



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com



Systematic literature review of humble leadership from article journal in 2012-2024

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Abstract

Dynamic organizations are of great interest to study because they are increasingly engaging. A successful organization is one that is dynamic and developing, has a global perspective, and is always changing. These conditions all depend on its leader. The purpose of the study is to provide a concept of humility in leadership that differs from traditional leadership styles, which often emphasize authority and power. The methodology used is based on the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) related to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA), which involves several important steps aimed at ensuring transparency, reproducibility, and high-quality results. The result is that the most cited article is "Modeling the Way of Growth: An Inductive Examination of the Behavior, Likelihood, and Outcomes of Humble Leaders." This article is significantly more cited than other articles, indicating that it has a great influence on research regarding humble leadership. Articles published earlier tend to have more citations, indicating that research on humble leadership is relatively new and continues to grow. The conclusion of this systematization is that humble leadership has a positive influence and impact on various aspects, including individuals, teams, and organizations.

Keywords: Humble leaders, individuals, organizations, teams.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i2.6103

Funding: Internal research grant of Bina Insani University with Research (Grant Number 112/BIU/1.5/IX/2024).

History: Received: 6 March 2025 / **Revised:** 4 April 2025 / **Accepted:** 8 April 2025 / **Published:** 11 April 2025

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Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Luthvi Rachman Ervianto: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Writing- original draft; Tantri Yanuar Rahmat Syah: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing- review & editing; Lista Meria: Validation, Visualization, Writing- review & editing; Safuan: Supervision, Formal Analysis, Writing- review & editing..

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank all lecturers of Esa Unggul University who have taught and given direction to the lectures. I would like to thank the promoter and co-promoter lecturers who supported this dissertation research so that it can be published in a reputable international journal.

Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

Humble leadership has become an increasingly interesting topic in organizational research over the past decade. This phenomenon has sparked many questions and interests from researchers, practitioners, and the general public. Research conducted by Owens and Hekman [1] defines humble leadership as an interpersonal characteristic that emerges in a social

context characterized by a willingness to view oneself accurately, demonstrate appreciation for the strengths and contributions of others, and openness to new ideas and input. Humble leaders acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses, appreciate the strengths and contributions of others, and are open to feedback and input.

The concept of humility in leadership is different from traditional leadership styles that often emphasize authority and power. Humble leaders do not feel superior to others but rather place themselves as equals with team members. They encourage collaboration, value differences of opinion, and create an environment where everyone feels valued and heard. Research on humble leadership has provided convincing evidence of its benefits for individuals, teams, and organizations as a whole. At the individual level, humble leadership has been linked to increased employee job satisfaction, job engagement, and psychological well-being. Employees who work under humble leaders tend to feel more valued, supported, and empowered, which in turn increases their motivation and performance. At the team level, humble leadership has been shown to improve team performance, creativity, and collaboration. Humble leaders create a positive and trusting team climate where team members feel comfortable sharing ideas, providing feedback, and working together to achieve common goals. This encourages innovation and increases overall team effectiveness. In addition, research also shows that humble leadership can improve organizational performance. Organizations led by humble leaders tend to have higher employee retention rates, better reputations, and better financial performance. This shows that humble leadership is not only beneficial for individuals and teams but also for the sustainability and success of the organization as a whole.

2. Literature Review

This systematic literature review aims to conceptualize humility in leadership that is different from traditional leadership styles that often emphasize authority and power. Humble leaders do not feel superior to others, but rather place themselves as equals with team members. They encourage collaboration, value differences of opinion, and create an environment where each individual feels valued and heard. Humble leadership, characterized by leaders who are open to feedback, value their followers, and learn from mistakes, has been shown to have significant positive impacts on a variety of employee outcomes and organizational dynamics. Research suggests that humble leadership fosters proactive and innovative work behaviors among staff nurses, as evidenced by a study conducted in the Intensive Care Unit at Tanta University Main Hospital, where a positive correlation was found between humble leadership and these behaviors [2]. Additionally, humble leadership improves employee performance and workplace happiness, with workplace happiness partially mediating these effects [3]. The active motivation model further supports that humble leadership significantly enhances employees' active self-service performance, with affective commitment playing a significant mediating role and job autonomy acting as a boundary condition [4]. In addition, humble leadership positively influences creative performance and reduces employee conflict, with emotional intelligence moderating these relationships. A meta-analytic review consolidated these findings, showing that humble leadership is positively associated with affective commitment, creativity, engagement, job satisfaction, and other positive outcomes, while also contributing unique variance beyond other leadership styles such as transformational and servant leadership [5]. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of humble leadership in enhancing adaptive performance, particularly in work-from-home settings, where it strengthens the relationship between remote work and adaptive performance [6]. In nursing, humble leadership is correlated with higher team performance, particularly in organizations with quality initiatives, and is associated with conflict resolution through compromise [7]. Furthermore, humble leadership has been identified as an effective strategy to reduce employee burnout, with work engagement and subjective well-being mediating this relationship, and altruism serving as a buffering factor [8]. The role of humble leadership in job crafting is also significant, with higher trust between leaders and employees enhancing this effect, and gender further moderating the relationship [9].

3. Research Methodology

This section describes the methodology used in this systematic literature review, including the article identification process, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategy, and synthesis method. The method in this study uses the PRISMA model. The methodology of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) related to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) involves several important steps that aim to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and high-quality results. PRISMA is a guideline used to improve the quality of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, which includes 27 key items that must be reported in SLR and meta-analysis publications [10]. PRISMA consists of several main stages, including: identification, selection, assessment, and synthesis of studies. The first stage is identification, where researchers conduct a comprehensive literature search using relevant databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, PubMed NCBI, ScienceDirect, and Springer. At this stage, researchers use specific keywords to find articles that match their research topic. After identification, the next stage is selection, where the articles found are arranged based on the previously established inclusion and exclusion criteria [11].

In the search conducted using the limitations of the year of research, search topics, document types, article limitations, language, subject areas, and open access, this study employs Boolean techniques with the search string "humble leadership", "humble leadership" AND "individual". Some journals obtained do not meet the selection criteria, such as non-articles, non-English, and duplication; therefore, they will be included in the exclusion category or removed. The database string used is: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("humble leadership") AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , "all"))

In the initial search in the Scopus database using the keyword "Humble Leadership," 116 articles were found without filtering and implementation of the established criteria. In the identification process based on the type of article document,

the number of articles was reduced to 103. Then, in the first screening phase, 90 articles were obtained with final article limitations. Furthermore, the restrictions imposed were articles in English, leaving 87 articles. After that, in the third screening phase, using the subject area limitation "Business, Management, and Accounting," 49 selected articles were obtained. Finally, the inclusion criteria regarding accessibility, such as "open access," were used to select 11 articles.

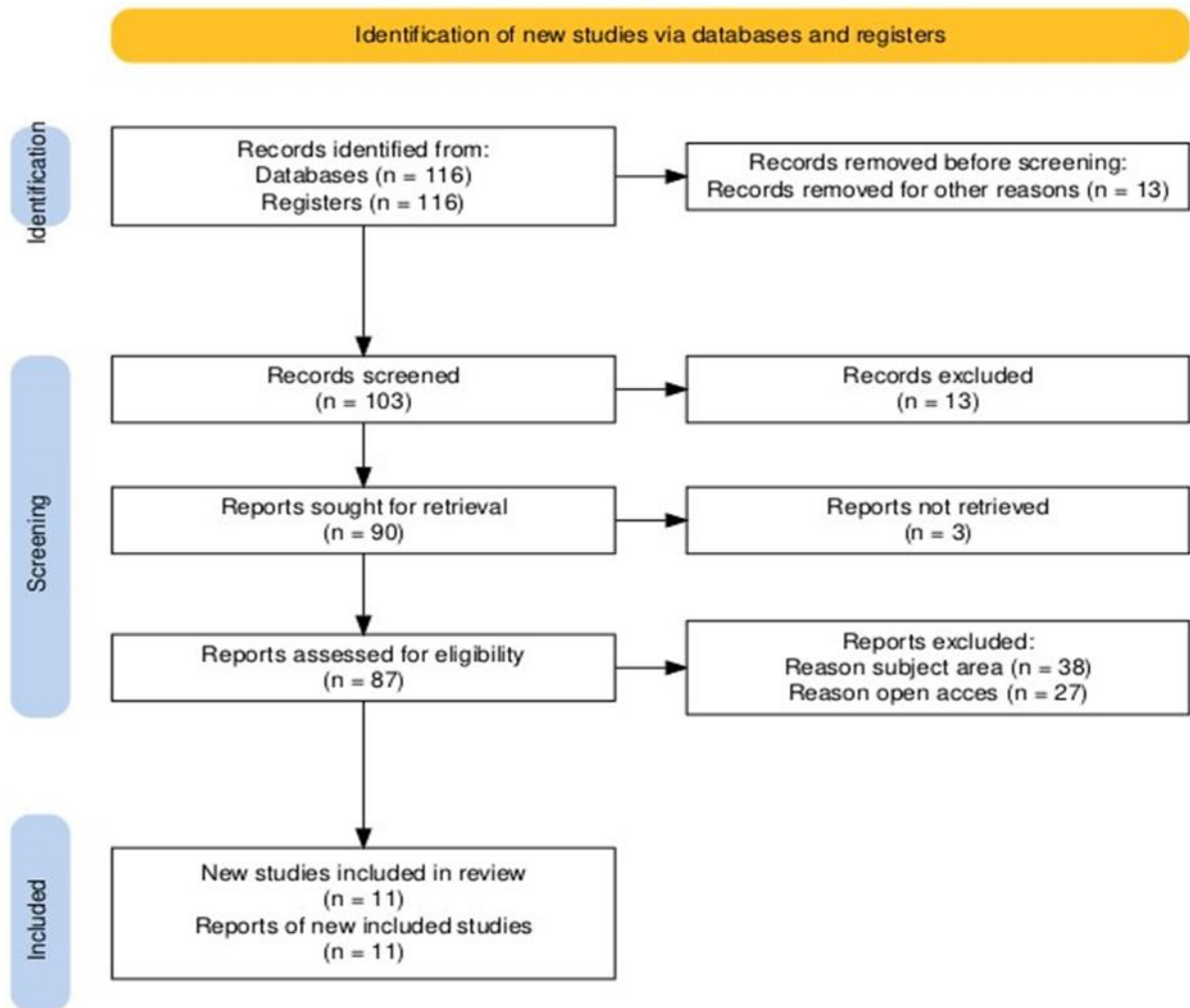


Figure 1.
PRISMA Humble Leadership Model.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Publishers and Citations

The 11 articles identified and analyzed in this literature review were published in leading academic journals, including the Journal of Applied Psychology (Q1), Academy of Management Journal (Q1), The Leadership Quarterly (Q1), Personnel Review (Q2), Asian Journal of Business Ethics (Q2), and Cogent Business & Management (Q4). These articles have been widely cited in the leadership literature, demonstrating their influence and contribution to the field.

Table 1.
List of Publishers and Number of Citations.

No	Publisher Name	Number of Articles	Number of Citations
1.	Taylor & Francis	3	14
2.	Springer Nature	2	2
3.	Elsevier	1	61
4.	Emerald	1	31
5.	John Wiley & Sons	1	54
6.	Academy of Management	1	473
7.	Pompea College of Business	1	1
8.	Sciedu Press	1	1

Of the 11 articles filtered, there are 2 publishers that are superior compared to other publishers, namely Taylor & Francis with 3 articles and Springer Nature with 2 articles related to the keyword "Humble Leadership." However, when viewed through the number of existing citations, 1 article from the Academy of Management far outperforms other articles, with 473

citations and a citation period from 2013 to 2024. The document shows that of the 11 articles uploaded, the most cited article is "Modeling How to Grow: An Inductive Examination of Humble Leader Behaviors, Contingencies, and Outcomes," which was published in 2012 and has been cited 474 times. This article is significantly more cited than other articles, indicating that it has a great influence on research on humble leadership. Meanwhile, two articles have the fewest citations, namely "Transparency and Accountability in Public Financial Management: A Stewardship Account at Kano State Ministry of Finance, Nigeria" and "Why and When Do Leaders Express Humility? Leader Expressed Humility as Psycho-Social Signaling," which are each cited once. Overall, the number of citations for these 11 articles varies, and of the 11 articles related to humble leadership, 9 have been cited by several other researchers. Articles published earlier tend to have more citations, indicating that research on humble leadership is relatively new and still developing.

Table 2.

List of Number of Citations.

No	Documents	Year														
		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
1	Development of thriving at work and organizational citizenship behavior through Islamic work ethics and humble leadership.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
2	The bright and dark sides of humble leadership for project success: A conservation of resources perspective.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
3	Why and When Do Leaders Express Humility? Leader Expressed Humility as Psycho-Social Signaling.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
4	Leader humility, team humility and employee creative performance: The moderating roles of task dependence and competitive climate.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	10	26	22	62
5	Making a Case for Culturally Humble Leadership Practices through a Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	1	11
6	Why and when leader humility promotes constructive voice: a crossover of energy perspective.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	5	16	6	31
7	Transparency and accountability in public financial management: A stewardship account at Kano State Ministry of Finance, Nigeria.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
8	Two roads to effectiveness: CEO feedback seeking, vision articulation, and firm performance.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	9	9	12	7	11	54
9	Modeling how to grow: An inductive examination of humble leader behaviors, contingencies, and outcomes.	0	0	7	14	12	16	32	27	55	53	51	76	80	53	476
	Total	0	0	7	14	12	16	32	30	58	66	68	105	146	98	652

Based on Table 2, in 2013, it was cited 7 times from the same article. In 2014, from the same article, the number of cited articles increased to 14 times. Then, in 2015, there was a decrease in the number of citations from the same article to 12 times. Furthermore, in 2016 and 2017, there was an increase in the number of citations, namely 16 times and 32 times, respectively, from the same article. Additionally, in 2018, there were 2 different journal articles related to humble leadership that had been cited 30 times, with each being cited 3 times and 27 times. The same trend occurred with an increase in citations in 2019 from 2 journal articles that were the same as the previous year, namely 58 citations, with 3 citations and 55 citations, respectively. After that, in 2020, the number of cited articles increased to 4 different articles with 66 citations. Meanwhile, in 2021, there was an increase in the number of citations, amounting to 68 citations from 4 different journal articles. There was a significant spike in the number of citations in 2022 to 105 citations from 5 different journal articles. Next, in 2023, there was an even more significant spike in the number of citations, reaching 146 times from 8 different journal articles. Finally, in 2024, until July, the number of citations only reached 98 citations from 7 different journal articles. Based on these data, the total citations obtained were 652 times from 9 different articles related to humble leadership.

Referring to the search for journal articles related to humble leadership using the PRISMA model above, 11 journal articles were obtained, which were the main discussion topics. These journals explain the relationship between humble leadership variables and other relevant variables over the last 12 years. Research related to humble leadership has also been conducted by Ma et al. [12]. This article was published in the journal *Personnel Review*, which is a Q2 journal in Scopus. This article discusses how and when leader humility can increase constructive voice. This study uses two studies with a quantitative approach to test the research hypothesis. Study 1 involved 449 subordinates and 88 direct supervisors, while Study 2 involved 185 subordinates and 50 direct supervisors. The results showed that leader humility positively predicted follower constructive voice behavior through increased follower relational energy. In addition, leader humility is only positively related to perceived relational energy when a leader is considered to have higher sincerity by their subordinates.

Furthermore, another study published in the journal *Asian Journal of Business Ethics*, which is a Q2 journal in Scopus. This article examines the mediation and moderation models of the relationships between Islamic work ethic (IWE), thriving at work, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and leader humility. This study used a sample of 418 employees from two different sample groups (Islamic banks and educational institutions) in Indonesia. The results of the study found a positive influence of IWE and leader humility on thriving at work and OCB, as well as a positive influence of thriving at work on OCB. Thriving at work was found to be a mediator in the relationship between IWE and OCB, and leader humility moderated this relationship [13].

Then also published in the journal *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, which is a Q1 journal in Scopus related to humble leadership. The study explores the relationship between humble leadership and employee improvisation, as well as its mechanisms and boundary conditions. Using a scenario-based simulation experiment ($N = 91$) and a questionnaire survey ($N = 217$), this study found that humble leadership positively affects employee improvisation. Employee positive emotions mediate this relationship, while employee positive emotions and leader-member exchange play a chain mediation role. In addition, power distance orientation negatively moderates the promotion effect [14].

Meanwhile, the results of the study published in the journal *Tourism Management*, which is a Q1 journal in Scopus by Ye et al. [15]. This study examines the relationship between leader humility, team humility, and employee creative performance, as well as the moderating role of task dependence and competitive climate. This study used data from 76 work teams and 531 employees in the hospitality industry. The results of the study indicate that leader humility has a positive effect on team humility, which in turn affects employee creative performance.

Furthermore, in a study published in *Cogent Business & Management*, which is a Q4 journal in Scopus, it examines the relationship between humble leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) with the mediating role of job satisfaction and employee engagement among employees at a public university in Ghana. The results of the study indicate that humble leadership has a positive and significant relationship with OCB, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. The results of the study further indicate that job satisfaction and employee engagement play a partial mediating role in the relationship between humble leadership and OCB [16].

Likewise, in the *American Business Review* journal, which is a Q2 journal in Scopus, there is a conceptual study that explains why some leaders exhibit humble behavior towards their subordinates more often than others. This study refers to self-determination theory and signaling theory to explain why some leaders demonstrate humble behavior. The need for relatedness and competence is proposed as an antecedent of humility expressions, with leader optimism acting as a moderator of this relationship [17].

Meanwhile, according to Owens and Hekman [1] in the *Academy of Management Journal*, which is a Q1 journal in Scopus, their research aims to build a model of behavior, outcomes, and contingencies of humble leadership. This study used 55 in-depth interviews with leaders from various contexts. The results of the study indicate that humble leadership involves leaders who model for followers how to grow and produce positive organizational outcomes.

Humble leadership, in a study conducted by Ashford et al. [18], explains two different leader behaviors, namely humble leadership behavior by seeking feedback and less humble leadership behavior by articulating a vision. This study focused on CEOs and top management teams (TMT) from 65 small to medium-sized companies in the United States and Belgium. The results of this study indicate that both CEO feedback seeking and vision articulation are associated with increased TMT potential and company performance. However, although the indirect effect of feedback seeking on performance through potential is significant when controlling for vision, the indirect effect of vision on performance through potential is not significant when controlling for feedback seeking. The results of this study are further qualified by the significant interaction between feedback seeking and vision articulation. This study also provides the view that CEOs who are not considered to articulate a clear vision can create the same level of TMT potential and lead organizations with the same level of company

performance as more visionary CEOs, provided they are seen to frequently seek feedback from TMT members. Conversely, the benefits of feedback seeking are less pronounced for CEOs who are described as vision articulators. Meanwhile, Dandago [19], in his research, presents a case study on transparency and accountability in public financial management in the Ministry of Finance, Kano State, Nigeria. The study highlights the practices implemented during the author's tenure as commissioner of finance, emphasizing the importance of ethical and collaborative leadership in enhancing transparency and accountability. The study also focuses on key achievements in the five main functions of the Ministry of Finance: revenue management, expenditure, debt, investment, and wealth creation and management. In revenue management, the Ministry succeeded in increasing Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) and implementing reforms such as the professionalization of the Kano Internal Revenue Service and the introduction of the Single Revenue Account (SRA). In expenditure management, emphasis was placed on prudence, transparency, and accountability in the expenditure of public funds, including the re-implementation of the Expenditure Committee and Cash Management Committee. The Ministry also succeeded in resolving the backlog of audit inquiries and updating the financial statements. In debt management, the Ministry enhanced the Debt Management Unit, ensured timely debt reporting, and conducted debt sustainability analysis. In addition, the Ministry is also active in investment management, including efforts to mobilize local investors and secure loans for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). According to Dandago [19], he concluded that the key achievement during his tenure was the creation of unity and a spirit of togetherness among Ministry officials. This spirit is what drives success in fulfilling the Ministry's main responsibilities.

Further research in the journal *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance* which proposes a culturally responsive leadership framework (CRLF) for public sector and human service leaders to help create an inclusive environment for increasingly diverse stakeholders. CRLF facilitates the accumulation and integration of cultural knowledge in the context of organizational leadership. It is important to consider whether leaders have the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the diverse experiences of their employees and stakeholders [20]. Finally, research conducted by Hassan et al. [21] in the *Cogent Business & Management* journal, which is a Q4 journal in Scopus. This article explores the bright and dark sides of humble leadership by examining the mediating role of project commitment and workplace deviance between humble leadership and project success. Data were collected from 315 IT employees and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The results showed that humble leadership positively influenced project success through the mediation of project commitment. However, workplace deviance did not mediate the relationship between humble leadership and project success.

4.2. Publication Year and Country of Publisher

The reviewed articles were published between 2012 and 2024, indicating a growing research interest in humble leadership in recent years. The research was conducted in a variety of countries, including the United States, China, Ghana, and Indonesia, suggesting that humble leadership is a global phenomenon relevant to a variety of cultural contexts.

Table 3.
Year of Publication, Number of Articles and Country.

Year	Number of Articles	Country
2012	1	United States
2013	1	United States
2014	1	Ghana
2015	1	Not Stated
2016	2	United States
2017	1	China
2018	1	China
2019	1	China
2020	2	United States, China
2022	1	United States
2023	2	China, Pakistan
2024	1	Ghana

Based on 11 articles from the Scopus search results, they have been classified based on the country of origin of the article. There is an increase in the number of publications on humble leadership from 2012 to 2024, indicating an increasing interest in this topic. Research on humble leadership has been conducted in various countries, indicating that this is a topic of global relevance. The United States and China are the two countries with the highest number of publications, indicating that these countries are leading research on humble leadership. This research was also conducted in other countries, such as Ghana, Indonesia, and Pakistan, indicating that humble leadership is a topic of interest in various parts of the world.

4.3. Researchers, Methods, Samples and Industry Types

Here are some lists of researchers, research methods, samples and types of industries used in previous studies on humble leadership from 2012 – 2024.

Table 4.

List of Researchers, Methods, Samples and Industry Types.

Researchers	Methods	Samples	Industry Types
Owens and Hekman [1]	Inductive, in-depth interviews with 55 leaders	Various organizational contexts	Various
Owens et al. [22]	Multi-method studies (experiments, surveys)	Business student, employee of a health care organization	Health Services
Owens and Hekman [23]	Multi-method studies (experiments, surveys)	Business student, healthcare employee	Health Services
Ma et al. [12]	Multi-source, multi-timeline survey	449 subordinates and 88 direct supervisors (Study 1), 185 subordinates and 50 direct supervisors (Study 2) from a pharmaceutical manufacturing company and a heavy industry manufacturing company in China	Pharmaceuticals and Heavy Industry
[20]	Conceptual review	There isn't any	Public sector and human services
Hassan et al. [21]	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)	315 IT employees in Pakistan	Information Technology
Sun et al. [14]	Scenario-based simulation experiments and questionnaire surveys	91 employees from various companies in Shanghai, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Hainan, and other regions (Study 1), 217 employees and their 61 supervisors from various companies in Shanghai, Shandong, Hainan, and Heilongjiang (Study 2)	Various
Ye et al. [15]	Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM)	531 employees from 76 work teams in the hospitality industry in Guangdong Province, China	Hospitality
Ansong et al. [16]	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	246 administrators at a public university in Ghana	Education
Liu et al. [24]	Study multi-level	It wasn't specifically mentioned, but it likely involved employees and team leaders from multiple organizations.	Not mentioned
Rego et al. [25]	Study multi-level	Study 2: 70 team leaders and 282 followers; Study 3: 53 team leaders and 203 followers	Not mentioned
Manix [17]	Conceptual	N/A	N/A

From the eleven articles on humble leadership reviewed, there is diversity in research approaches. Owens and Hekman [1] used an inductive approach by conducting in-depth interviews, while Owens et al. [22] and Owens and Hekman [23] used multi-method studies combining experiments and surveys. According to Ma et al. [12], who used a multi-source and multi-time survey, while Hassan et al. [21] and Ansong et al. [16] used quantitative methods such as PLS-SEM and SEM. Sun et al. [14] combined scenario-based simulation experiments with questionnaire surveys, while Ye et al. [15] used Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM). Campos-Moreira et al. [20] and [17] conducted a conceptual review.

This diversity shows that research on humble leadership can be conducted using various approaches, both qualitative and quantitative. In addition, the samples used in this study were also diverse, ranging from business students and healthcare employees to managers and CEOs from various industries. This diversity of samples shows that humble leadership is relevant in various organizational contexts.

Future research can consider using more diverse research methods, such as case studies, field experiments, and meta-analyses, to expand our understanding of humble leadership. In addition, future research can also consider using more diverse samples, such as leaders and employees from different cultures and countries, to test the generalizability of findings from previous research.

4.4. Negative Factors Affecting Humble Leadership Goals

4.4.1. Insincerity of Humble Leaders

Leader humility is only positively correlated with perceived relational energy when a leader is perceived as having high sincerity by their followers [12]. This suggests that if a leader's humility is insincere or perceived as fake, it can negatively impact followers' perceptions of the leader and their relationship with the leader.

4.4.2. Workplace Deviant Behavior

The dark side of humble leadership by testing the mediating role of project commitment and workplace deviant behavior between humble leadership and project success. Although the results showed that humble leadership positively affected

project success through the mediation of project commitment, however, workplace deviance did not mediate the relationship between humble leadership and project success.

4.4.3. Power Distance Mismatch

Sun et al. [14] found that power distance orientation negatively moderated the promotion effect. That is, employees with high power distance orientation may be less responsive to humble leadership, which may hinder its positive effects on employee improvisation.

4.4.4. Excessive Leader Humility

Yuan et al. [26] found that when a leader is perceived as being too humble, it can lead to distrust in the leader's abilities and can indicate decreased employee engagement in the workplace. This suggests that there is an optimal level of leader humility, and too much humility can be counterproductive.

These negative factors highlight the importance of authenticity and moderation in humble leadership. Although leader humility is generally associated with positive outcomes, it is important to note that it is not always effective and can have negative consequences in certain situations. These results suggest that leader humility should be expressed sincerely and authentically, and that leaders should be aware of the potential pitfalls of being too humble. Additionally, leaders need to adapt their leadership style to the characteristics of their followers, such as power distance orientation, to maximize the effectiveness of humble leadership.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the growing research interest in humble leadership and its positive impact on a variety of individual, team, and organizational outcomes. However, it also identifies several limitations and gaps in the existing literature. For example, future research could further explore the antecedents and consequences of humble leadership, as well as the role of moderating variables. Additionally, research could broaden its focus beyond the Western organizational context and investigate humble leadership in different cultures. By addressing these gaps, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of humble leadership and its implications for management practice.

Specifically, future research should focus on developing and testing a more comprehensive model of humble leadership that includes multiple antecedents, mediators, and moderators. Additionally, research should broaden its focus beyond positive outcomes and investigate the potential negative consequences of humble leadership [21]. By addressing these gaps, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of humble leadership and its implications for management practice.

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