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In Search of Humble Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The significance of moderation and balance across various domains has been sanctioned for millennia and deviations from midpoints of virtues, traits, qualities, and other attributes have been described as dysfunctional suggesting a nonmonotonic, U-shaped curve. Modern scholarship and lay interpretations of the virtue of humility have neglected this perspective and appear to tacitly assume that humility is an unmitigated good that leaders should develop and that more is better. Here we show, however, that what we refer to as authentic humility, is positioned at an intermediate point between negative and positive views of the self and that deviations from this center adversely impact well-being and offer a nonlinear, inverted U-shaped curve. Such an interpretation reconciles views of humility as a weakness or strength and demonstrates its positive impact on self, followers, and organizational well-being. We conclude by suggesting that humility has costs for leaders and therefore not an unmitigated good.

Keywords: **humility, authentic humility, leadership, self-view**

Introduction

"Both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly, the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect and preserved by the mean" (Aristotle, about 340 BCE, trans., 1999, p. 22).

Aristotle suggested individuals can achieve well-being by finding the appropriate level of each of the virtues. Virtue can be considered as the "mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency ... its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and actions'' (p. 32). This emphasis on moderation and balance is referred to as the "Doctrine of the Mean" comparable to the guiding principle of Confucius known as the "Golden Mean" which states that for each action, two excesses need to be avoided: the deficiency extreme and the deficiency of excess (Lawrenz, 2021). Between the extremes are virtue and correct action. In the same way, Buddha (around the sixth century BCE) pointed out that moderation (the "Middle Way") was the path to wisdom and enlightenment (Gerhards, 2007). Thomas Aquinas, a prominent 13th-century theologian spoke of reaching the middle point as the place of virtue (O'Mera, 1997). For its proponents, moderation is both an ethical and realistic necessity (Hamburger, 1959). Furthermore, proverbs and adages, for example, the Chinese "too much can be worse than too little," and the Western equivalent "everything in moderation; nothing in excess," indicate that many cultures accept the moderation principle.

Modern scholars (e.g., Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Pierce & Aguinis, 2013; Quinlan, Janis, & Bales, 1982; Von Bergen,

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Campbell, & Leird, 2016) have also discovered that for some traits, states, and experiences balance and moderation are important and that for numerous experiences a deficiency can be harmful to well-being and performance and can also come with excessive costs. In other words, phenomena that deviate from the mean turn negative, thus exhibiting an inverted U-shaped curve revealing that "life is nonmonotonic" (Grant & Schwartz, 2011, p. 62) and rarely linear (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Suedfeld (1969) called this occurrence the "ubiquitous U" and Pierce and Aguinis (2013) discuss this as the "too much of a good thing effect" (p. 313) in discussing this principle. These findings emphasize the importance of moderation or striving for a balance between extremes.

Nevertheless, extant scholarly and practitioner-oriented books, periodicals, and journals (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Le et al., 2011) have implied that experiences, positive traits, emotions, and virtues have straight, flat effects on well-being and performance meaning the more of an attribute the better. As an example, Seligman (2002) proposed that people identify their signature strengths and develop them to increase well-being and effectiveness. Likewise, Zenger, Folkman, and Edinger (2011) argued that leaders should focus on strengthening their strengths. These beliefs assume "the more developed any strength is, the better people are" (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006, p. 380).

Discussion

What is humility?

This paper focuses on humility (Lavelock et al., 2014; Seligman, 2002; Wright et al., 2017) which is identified as a primary virtue within an organization that provides the moral foundation of the organization's environment (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). It has been regarded as "a fundamental quality of a good manager and good management" (Argandona, 2015, p. 63) and although there are many definitions of humility, we prefer that provided by Morris, Brotheridge, and Urbanski (2005) who described humility "… as a personal orientation founded on a willingness to see the self accurately and a propensity to put oneself in perspective …" which "… can be thought of as that crest of human excellence between arrogance and lowliness. It involves neither self-abasement nor overly positive self-regard" (p. 1331). This definition points to the perspective that humility involves an equalized perspective, acknowledging both limitations and strengths, and does not attempt to under-or over-represent the self, with lesser emphasis on the self and greater emphasis on others, and its role in moderating both excessive negative and positive self-views.

This definition recognizes that humility has a tangled history and that certain people consider Janus-faced. Janus was the mythological Roman god with two faces pointing in opposite directions. Similarly, one side of humility is self-effacing often perceived as a negative self-view. On the other side is self-enhancing frequently understood as a positive. We review these distinctions below in our discussion of self-views.

Self-views

Self-views refer to the thoughts and feelings individuals have of themselves (Bong & Clark, 1999) and are occasionally referred to as self-regard or self-concept. Self-views comprise knowledge and understanding of their personality traits, values, motives, possessions, abilities, expectations, life events, relationships with significant others, and appearance (Stangor, 2022) that impacts people's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Gecas, 1982). Self-views vary from negative (e.g., self-effacing) to positive (e.g., self-enhancing) and perform a significant role in shaping reality and guiding behavior in other words, they matter (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). Self-views provide significance to our experiences, assisting us in making sense of, and reacting properly to those experiences. Positive self-views enable people to live a more supportive, fulfilling life whereas negative self-views frequently damage people's ability to successfully manage life events. People receive self-views by studying reactions other people have regarding them (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), as well as their behavior (e.g., Bem, 1972), in addition to the relative performance of other persons (e.g., Festinger, 1954).

The self-effacing face of humility

The self-effacing face of humility is negative because it is often understood as involving degrading oneself, feeling inferior to others, or having low self-esteem. It is associated with timidity, lowliness, servitude, self-loathing, innocence, vulnerability, and its association with inferiority. Historically, this view was seen as virtuous. For example, in the Old Testament, pride and arrogance were often stressed as the foremost vices to avoid. As the proud and high-minded will be corrected for assuming a self-important attitude, keeping low-minded was considered a way of staying in God's good graces. When the Old Testament mentions humility, the act of being humbled is often identified as being important ("For when they are humbled you say, 'It is because of pride; but he saves the lowly,'" Job 22:29).

The concept of humility continues in the New Testament where being humbled is presented again: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12, ESV), and the apostle Paul said, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). This way of understanding humility was likewise endorsed during the Middle Ages where Bernard of Clairvaux (1124/1987) described humility as "the virtue by which a man recognizes his unworthiness because he knows himself" (p. 103) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1485/1972) who defined humility as "self-abasement to the lowest place." Maimonides (1972) in the 12th century said, "When a man reflects on these things…He will be filled with fear and trembling, as he becomes conscious of his lowly condition, poverty, and insignificance … He will then realize he is a vessel full of shame, dishonor, and reproach, empty and deficient" (p. 48).

Much later, Sidgwick (1907/1962) suggested that "humility prescribes a low opinion of our merits" (p. 334) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* defined humility as "the quality of being humble or having a lowly opinion of oneself, meekness, lowliness, humbleness, and the opposite of 'pride' or 'haughtiness'" (McAuthur, 1998). Emmons (1998) noted that "… humility is often equated in people's minds with low self-regard and tends to activate images of the stoop-shouldered, self-deprecating, weak-

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willed soul only too willing to yield to the wishes of others …" (p. 33). Taylor (1985) observed that the humble person is someone "who accepts his lowly position as due him" (p. 17). Contemporary philosophers also emphasize the importance of low self-worth, self-deprecation, and submissive behavior (e.g., Tucker, 2015).

Additional research supports evidence of a self-abasing side to humility. Studies have explored the concepts of humility and modesty (which are considered closely related though distinct constructs; Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Davis, Worthington, & Hook, 2010; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000), and each study has revealed indications of self-abasement. In Exline and Geyer's (2004) survey of individuals' perceptions of humble people (although many of the qualities participants listed were prosocial, e.g., kind/caring toward others, not boastful, unselfish/ sacrificing), some were oriented toward avoidance, such as timid, unassertive, and prone to shame and embarrassment. Correspondingly, in Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, and Kumashiro's (2008) prototype analysis of behavioral modesty, participants categorized their descriptions of a modest person into prosocial classifications and those more associated with avoidance and a negative self-view (e.g., shy, insecure, and embarrassed by praise). One face of humility may have a negative or self-abasing element.

Excessive levels of self-effacing involve negative self-evaluations and action tendencies oriented toward hiding from others' evaluations and are also associated with dispositions such as shame, guilt, low self-esteem, embarrassment, and submissiveness (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Baumeister (1993) indicated that low self-esteem is associated with self-effacement. Taylor and Brown (1988) noted that a great deal of research indicates that people who understate their ability tend to be depressed and have low self-esteem (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Moreover, Weidman, Cheng, and Tracy (2018) found that extreme levels of self-abasement were associated with high neuroticism and introversion, and such individuals "… tend to feel shame, have low self-esteem, and report frequent submissive behaviors and a sense of low inclusionary status; these characteristics portray an individual who fails to accomplish desired goals and views himself [sic] as worthless and deserving of low status" (p. 174).

The self-enhancing face of humility

The other face of humility is its positive or affirming side. Indeed, in American culture, there is a widespread belief that self-enhancement confers psychological benefits (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Kim & Chiu, 2011). Self-enhancement is said to involve fostering and safeguarding self-positivity (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009, 2011) and is often assessed regarding positively biased social comparisons of oneself relative to others (Heck & Krueger, 2015; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015). Its signature tendency is expressed on dimensions of importance and centrality to the self and muted on dimensions of lesser importance and centrality (Alicke, 1985; Dunning, 1995). A person high in self-focus "… would tend to be described as self-absorbed, narcissistic, or self-obsessed" (Hollenbeck & Williams, 1987, p. 206). Additionally, when people spend an inordinate amount of time and energy thinking about themselves especially the things they feel they did wrong or the things they would like to change disproportionate self-focus can turn into rumination often referred to as brooding which is s associated with negative affect and impaired cognitive control in healthy subjects, and with negative attentional biases, severity and duration of depressive episodes, and increased risk of relapse in currently and formerly depressed patients (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Whitmer & Banich, 2007).

The prototypical example of self-enhancing social comparison is the inclination of people to consider themselves better than the typical person (Guenther & Alicke, 2010). However, it is not restricted to social comparisons but also demonstrates itself in additional ways. This perspective can also be ascribed to the influence of the positive psychology movement over the last 20 years. In the decade since the launch of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) scholars have confirmed the well-being and performance benefits of a wide range of strengths, virtues, and positive experiences. Research has linked self-enhancement to numerous positive attributes including lower depression, higher happiness, lower anxiety, lower neuroticism, and lower hostility (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003a; 2003b). Studies have also shown that positive emotions can enhance performance and creativity (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) and that threats to stress and physical health can be allayed by experiencing positive emotions (Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004), affirming one's values (Creswell et al., 2007), and thinking optimistically (Taylor & Kemeny, 2000). Overall, there has been considerable support that positive psychology interventions can enhance well-being and reduce depressive symptoms (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Such findings have also been found by organization scholars (Luthans & Yousssef, 2007).

Yet, overly positive self-assessments forecast instability and relationship problems (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995; Greham, Lane, ManMillan, Bocian, & Ward, 2000). High self-enhancers are often considered arrogant (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997), conceited (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995), less amenable over time (Paulhus, 1998), having poor social skills (Colvin et al., 1995), and are evaluated negatively (e.g., Hoorens, Pandelaere, Oldersma, & Sedikides, 2012). Disproportionate levels of self-enhancement may also lead to narcissism. Narcissists believe they are special and unique, require excessive admiration, and can be described as arrogant, haughty, personally exploitative, lacking in empathy, having a sense of entitlement, and exhibiting a grandiose sense of self-importance (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Narcissists also tend to exaggerate their achievements and talents and expect to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements (Dhawan, Kunik, Oldham, & Coverdale, 2010). Bushman and Baumeister (1998) found that narcissists are especially likely to become aggressive when their self-esteem is threatened. Additionally, the probability of making mistakes caused by the narcissism and hubris of leaders increases in today's dynamic environments (Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Rogoza, Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Kwiatkowska, & Kwiatkowska, 2018; Shamir & Howell, 1999).

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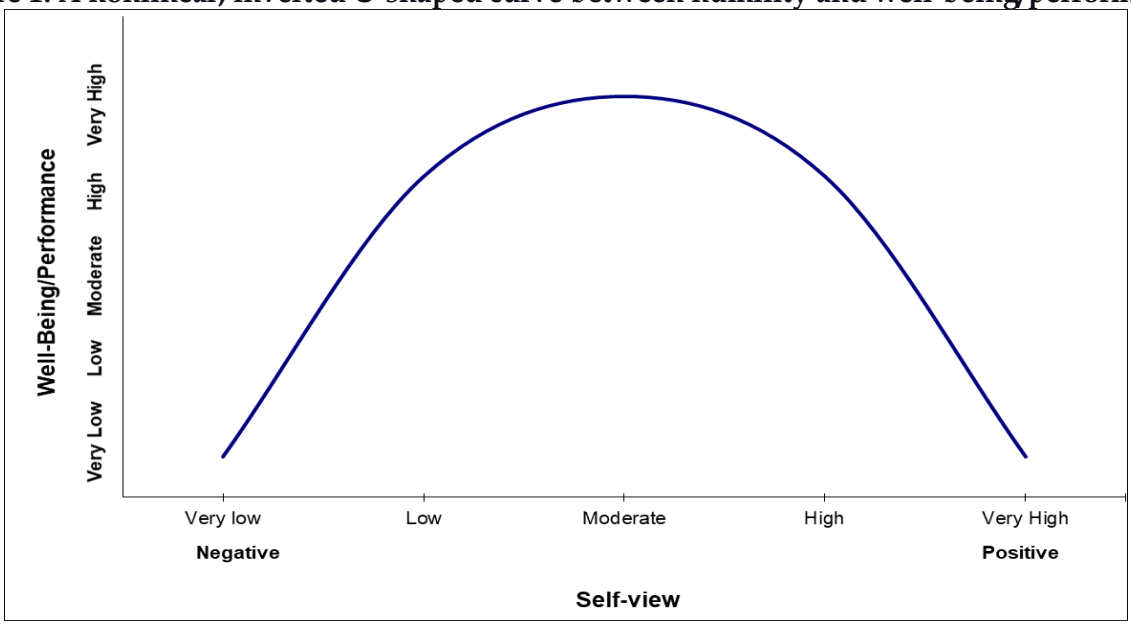
In summary, when self-views are excessively negative individuals experience narrowed cognition, reduced action tendencies, underestimation of their competencies and value, and lacking resources for initiative-taking behaviors. As one's self-regard increases to a moderate level, individuals have a supported and realistic perspective of their strengths and limitations accompanied by an appreciation of the inherent worth of others, openness to learning, and a willingness to subordinate oneself to a higher purpose. After a certain point, however, self-views can reach such elevated levels that individuals become so self-focused that they perceive that they are invulnerable, superior, entitled, and unwilling to listen to perspectives other than their own. This description supports a nonmonotonic or U-shaped curve implying that there is no such thing as an unmitigated good and that balance is important. Such thinking is in line with Quinlan et al., (1982) who suggested over 40 years ago that there appears to be a robust curvilinear relationship associated with many positive experiences and advised researchers to "… start thinking in terms of a family of inverted U-shaped curves to represent interacting variables" (p. 184). This guidance is as valid today as it was then, but this counsel seems to not have been applied when reviewing the positive virtue of humility. We attempt to do so by showing how departures from moderate levels of humility impact well-being, both individual and organizational well-being, and there is a negative correlation between humidity and well-being/performance after the threshold (see Figure 1). Note for example, that moderate (authentic humility) is the ideal however, either low levels or elevated levels of humility can generate less desirable leader behaviors.

Thus, the Janus-faced views of humility as both self-effacement and self-enhancement may be problematic, and balance is ideal in terms of delivering optimal well-being and performance. To reconcile these two perspectives, we view humility as existing at the mid-point on a self-view continuum with extremely negative (self-effacement) and extremely positive (self-enhancing) as the endpoints. Viewing humility as situated midway between such extremes is consistent with the ancient religious sources and philosophers cited earlier. Moreover, some contemporary scholars view humility as the midpoint between excesses, and those humble persons occupy the middle of a spectrum between arrogance and lack of self-esteem (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), having neither self-deprecating nor grandiose self-regard (Morris et al., 2005; Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010; Tangney, 2000). Tangney (2009) said that humility involved "a moderate estimate of personal merits or achievement" (p. 485). According to

Greenberg (2005) "The humble person has achieved a balance of appreciation of [personal] worth and limit, and thereby avoids despair" (p. 181). Thus, the ideal is one of balance between two extremes and desirable attributes and should be developed in moderation (Nussbaum, 1995, 2004). We refer to this moderate level of humility as authentic humility and discuss this in more detail by first reviewing the concept of authenticity, followed by a discussion of authentic leadership, and finally examining our view of authentic humility.

Figure 1. A nonlinear, inverted U-shaped curve between humility and well-being/performance



Authenticity

The idea of authenticity can be traced back to at least the ancient Greeks, as captured by their timeless admonition to "be true to oneself" (Harter, 2002). More recently, Harter (2002) has defined authenticity as "owning one's firsthand experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself" (p. 382) and behaving following the true self. It is the feeling that a person is in alignment with their true or genuine self (Sedikides, Slabu, Lenton, & Thomaes, 2017). Authenticity positively relates to many criteria including subjective well-being, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, meaning in life, job performance, and moral behaviors (e.g., Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015; Kifer, Heller, Qi, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009; van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). Kernis (2003) observed that attainment of authenticity produces "optimal" levels of self-esteem, i.e., when individuals come to know and accept themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses, they display elevated levels of stable, as opposed

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to fragile, self-esteem. Such individuals are also relatively free of the defensive biases displayed by less mature persons and consequently more comfortable forming transparent, open, and close relationships with others. Furthermore, they display behavior that reflects consistency between their values, beliefs, and actions. Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2003) asserted that authenticity can be achieved when individuals enact internalized self-regulation processes; that is, their conduct is guided by internal values as opposed to external threats, inducements, or social expectations and rewards. Moreover, Deci and Ryan (2000) and Kernis and Goldman (2005) offered empirical support that significant positive consequences accrue in terms of physical and psychological well-being to individuals who achieve elevated levels of authenticity.

Authentic leadership

As the first step in our discussion of authentic humility, we reviewed relevant research on authentic leadership because of its significantly larger research base and similarity to what we envision in our construct of authentic humility. Authentic leadership is built on authenticity as described above. Authentic leaders express their true selves to their followers, acting according to their internal reality and away from any hypocrisy and lack of sincerity (Otaghsara & Hamzehzadeh, 2017). Also, Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and May (2004) state that authentic leaders know who they are, know what they believe and value, and act on those values and beliefs when interacting transparently with others. Authentic leadership consists of four dimensions: (1) *Self-awareness*, which is about understanding one's strengths and weaknesses and the multifaceted nature of oneself, being aware of one's impact on other people; (2) *Relational transparency*, which refers to presenting one's authentic self to others; (3) *Internal moral perspective*, which is a form of internal and integrated self-regulation guided by internal moral standards and values rather than due to organizational or societal pressures, resulting in decision making and behavior that is consistent with these internal values; and (4) *Balanced information processing*, which means objectively analyzing data before making decisions, and soliciting views that question one's deeper positions (Avolio et al., 2004; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). One key characteristic of authentic leaders is their humility (Oliveira, Lopes, Santos, Gomes, & Sousa, 2021; Owens & Hekman, 2012) and we refer to such humility as authentic humility.

Authentic humility

Based on these considerations regarding authentic leadership we view authentic humility as grounded in a transcendent self-concept and manifested as an accurate, yet modest, view of oneself, an appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and openness to feedback (Ou et al., 2014; Owens & Hekman, 2012), and a desire to enhance the well-being of the organization and its members (Morris et al., 2005). Such humility

Characteristics of leaders possessing authentic humility include the following:

- Accurate self-awareness or willingness to see oneself accurately refers to showing an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses including gaining insight into the self through exposure to others and being cognizant of one's impact on other people (Davis et al., 2011).
- Recognizing that they do not know everything or understand everything; they see that their opinions are not always the "right" ones or the only way to believe, and willing to listen and learn from others (Morris et al., 2005).
- Sincerity in expression is opposed to masking one's self-promotion with false modesty (Sezer, Gino, & Norton, 2018).
- Objectively analyzing all relevant data before coming to a decision; includes the solicitation of views contrary to their own deeply held perspectives (Walumbwa et al., 2008).
- Willingness to view themselves accurately and openly sharing information and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings while trying to minimize displays of inappropriate emotions (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Morris et al., 2005).
- Their ego is stroked by coaching, developing, and building others and watching them grow (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Owens & Hekman, 2016).
- Seeing the world as a vast, complex, and wondrous place versus seeing the world as simple and easily understood propagates the attitude that such individuals can understand everything (Owens & Hekman, 2016).
- Attending to and valuing subordinates' voice expressions about work-related issues (i.e., ideas, suggestions, concerns, information; Ou et al., 2014).
- Acting in ways that decrease the power differentials between them and their followers by adopting "… a stance of egalitarianism rather than superiority or servility in their communications with others" (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1341) which creates an environment in which subordinates feel more comfortable speaking up without fear of retribution or damaging their relationships with the leader (Liu, 2016).
- Appreciating and respecting others (King & Hicks, 2007; Morris et al., 2005).
- Creating an environment where followers feel less vulnerable (Oc, Daniels, Diefendorff, Bashshur, & Greguras, 2020).
- Maintaining optimal levels of self-confidence and self-esteem (Kernis, 2003).
- Acceptance of something greater than the self; individuals acknowledge that they are not gods, that they are fallible and human (Morris et al., 2005; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013).
- Evaluating success, failure, work, and life without exaggeration (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004).
- Modulate their sense of self-importance and focus their attention on the value of others (Morris et al., 2005); and
- Being ethical and willing to admit limits, mistakes, and biases regarding moral issues (Exline & Guyer, 2004).

In summary, authentic humility involves showing others that one genuinely desires to understand their self, serve others more effectively, act following deep personal values and

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convictions to build credibility, and win the respect and trust of followers by encouraging diverse viewpoints and building networks of collaborative relationships with them. These characteristics suggest that authentic humility has a positive impact on well-being and performance which we now discuss.

Well-being and performance

Humility can be said to have an impact on well-being which can be viewed from self, follower, team, and organizational perspectives (see Nielsen & Marrone, 2018). These are discussed below.

self-outcomes

Authentic humility may be defined as including hedonic (enjoyment, pleasure) and eudemonic (meaning, fulfillment) happiness as well as resilience [coping, emotion regulation, healthy problem solving] Ryan and Deci, 2001; National Institutes of Health Report, 2018). Elements of psychological well-being include a sense of balance in emotion, thoughts, social relationships, and pursuits (Community Translational Science Team, 2016; Feller et al., 2018). According to Ryff (2014), key dimensions of psychological well-being include individuals feeling their lives had meaning, purpose, and direction (purpose in life); whether they viewed themselves to be living in accord with their convictions (autonomy); the extent to which they were making use of their talents and potential (personal growth); how well they were managing their life situations (environmental mastery); the depth of connection they had in ties with significant others (positive relationships); and the knowledge and acceptance they had of themselves, including awareness of personal limitations (self-acceptance).

Kundi, Aboramadan, Elhamalawi, and Shahid (2021) noted a link between employee psychological well-being to the job and organizational performance. Ryff and Singer (2008) also value the concept of balance, both as a theoretical guide and as an empirical reality that practitioners of well-being need to appreciate. Garamoni et al. (1991) suggested that healthy functioning can be characterized by an optimal balance of positive and negative cognitions or effects and that psychopathology is marked by deviations from the optimal balance.

Humble people are more helpful than less humble people, even when researchers control for personality and impression management (LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang, & Willerton, 2012), and those who are humble enjoy bonding with and acceptance by others in interpersonal settings. For instance, Peters, Rowat, and Johnson (2011) found that humility was positively related to higher social relationship quality, Davis et al. (2013) found that humility strengthened social bonds and positively predicted status and acceptance in groups, and Krause (2014) found that humility reduced the impact of negative interactions on depressive symptoms.

follower outcomes

Authentic humility in leaders is modeled by employees (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018) resulting in enhanced employee psychological well-being. While relevant literature frequently suggests a positive relationship between leader-expressed humility and follower affective and behavioral outcomes, Kelloway and his associates have found that high-quality leadership including leader authentic humility is associated not only with enhanced work performance (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996) and occupational safety (Mullen & Kelloway, 2009) but also with enhanced psychological well-being on and off the job (Kelloway & Barling, 2010). Leader humility manifested by admitting mistakes and limits, holding positive views of others, and having a desire to learn is associated with positive outcomes for followers (such as increased levels of engagement, positive affect, performance, psychological freedom, and reduced turnover intentions (Owens et al., 2013; Wang, Owens, Li, & Shi, 2018).

team outcomes

Two primary team-level outcomes have been examined to date: team integration and team performance (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018). Team integration indicates a team's dynamics and 'includes collaborative behavior, information sharing, and joint decision making . . . , as well as a shared vision . . . ' (Ou et al. 2015, p. 6). Ou et al. (2014) studied 63 CEOs and 328 top management team (TMT) members in Chinese companies and found that CEO humility was positively and related to CEO empowering leadership and those humble leaders, compared with less humble CEOs, are more likely to see more strengths in their TMT and to empower TMT members to make decisions collectively.

Regarding team performance, Owens and Hekman (2016) noted that humility fostered a team's focus on achieving, reaching its highest potential, and taking advantage of opportunities. Additionally, Rego et al. (2017) found formidable team performance effects for leader humility. Across three studies, humble leaders increased their team's psychological capital and task allocation effectiveness, which in turn produced significant and positive performance effects for teams. Moreover, Hu, Erdogan, Jiang, Bauer, and Liu (2017) found that humble leaders show followers how to view shortcomings positively and look for added information which enhances team creativity through facilitating information sharing.

Leaders eat last

In the U.S. military, it is customary practice for officers (leaders) to eat last. Why? Because soldiers quickly learn that you take care of them. When you do, your troops will take care of the mission and take care of you. Military officers are the last to eat throughout their careers. Some military leaders have spoken of times when there was not any food left. In his book, *Leaders eat last*, author Simon Sinek explains why some teams pull together while others cannot.

Hyman (2018) refers to several research studies that conclude that humble leaders are more effective listeners and inspire great teamwork and focus on organizational goals better than leaders who do not score high on humility. In one study published in the *Journal of Management*, results of a survey of 105 computer hardware and software companies revealed that humility in CEOs led to higher-performing leadership teams, in addition to increased collaboration and cooperation and flexibility in strategy development.

In another study published in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, managers with traits correlated with humility including

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focusing on employee needs and seeking employee feedback produced higher levels of employee engagement and job performance. Also, in the book *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins revealed two traits of CEOs in companies that transitioned from average to superior market performance shared: humility and a steadfast will to move the organization forward.

Humble leaders understand that they will not be the smartest person in every room they enter, and they also understand that they do not need to be the smartest person. Humble leaders encourage employees to speak up, they respect differences of opinion and advocate for the best ideas, regardless of who produced the best idea. Humble leaders also admit mistakes and take responsibility when things go wrong. When things go well in the organization the humble leader is quick to shine the spotlight on employees who help make projects successful. When other executives and managers begin to model the humble leader, the organization's culture becomes one where getting the best from every employee and team is the norm. psychological research finds humility is most strongly associated with highly positive qualities including sincerity, modesty, fairness, truthfulness, unpretentiousness, and authenticity.

Organizational outcomes

CEO humility is associated with increased levels of top management team integration, middle manager satisfaction, organizational performance, and firm innovation (Ou, Seo, Choi, & Hom, 2017; Ou, Waldman, & Peterson, 2018). Other studies have documented that employee psychological well-being leads to various individual and organizational outcomes such as increased organizational performance and productivity (Hewett, Liefooghe, Visockaite, & Roongrerngsuke, 2018), customer satisfaction (Sharma, Conduit, & Rao Hill, 2017), employee engagement (Tisu, Lupșa, Vîrgă, & Rusu, 2020), error management (Wang, Guchait, & Paşamehmetoğlu, 2020), and organizational citizenship behavior (Mousa, Massoud, & Ayoubi, 2020). Schimmack (2008) noted that neuroticism, a characteristic of individuals with low self-regard, is a negative predictor of life satisfaction and job satisfaction, key elements of the construct of well-being.

In summary, moreover, leaders possessing authentic humility effectively develop subordinates, increase team performance, and cultivate an empowering organizational culture for organizational functioning (Chiu, Balkundi, Owens, & Tesluk, 2020; Hu, Erdogan, Jiang, Bauer, & Liu, 2018; Ou et al., 2018; Rego et al., 2019). Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) speak of humility as providing a competitive advantage to organizations.

Humility, but at what cost?

Although humble leaders can benefit followers, teams, and firms, our study also demonstrates how being humble may be detrimental to the leaders themselves. Failure to deal with the potential disadvantages of humble leadership behavior can be problematic as developing research reveals that engaging in what are considered "good" leadership behaviors also have draining effects on the leaders themselves (Barling and Cloutier, 2017; Lin et al., 2018). In addition, other research indicates that enacting exemplary leadership behaviors including humble leadership can take a toll on the happiness and welfare of humble leaders (Barling and Cloutier, 2017).

Leaders may find expressing humble behaviors requires a good deal of effort for the leaders themselves (Owens and Hekman, 2012). Though it may seem simple for leaders to act powerful and authoritative (Zhang et al., 2015a); there are leaders, however, who may have to exercise continuous attempts to exhibit humble leadership behavior.

Humble leader behavior might especially consume resources, considering the variety and number of difficult behaviors and tasks needed for performing humble behavior. For example, disclosing limitations to display a growth orientation for employees will likely expend both time and energy (Owens and Hekman,2012), and expressing positive emotions to acknowledge others' strengths and show openness to feedback may require emotional regulation and increase emotional exhaustion (Hülsheger and Schewe, 2011).

Emotional labor refers to managing feelings to generate a socially suitable appearance in harmony with the job requirements (Ashford & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983). Many service profession employees regularly participate in emotional labor (Grandey, 2000). Earlier emotional labor research revealed that displaying emotions is positively associated with burnout, turnover, and absenteeism and negatively related to job attitudes, including job satisfaction (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Therefore, an emotionally demanding job is associated with more stress, burnout, increased turnover, and absenteeism, while a job that requires less emotional regulation is associated with increased job satisfaction and employee retention.

Summary and Conclusion

Organizations are badly in need of leaders with greater humility as such leaders are better at managing today's increasingly dynamic and complex organizational structures (Weick, 2001) and researchers have for countless years implicitly assumed that the relationships between variables (e.g., personality/virtues and performance) are linear. Such views may need a more nuanced perspective as offered here. Indeed, Le et al. (2011) found credible evidence for the curvilinear relationships between personality, especially Emotional Stability, and job performance dimensions such that there is an optimal midrange level (threshold) of personality for maximum performance.

Many characteristics that are linked to well-being and robust performance can, at elevated levels, undermine the outcomes they are intended to promote. This review shows that there is an optimal midrange level (threshold) of humility that is constructive thereby illustrating an inverted U-shaped function. Such a curvilinear discovery should not be surprising because many findings have found nonmonotonic relationships across numerous variables (Antonakis, House, & Simonton, 2017; Avanzi, Savadori, Fraccaroli, Ciampa, & van Dick, 2022; Harris & Kacmar, 2006; Lam, Spreitzer, & Fritz, 2014; Le et al., 2011). For example, Moon (2001) demonstrated that highly persistent, conscientious individuals who strongly value achievement are more likely to escalate their commitment to failing courses of action, investing time, money, and resources in losing endeavors. Such excessively elevated levels of persistence may undermine psychological and physical well-being by preventing individuals from disengaging from goals at appropriate times (Miller & Wrosch, 2007; Wrosch,

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Scheier, Carver, & Schulz, 2007). Research has also demonstrated inverted-U-shaped relationships between optimism and performance (Brown & Marshall, 2001). At moderate levels, optimism provides confidence and increases planning, but exceedingly high optimism leads to inadequate preparation and the underestimation of risks. Similarly, there is evidence that at elevated levels empathy can be emotionally harmful and weaken prosocial behavior. Eisenberg (2000, p. 674) summarized research on the phenomenon "empathic overarousal," in which a strong experience of empathy cultivates feelings of distress, which have the boomerang effect of distracting attention away from others and toward managing one's aversive feelings. Research also suggests that empathy runs the risk of undermining task performance. Elevated levels of empathy can cloud judgment, leading to self-sacrificing behaviors that benefit others at the expense of achieving one's own goals (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008), or sometimes, even, fail to benefit others.

Such a nonmonotonic relationship also appears to be the case concerning self-views, self-concept, and self-regard which have historically been seen as unambiguously negative at low levels and unquestionably good at a high positive self-view. We attempted to show that at moderate levels of effect lies true humility and that deviations from this mid-point are dysfunctional. Such a perspective challenges current beliefs that view humility as a virtue to be unambiguously promoted with scholars and practitioners suggesting that the more humility the better. In this paper we attempted to show that like many other variables humility at extremely low and elevated levels can be costly to individual and organizational performance and well-being, interpersonal relationships, and health. The optimal amount of humility, what we refer to as authentic humility, appears to exist at an intermediate level on a self-view continuum ranging from high self-effacement to high self-enhancement.

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