I tend to take too much on and not delegate as much as I should...taking on too much. I've learned to say no, just not as often, I'm getting better." Further, Roy examined his limitations by saying:

That's a limitation. I'm not a numbers guy, all right. So, knowing that I need to hire the best numbers person that I can trust and to do that side of my business and guess who that is, that's my wife, that's [wife].

Additionally, Cole mentioned his strengths and weaknesses:

I've always looked at it [emotions] as a strength. And I think a weakness could be – I mentioned, you're always trying to see the positive in everybody. But sometimes you gotta call it. Those are always tough calls and tough conversations to have. But I knew sometimes I probably gave the benefit of the doubt a little too long.

The second research question asked: How do identified humble leaders express leadership from the perspective of two followers? Five major themes were connected to this research question: (a) trusting relationships, (b) other orientation, (c) leading by example, (d) a focus on the bigger picture, and (e) integrity (authenticity/honesty).

Trusting Relationships

One of the first key themes that surfaced from the second line of inquiry was trusting relationships, which was established using data based on a mutual exchange of confidence between the identified humble

leaders and their followers. For example, Ted described David's leadership expression in terms of trust: "Working with him is really like if I was my own boss really. I don't get pushed around that much because we know what we're doing, and he believes in me and the trust in what we're doing is legit and we're doing it." Additionally, Luke went into detail about John's ability to forge trusting relationships:

He's built relationships with all these folks that they're now passing on to the folks coming in behind them, so I think a lot of ... a lot of his success has to do with not just getting a job done but building long term relationships.

Finally, Danny remarked about Roy's ability to build rapport with people in his industry by saying Roy has a "good relationship" as far as "working with the other contractors." He also has "a good rapport with the people." And from his perspective, "that trust, that rapport with people helps you with negotiating at times."

Other Orientation

The second key theme which emerged from the data was that humble leaders demonstrated a general orientation toward others. This was developed using data from followers observing certain attitudes or behaviors from the humble leaders showing a general concern for others. For example, Jenny explained how Gilbert is concerned for others: "He's always giving us I guess the support that we need or the push that we need in order to I guess just be a step ahead in something like benefit us in the long run. So, he's always got that concern for us." Additionally, Amy mentioned David's ability to treat his employees well:

He treats very good with the people in his own ways like telling them like employee like [other employee] he say 'Hello' and stuff like that or something and when we go to lunch or something, we bring some lunches back or something so they can have and right now, he asks 'Do you want water or something,' he's going to bring water for them or drinks. So, it's good. It's good because not all the employers do that for their employees.

Leading by Example

The third theme was developed using data that showed how followers perceived humble leaders modeling positive behaviors. Through the humble leaders' example, standards were set, which were seen as sources of influence and inspiration to others. For example, Heather described Gilbert's leadership in terms of his passion and dedication:

I see that he's very, he's dedicated, and he is...I'm trying to find a word for it. Like he takes, you know, he's very emotional about what he does. He has a passion for his job...I see how serious he is, I've worked with a lot of people who I've felt that they were not serious about their role, but I see that...I see his seriousness and I like that.

Corbin echoed this theme when explaining Cole's leadership by saying "everybody within the company looks up to Cole" and that he "kind of leads by example... kind of how things should go." Furthermore, Corbin said that Cole has been with the organization for "a long time" and it shows because of how respected he is:

...people respect Cole, in our company because he's been a long time, he obviously does a lot of positive things for our company, so I think they respect him and when they see him do that, I think that means a lot to people.

Focus on the Bigger Picture

A fourth major theme connected to followers' perceptions of the humble leaders was a focus on the bigger picture, which was constructed using data showing how humble leaders displayed a concern or

orientation towards the larger organization. For example, Jenny mentioned Gilbert's ability to cast a vision for the whole organization:

"He [Gilbert] keeps a vision. He tries to follow within that vision and has goals of always doing better and wanting better for the agency, always keeps everyone in mind."

Jason explained how John "really believes in this industry", "looks at the whole thing" and is a "big picture-type-thinking guy." He also described a moment when John saw a conflict between two chapters in a larger organization before others:

We've had some...there was a divide between...we have our state office which is here in Orlando and we have our chapters throughout, the chapters were in... there's a huge split and divide between chapters and state... [John] saw this coming before anybody else.

Lastly, Gladys described Cole's ability to focus on the bigger picture by saying he was a "company advocate" and is very "knowledgeable not only on the industry but on the company policies and procedures."

Integrity (Authenticity/Honesty)

The final theme was developed based on followers' observations of humble leader integrity, which were behaviors seen as both authentic and honest. When reflecting on Gilbert Jenny explained that he is "very humble," "good-hearted," and that she and him are "friends outside of the office." Furthermore, Jenny said, "I mean, he's a great friend, someone I really look up to, with feedback, just when I need someone to talk to." Moreover, Danny described Roy as "a good person. He's generally just a good guy." He is also very honest in his communication:

Something that I have noticed about [Roy] that you may want to add is I've noticed that he's-- he'll tell somebody the absolute truth. It may not be what they want to hear but that's what he's going to tell them and that's--in any and all businesses--that's pretty notable as far as timelines and obligations.

Amy described her relationship with David as "more like friends, not like a boss". She also said David is "a good person." Finally, according to Gladys, Cole is a tremendously "conscientious" and "considerate" leader. She described him as "one of the best" because "He's very conscientious. He's very polite. He's very considerate." Gladys also described how Cole makes others feel important, "just because of who he is."

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore perceptions of leadership from the perspective of identified humble leaders and two of their followers. After a review of the major themes, we believe the identified humble leaders displayed elements of theory-based authentic leader behaviors. In other words, in setting out to understand humility among leaders, we discovered numerous elements of authentic leadership. Using Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumbwa's (2005) self-based model of authentic leader-follower development, along with the findings from the study, we assert that humility plays a key role in bringing out authentic leadership behaviors.

The first authentic leadership behavior influenced by humility was self-awareness. According to Gardner et al. (2005), self-awareness "encompasses awareness of both one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the multifaceted nature of the self" (p. 349). Self-awareness was found as a major theme from the humble leaders' perceptions of their own leadership. In the interviews, they expressed both abilities and deficiencies while also recognizing the need to include others in the leadership process to close potential

gaps in understanding. This was in line with the literature on humility, which suggests an accurate appraisal of one's strengths and weaknesses, and a recognition of one's gaps in knowledge are foundational to the practice of humility (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000).

A second component of authentic leader behavior identified in the data that connected to humility was balanced processing. Balanced processing refers to the capacity to analyze all relevant information with minimal bias as well as to seek out views contrary to one's own (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008). Balanced processing was seen in the "openness" theme from the humble leaders' perception of leadership through an openness towards others' perspectives and the leaders overall value others in the process. This idea of being open to others' perspectives is another important element of humility. According to Tangney (2002), humility involves opening one's self to new ideas, contrary information and advice.

A third component of authentic leadership, relational transparency, was also seen in the data from the study. Gardner et al. (2005) refer to relational transparency when "the leader displays high levels of openness, self-disclosure and trust in close relationships" (p. 7). From the followers' perspectives, several themes from the identified humble leaders' behaviors highlighted these aspects of relational transparency. For one, followers alluded to the theme of "trusting relationships," which showed the humble leaders sought to build trusting relationships with their followers. Additionally, followers described the humble leaders as having integrity and displaying both honest and authentic behaviors. Overall, this ability for humble individuals to maintain a focus towards others is highlighted in the literature. Van Tongeren and Myers (2017) noted that humility involves an attention toward others, which includes an interest in others' welfare, an ability to control one's selfish desires for others' advantage, and the desire to place the needs of others and one's relationship with others over one's own pursuits.

Furthermore, additional research suggests that relational transparency should be framed as "fidelity to purpose" (Kempster, Iszatt-White & Brown, 2019), which connects to one of the major themes of the study: a focus on the bigger picture. According to Kempster et al. (2019), whereas "relational transparency" involves a leader's self-perception, "fidelity to purpose" refers to authentic leaders acting in accordance with professed goal achievement (Kempster et al., 2019). This shift in thinking resulted from recent critiques about the notion of authenticity in leadership and renewed calls for its exploration (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2018). Humility connects to the notion of "fidelity to purpose" based on data that showed how followers perceived humble leaders as focused on the bigger picture or placing emphasis on the larger organizational goals.

A final connection between humility and authentic leadership comes in the form of positive role modeling. According to Gardner et al. (2005) one of the primary ways authentic leaders influence the development of followers is the modeling of behavior. This is conceptualized as "a basic means whereby authentic leaders impart positive values, emotions, motives, goals and behaviors for followers to emulate" (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 25). Two major themes from the data were seen as connection points between positive role modeling and humility: "other orientation" and "leading by example." For one, followers recognized humble leaders as oriented toward others, which meant they observed the humble leaders demonstrating a concern for the well-being of others. Additionally, humble leaders were seen by followers as individuals who led by example, by modeling positive behaviors which were expected of others. Perhaps humility plays a role in positive modeling. Indeed, the virtue has been connected to the demonstration of positive behaviors such as generosity (Exline & Hill, 2012), forgiveness (Powers et al., 2007), and the ability to receive from others (Exline, 2012). Furthermore, research by Oc, Bashshur, Daniels, Greguras and Diefendorff (2015) found that humble leaders lead by example.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the study offer several key takeaways. First, the study provided added insight into the role humility plays in the expression of specific authentic leadership behaviors which, as alluded to earlier, could potentially address the negative effects of narcissistic leadership. Second, we now have a better understanding of which specific humble leader-based traits or behaviors are most perceived by

themselves and their followers that align with authentic leadership. Lastly, if humility is indeed a critical component of authentic leadership, the virtue could be used as an avenue to develop authentic leadership. Council and Sowcik (2020) found that (a) anchoring personal values (family, significant people, life changes and experiences), (b) investment in human and social capital, and (c) supportive feedback all contributed to the development of humility among leaders. Perhaps an investigation into what aspects of humility contribute to authentic leadership development should be considered in future research. As a whole, the findings from the study open up an opportunity for continued research between humility and authentic leadership and what this could mean for understanding leader-follower relationships. The following recommendations for further research should be considered.

First, if humility interacts with authentic leadership, does it also have a connection with other prosocial theories of leadership? For example, could humility influence some of the leader behaviors of servant and transformational leadership? Could humility help develop these approaches to leadership? Further studies could investigate these areas.

Second, there appears to be an increased amount of attention given to qualitative studies focusing on authentic leadership. A qualitative study comparing leaders who have been identified as humble and leaders who have been identified as authentic leaders could provide deeper insights into the interaction between humility and specific authentic leader behaviors.

Third, a significant limitation of the study was that all five of the identified humble leaders were men. Thus, a limited perspective of humility and gender was included in the study. More research needs to be conducted around gender and humility. Specifically, do men and women experience humility differently? Also, with respect to women in leadership, is humility seen as a barrier, or a benefit?

Fourth, a majority of the humble leaders identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. This demographic information could provide a clue into the role that one's racial, ethnic or cultural background plays in the perception and expression of humility. For instance, Li (2016) argued that humility is valued in Eastern cultures more than Western ones. Additionally, the theory of cultural humility has also been researched and developed (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), which could influence this process.

Fifth, another limitation of this study is that it took place in one particular context: agriculture and natural resources. Despite each case focusing on a different aspect of the field, the participants were all connected to agriculture and natural resources. What role does context play in how humility is perceived and expressed? An exploration of the role context plays in understanding humility would provide a deeper understanding of whether or not humble leader behaviors transcend a particular context.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century world is characterized by a plethora of complex problems and an overall atmosphere of immense uncertainty, which means how leadership is approached and defined is evolving (Satterwhite, McIntyre Miller & Sheridan, 2015). Where there was once a reliance upon singular leaders with the expertise, skill and experience to address crisis and uncertainty (Heifetz, 1994), there are now calls for leadership to be approached collectively in an effort to solve problems where there are no singular solutions (Grint, 2010). Simultaneously, leadership has been characterized by widespread mistrust due to the degree of ethical breakdowns at the highest levels (Chang & Diddams, 2009; May et al., 2003). This has brought increased attention to more positive forms of leadership, with an emphasis on transparency, authenticity, and virtue (Pearce, Waldman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008) to counteract narcissistic tendencies.

The purpose of this paper was to explore the virtue of humility within the context of leadership, which has gained an increasing amount of attention in recent years (Morris, Brotheridge & Urbanski, 2005). In exploring how identified humble leaders perceive leadership and how leadership is expressed from the perspective of two of their followers, our research indicated that humility plays a key role in several authentic leadership behaviors. Humble leaders possess a degree of self-awareness, lead with a sense of balanced processing through their openness, develop trusting relationships through relational transparency, focus on the bigger picture by their fidelity to purpose, and act as positive role models for followers.

Implications were provided, as well as limitations and recommendations for future research. Moving forward, it will be critical to further explore the important role the virtue of humility plays in the practice of authentic leadership in today's society for both leaders and followers.

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