Linking Leader Humility with Follower Performance: A Multi-Foci Relational

Identification Perspective

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Abstract

One distinctive feature of leader humility is its facilitation of followers' development-oriented relational identity. Drawing on relational identity theory, we argue that leader humility, a kind of bottom–up leadership, enhances followers' multi-foci relational identifications and subsequent multi-foci performance. Furthermore, leader workplace status is a boundary condition affecting the indirect relationships between leader humility and employee performance through multi-foci relational identifications. In an experiment (Study 1), we manipulated leader humility and our results supported the positive indirect effects of leader humility on multi-foci performance through multi-foci relational identification. In a field study (Study 2), we tested our hypotheses with two-wave data from a sample of 380 office workers in 82 groups in China. The results of Study 2 largely support our conceptual framework. We found that leader workplace status strengthened the relationship between leader humility and relational identification to coworkers, although did not facilitate the linkage between leader humility and followers' relational identification to the leader. Taken together, converging results from the two studies suggest that leader humility promotes followers' multi-foci relational identifications and subsequent multi-foci performance, and leader workplace status facilitates the indirect relationship of leader humility and follower interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior (OCBI) through relational identification to coworkers.

Keywords: Leader humility; Multi-foci; Relational identification; Workplace status; In-role performance; OCBI

Introduction

In recent years, organizational researchers have paid increasing attention to the
implications of leader humility (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018). Humility has been defined as an
interpersonal characteristic that emerges in social contexts and its effectiveness is constructed
in workplace interpersonal processes (Hu et al., 2018; Mao et al., 2019; Owens & Hekman,
2012). It connotes a willingness to view oneself accurately, an appreciation of others'
strengths and contributions, and teachability or openness to new ideas and feedback (Owens
et al., 2013). Although there are considerable empirical evidences suggesting that leader
humility fosters followers' positive work attitude and performance (Chen et al., 2018; Morris
et al., 2005), including in-role performance (Ou et al., 2014; Owens et al., 2013; Owens et al.,
2019) and proactive performance (Oc et al., 2015; Owens & Hekman, 2016), the impact of
leader humility on followers' identities and identifications in a deep sense remains
underdeveloped.

The omission is consequential. Theoretically, leader humility goes beyond the "great
man" perspective and focuses more on the role of followers in leadership process by being
open about the limitations of knowledge and skills (Chen et al., 2018). In other words,
humble leaders make themselves transparent and followers become critical to the
effectiveness of leader humility. As a bottom–up leadership style (Chiu et al., 2016), the
influence of leader humility on followers' identity and self-conceptions at work represents the
development of followers' deep level psychology and indicates that humble leaders can exert
significant influence on followers (Howell & Shamir, 2005; Mao et al., 2019; Liu et al.,
2010). The underexplored impact of leader humility on followers' identity in existing

literature limits our understanding of how leader humility works. Moreover, leader humility

shapes followers' relational identities in a deep sense (Owens & Hekman, 2012) rather than

only provides psychological safety or trusted climate. In workplace relational interactions,

leaders with high humility present themselves as "in process", which facilitates the validation

of followers' developmental efforts and shapes relationships of mutual learning and growth

(Owens & Hekman, 2012). Followers' development-oriented relational identities are thus

activated (Owens & Hekman, 2012). It is reasonable to expect that leader humility is

concerned with followers' relational identifications (Mao et al., 2019; Owens & Hekman,

2012).

In the present research, we explore the influence of leader humility on relational

identities and argue that leader humility relates to followers' multi-foci relational

identifications (i.e., relational identification to the leader and relational identification to

coworkers), which subsequently affects multi-foci performance (i.e., in-role performance

toward leader and interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior toward coworkers).

Indeed, when followers interact with humble leaders, followers' relational identities become

relevant and salient (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Robert & Vandenberghe, 2020). As humility

embeds in interpersonal process, leader-follower role relationship bears the brunt (Aryee et

al., 2007). Meanwhile, the influence of leader humility on followers' relational identity can

have a transference effect (Anderson & Chen, 2002) and followers guide the cognitive

process toward coworkers based on their mental structure developed by leader humility

(Ritter & Lord, 2007). Leader-follower role relationship and coworker-coworker role

relationship constitute followers' relational identities at work and have an impact on

followers' self-definitions (Farmer et al., 2015). Therefore, this study focuses on employees'

relational identification to both leader and coworkers and refines the different performance

consequences.

However, we expect that leaders' relative standing within the organization – workplace

status – influences the leader humility and multi-foci relational identification relationships.

Relational identities knit the network of roles and roles incumbents together and integrate the

social structure with relational interactions (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Sluss et al., 2011). It is

reasonable that both relational interactions and social structure will influence relational

identities and the development of relational identifications. More importantly, relational

interactions are embedded in social structure. Therefore, humility, as the role incumbent's

attribute that is reflected in relational interactions (Mao et al., 2019), is constrained by social

structure. We argue that leader workplace status, as a leader's standing in social structure,

influences the relationship between leader humility and followers' relational identifications.

We address the question of how leader humility influences multi-foci relational

identifications and performance by drawing upon relational identity theory (Sluss & Ashforth,

2007) as it provides a framework about how relational identifications develop and how

relational identifications relate to behaviors.

Relational identity theory suggests that relational identification develops in perceived

attractiveness or desirability of specific relational identity, and facilitates behaviors toward

the relational others (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Based on relational identity theory, we propose

that leader humility relates to followers' relational identification to the leader and relational

identification to coworkers, because leader humility facilitates the developmental role

relationships (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Humble leaders' focus on followers' development is embedded in workplace relational interactions (Mao et al., 2019), such as fostering the mutual learning relationship by acknowledging their own shortcomings and affirming the efforts of followers, thus the role relationships become positive and important to followers' self-awareness and relational identifications are developed. Multi-foci relational identifications based on multiple role relationships relate to multi-foci performance (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Specifically, when followers develop relational identification to the leader and (partial) define themselves based on leader-follower role relationship, they tend to adopt behaviors benefiting the leader, thus we propose that relational identification relates to in-role performance. Accordingly, when relational identification to coworkers develops, followers behave in favor of coworkers, thus we propose that relational identification to coworkers relates to their helping behaviors toward their coworkers such as OCBI. Following prior research in humility and relational identity theory, we focus on leader workplace status as a vital boundary condition for leader humility. Followers may associate leader's humility with incompetence (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Liu, 2019). While, a leader's higher status brings more tangible and intangible resources from social structure to role relationships and exerts more social charisma, which enhance the positive effects that humility could have. Thus, high leader status strengthens the relationship between humility and multi-foci relational identification.

Overall, our model extends the current understanding of leader humility and explores the boundary conditions under which it works. The primary contributions of our research are threefold. First, we extend the understanding of the positive role of leader humility by

showing how leader humility can influence followers' deep level psychology (i.e., promote

multi-foci relational identification) and improve subsequent multi-foci performance (Hu et

al., 2018; Mao et al., 2019). Although prior studies have suggested there are positive effects

of leader humility on psychological safety (Hu et al., 2018), trust climate (Bharanitharan et

al., 2019) and so on, we argue that humility can have an impact on a follower's self-concept

and promote relational identifications. By introducing the relational identity theory

perspective, our research sheds additional light on leader humility by exploring the potential

of humility to influence relational identities. Second, by exploring the influence of leader

humility on followers' multi-foci relational identifications, this research refines the

performance consequences of leader humility. Existing literature has discussed relational

identification to the leader and to coworkers separately. Since self is embedded in a larger

context (Zhu et al., 2015), our focus on followers' relational identities, which are shaped not

only by leader–follower role relationships but also by coworker role relationships, is

significant in refining the influence of leader humility on followers' performance. When

leader humility modifies a follower's self-concept, the impact naturally affects the follower's

view of other issues and relationships (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). We discuss followers'

relational identification to both leaders and coworkers under one framework for the first time,

and we suggest different foci performance are motivated by different foci relational

identifications. The last theoretical contribution of this research is that it explains when

followers are most likely to respond to leader humility (Hu et al., 2018; Mao et al., 2019; Ou

et al., 2017). In combination with relational identity theory, we focus on leader workplace

status as an important contextual factor that influences the impact of leader humility on

followers' relational identifications.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Relational Identity Theory

Relational identity theory addresses how relational identifications develop in situations where individuals attach relational identities with positive valence and how relational identifications facilitate behaviors toward the relational others (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Relational identity is the nature of one's role relationship, such as leader-follower and coworker-coworker, and is about how role occupants enact their respective roles with reference to each other (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Roles are sets of behavioral expectations of the given positions and depend on the network of complementary roles (Biddle, 1979), thus the interpersonal perspective on role relationships is necessary (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Positive valence of relational identity refers to its perceived attractiveness or desirability. Relational identification is defined as "a (partial) definition of oneself in terms of a given role-relationship – what the relationship means to the individual" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p.15). Relational identifications develop when individuals evaluate the role relationships as attractive or desirable and attach positive valence with relational identities.

Relational identities and relational identifications are arranged in a cognitive hierarchy ranging from generalized to particularized schemas (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Specifically, individuals experience generalized relational identities and relational identifications apart from any specific relational other (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). For example, individuals may develop relational identification to coworkers as a generalized schema and view coworkers as a symbolic collective, rather than develop relational identification to a particular coworker.

Particularized relational identities and relational identifications are based on the specific role

relationship (e.g., Peter as a coworker). Generalized and particularized relational identities

and identifications mutually reinforce each other (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Based on these

suggestions, we propose that leader humility positively relates to followers' particularized

relational identification to the leader and generalized relational identification to coworkers.

Leader Humility, Multi-foci Relational Identification, and Multi-foci Performance

Compared with traditional leader-centered "heroic" leadership (e.g., transformational

leadership), a humble approach to leadership is regarded as a bottom–up leadership style that

is follower–centered and constructed in interpersonal process (Dansereau et al., 2013; Yukl,

2006). Leader humility is characterized as being open to acknowledging personal limits,

faults, and mistakes; showing appreciation; and giving credit to followers (Hu et al., 2018),

and therefore, leader humility influences the way one sees oneself (more objectively), others

(more appreciatively), and new information or ideas (more openly) (Rego et al., 2019). The

interpersonal process attribute of leadership is embodied incisively and vividly in leader

humility, since humility has significant effects on the pattern and content of relational

interaction and is conceptualized as an interpersonal attribute (Owens et al., 2013; Hu et al.,

2018). Attribute reflects the behavioral view of personality, which suggests that "behaviors

are the building blocks of traits and that traits are established through behavioral consistency"

(Mao et al., 2019, p.346).

Leader humility is experienced and interpreted by followers as they engaging in work

relationships (Argandona, 2015; Davis et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2018). We propose that leader

humility motivates followers to form multi-foci relational identifications by attaching

attractiveness and desirability to multiple role relationships (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Specifically, we argue that leader humility relates to follower's particularized relational

identification to the leader due to the following reasons.

First, we argue that leader humility can enhance followers' relational identification to the

leader by increasing the perceived self-importance of followers in the role relationship.

Humble leaders are open, are willing to listen to the opinions of followers, and actively seek

feedback so that followers have unhindered communication with leaders with regard to work

problems; thus, followers may fully express their ideas or suggestions to leaders

(Bharanitharan et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2013). In this situation, the valences of leader–

follower workplace role relationships are determined by both leaders and followers, as

followers also influence these relationships. Perceived self-importance in leader–follower

role relationship contributes to the fulfillment of self-concept, attaches attractiveness to these

relationships, and thereby motivates followers to (partially) define their self-concepts

accordingly (Qu et al., 2015; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Therefore, followers develop relational identification to the leader.

Second, a humble leader may encourage followers to internalize the leader's goals,

values, and beliefs by affirming followers' values in the workplace through relational

interactions (Carnevale et al., 2019). Humble leaders recognize the contributions of followers

and appreciate their strengths, helping followers to form an objective view of their own value

at work (Bharanitharan et al., 2019). In this way, meaningfulness arises at work (Chen et al.,

2018; Jeung & Yoon, 2016); the leader–follower relationship has less uncertainty and is more

attractive to followers, thereby promoting followers' relational identification to the leader (Qu

et al., 2015). In addition, the positive information that followers received helps them to develop deeper understanding of their own relational identities, which may bring about relational identification to the leader (Qu et al., 2015).

Finally, leader humility suggests strong ethics (Lin et al., 2019; Oc et al., 2015), which may add to followers' positive evaluations of the personalities of leaders and further encourage the formation relational identification. Specifically, a humble leader shows humanistic concern (Rego et al., 2018) and exhibits elevated and impressive moral qualities (Lin et al., 2019) in workplace relational interactions. This positive impression of personalities may encourage followers to develop relational identification to the leader (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

According to relational identity theory, the more attractiveness or desirability an individual perceives in a role relationship, the higher level of relational identification could be formed (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, 2008). Leader humility promotes the formation of followers' relational identification to the leader by providing a sense of importance in the leader-follower role relationship, promoting internalization of this role relationship through relational interactions, and enhancing positive evaluations of leaders' personal qualities. Furthermore, followers' relational identifications to their leaders affect their motivation and performance in the workplace (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, 2008; Qu et al, 2015). When followers view the leader–follower role relationship as part of their self-concept, they align their own interests to the leaders' interests, and regard helping leaders as they help themselves, thereby generating strong intrinsic motivation to achieve leaders' role goals and helping leaders to achieve success (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). As relational identification

develops based on workplace role relationships, relational identification to the leader may

prompt followers to realize the role expectation of the leader and ultimately achieve higher

work performance. Therefore, we propose as follows.

Hypothesis 1. *Relational identification to the leader mediates the relationship between*

leader humility and follower in-role performance.

Unlike in-role performance, interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior toward peers

is a kind of extra-role performance that would not be rewarded formally by organizations.

Existing research has suggested that leader humility has relational and prosocial

consequences (e.g., OCBI and/or helping behaviors), because a humble leader can become

followers' role model and have a behavioral contagion effect (Owens et al., 2013; Owens &

Hekman, 2016; Qin et al., 2020). In this research, we suggest a relational identification

mechanism and argue that leader humility relates to followers' OCBI by influencing

relational identity and fostering follower's generalized relational identification to coworkers.

First, leader humility emphasizes the role of followers in daily work, which makes it

easier to establish relational identification to coworkers (Thompson & Korsgaard, 2019).

Humble leaders discover, acknowledge, and encourage followers' abilities and contributions,

and actively seek and fully respect feedback from followers (Margolis, 2015; Seers, 1989).

These efforts result in followers not only feeling a stronger sense of meaningfulness, but also

helping them to realize others' unique contributions (Jeung & Yoon, 2016; Hu et al., 2018). A

clearer understanding of their own and coworkers' contributions motivates followers to attach

positive valence to their role relationships with coworkers and to internalize coworker

relationships into self-conceptions.

Second, by promoting interactions between followers, leader humility makes the coworker role relationships become salient and important for followers. Specifically, humble leaders seek everyone's cooperation (Argandona, 2015) and, at the same time, are more likely to encourage followers to participate in management and to lead themselves (Morris et al., 2005). These leaders have no need to be superior to followers, which encourages followers to distinguish themselves and results in more autonomy at work (Jeung & Yoon, 2016). These encouragements drive followers to form higher levels of self-organization and embeddedness in team process, leading to a higher level of interaction within teams (Hu et al., 2018; Owens & Hekman, 2016). Workplace role relationships between followers (i.e., coworker–coworker relationships) become salient and important for collaboration, cooperation, and even conflicts among followers (Banks et al., 2014), which in turn triggers followers' desire to identify these relationships and to develop generalized relational identification to coworkers.

Finally, humble leaders become role models for followers, with a resulting followers' interest in developing relational identification to coworkers (Owens & Hekman, 2012, 2016). Leaders who lead by example inspire followers to show kindness and acceptance to others (Carnevale et al., 2019). By displaying humility, leaders can positively influence followers' shared beliefs about being humble in the presence of each other; teams may become "humble teams" (Owens & Hekman, 2016) in which followers not only focus on their role relationships with leaders, but also concern about their relationships with team coworkers. Therefore, the perceived desirability of coworker relationships drives the formation of follower's generalized relational identification to coworkers (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, 2008).

Based on this discussion, we consider that, at least at a generalized level, leader humility

can promote followers' relational identification to coworkers by helping followers to form a holistic view of workplace roles, making the coworker relationship significant, and reminding followers of the value of the coworker relationship.

When followers form relational identification to coworkers, they demonstrate behaviors that are beneficial to coworkers. Relational identification is associated with several processes that Pettigrew (1998) identified for overcoming intergroup bias, including empathy and perspective-taking (Aron et al., 1991), getting to know another person through personalized interactions (Brickson & Brewer, 2001), and behaving for the benefit of another person (Cooper, 2013; Vos & Van der Zee, 2011). Interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior (OCBI), a type of interpersonal altruistic behavior, directly helps to improve the effectiveness of peer, individual, and teams (Farmer et al., 2015). When followers show relational identification to coworkers, they display higher level of OCBI. Therefore, we propose as follows.

Hypothesis 2. *Relational identification to coworkers mediates the relationship between leader humility and follower OCBI.*

Leader Workplace Status as a Moderator of the Effect of Leader Humility

Humans are innately driven to organize themselves so that some are afforded higher status than others (Maner & Kenrick, 2010), even if they are in formal positions at almost the same level. Workplace status is an individual's relative standing in an organization and is defined by the respect, prominence, and prestige he or she possesses in the eyes of other members of the organization (Djurdjevic et al., 2017). Leader workplace status is a symbol of the leader's position in the intra-organizational social structure, and high workplace status

tends to be seen as strength or "strong" traits. Humility and status are balanced to make leader humility effective (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Wang et al., 2018). Hence, we argue that the workplace status of leaders may impact the relationship between leader humility and followers' relational identifications.

Due to the psychological resources and tangible resources that the leader's workplace status can bring to the leader–follower role relationship, humility from higher-status leaders is more likely to promote followers' relational identification to the leader (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Based on relational identity theory, the value of resources accruing from role relationships influences an individual's evaluation of relational identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). On the one hand, psychological resources provided by leader workplace status motivate followers to internalize the leader–follower role relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). The co-existence of leader humility and status provides followers with strong feelings about the uniqueness of leader–follower role relationship and the reputation of the other party (i.e., humble leader) in the relationship (Leavitt & Sluss, 2015). Followers' positive feelings on relational identity may foster their efficacy and positive affects at work (Wang et al., 2018) and further a positive evaluation of the leader–follower role relationship. On the other hand, higher workplace status means there are more external tangible resources available (Bunderson, 2003), such as better project arrangement and better working conditions. When the humble leader has a higher workplace status, followers more highly evaluate the resources that the relationship with the leader can bring, and then form a higher level of relational identification. Therefore, leader's high workplace status may heighten the positive relationship between leader humility and followers' relational identification to the leader.

Moreover, followers perceive leaders with elevated status or reputation as more attractive and use those leaders as role models (Carnevale et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2013). Humility is an interpersonal attribute, and charisma reflects followers' perceptions and attributions regarding their leaders (Waldman et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2017). By being open minded, attentive to followers' voices, and showing concern for the collective good (Ou et al., 2014), humble leaders show benevolence and goodness (Wang et al., 2018). High workplace status gives leaders greater interpersonal influence (Bunderson, 2003; Cialdini, 2009). The higher a leader's workplace status, the more socialized charisma is earned via the leader's expressed humility, because followers attribute humility to the good character and qualities of the leader, rather than incompetence or expediency (Sousa & Dierendonck, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). Then, leadership effectiveness is further enhanced. Based on the influence of leader humility on followers' cognition and behavior, followers form a higher level of generalized relationship identification to their coworkers.

In contrast, when leaders have relatively low workplace status, the potential negative interpretation of leader humility may show up (Wang et al., 2018) and multi-foci relational identifications are thus slacked. First, low workplace status implies fewer psychological and tangible resources that humble leaders can possibly bring to followers. Several studies have suggested that followers may associate leader humility with incompetence, thus resulting in the ineffectiveness of the leader's behaviors (Sousa & Dierendonck, 2017). When humble leaders have low status in the organization, followers are likely to discount the humility showed by their leaders (Carnevale et al., 2019) and thus mitigate their relational identification to the leader. Second, leader humility is less attractive and charismatic to

followers, when the leader's status is low. Humble leaders' role modeling effect will be reduced and the social contagion process will be diminished when a leader is low in terms of his/her status. Thus, the positive relationship between leader humility and follower's generalized relational identification to coworkers is mitigated. We propose as follows.

Hypothesis 3. *Leaders' workplace status facilitates the relationship between leader humility and followers' relational identification to the leader, such that the positive relationship is stronger when leader workplace status is high than when leader workplace status is low.*

Hypothesis 4. *Leaders' workplace status facilitates the relationship between leader humility and followers' relational identification to coworkers, such that the positive relationship is stronger when leader workplace status is high than when leader workplace status is low.*

Insert Figure 1 about here

Overview of the Current Research

To test our model, as illustrated in Figure 1, we conducted two studies, including an experimental study (i.e., Study 1) and a multiwave field study (i.e., Study 2). In Study 1, we experimental examined the effect of leader humility on follower in-role performance via relational identification to the leader (i.e., Hypothesis 1) and the effect of leader humility on follower OCBI via relational identification to coworkers (i.e., Hypothesis 2). In Study 2, we used a multiwave design to test our full model (Hypothesis 1-4) in a field setting to maximize external validity. The multimethod design (i.e., experimental and field studies) helps establish the internal and external validity of our findings (Qin et al., 2020).

Study 1 Method

Participants

A total of 81 participants were recruited from Credamo

(https://www.credamo.com/home.html#/), a widely used online survey platform in China

equivalent to MTurk and Prolific, to participate in exchange of ¥1. After excluding those

failing the attention check item and those who do not have a job, we obtained complete

responses from 80 participants (31 male, 49 female; M_{age}= 30.56, SD_{age}= 5.79).

Procedure and Experimental Design

We manipulated leader humility, resulting a 2 (i.e., high leader humility vs. low leader

humility) factorial design. We used a between subjects design and randomly assigned

participants to one of the two experimental conditions (i.e., high leader humility vs. low

leader humility), instructed them to read the corresponding scenario materials (Owens &

Hekman, 2016; Qin et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Following this, participants reported their

relational identification to the leader, relational identification to coworkers, efforts on in-role

performance and willingness to engage in OCBI, completed manipulation check items, and

reported demographic information.

Leader humility manipulation. To manipulate leader humility, we instructed

participants to imagine a work team context in which they experience high or low leader

humility. We provided participants with some leader responses to their daily work behavior

(Owens & Hekman, 2016; Qin et al., 2020). Leader's responses in the instruction are adopted

based on the definition of leader humility and from the recent experiments research on leader

humility (Owens & Hekman, 2016; Qin et al., 2020). As for sample responses in low leader

humility condition, following Qin et al. (2020), we revised Owens & Hekman' (2016) control condition scripts to make them more neutral. The scripts for high leader humility / low leader humility included statements that validated / invalidated follower ideas (e.g., "Yes! Great idea!" versus "No, let's follow my suggestion."), praised / casual with the follower (e.g., "Your supervisor Liu Yang …… was very satisfied with it…… he said that your presentation was more professional and logical than his" versus "Your supervisor says you need to add more details to your idea"), and vocalized limits/bragged about strengths (e.g., "Although I'm the leader, I may not be the smartest in ranking task and I welcome your suggestions." versus "I like my way more. I am also glad I was appointed as the leader. The position really fits me personality"). Experimental materials are presented in Appendix A.

Measures

Without exception, all responses were measured on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Harzing and colleagues (2012) suggested that Asian respondents showed higher middle response styles (MRS) than Western respondents, that is, showed a high tendency to use the middle response categories on rating scales (Harzing, 2006). In order to reduce the impact of this tendency on research conclusion, we used 6-point Likert scales. The survey packages were all written in Chinese. For measures (i.e., performance, OCBI, leader humility, relational identification, and workplace status), we used translation and backtranslation to ensure that the terms captured their original English meaning accurately and were understandable in Chinese (Brislin, 1970). A bilingual professor and two senior Chinese managers reviewed the questionnaire items to ensure semantic clarity.

Relational identification to the leader. We measured followers' relational identification

to the leader using the four-item scale developed by Sluss et al. (2012), and adapted it to make it appropriate in an experimental setting. We asked participants to rate the extent to which they feel in the specific imagined team context. Liu Yang is the supervisor in the imagined team context. Sample items included "My relationship with the immediate supervisor Liu Yang is an important part of who I am at work" (Cronbach's alpha= .90).

Relational identification to coworkers. We adapted a four-item scale measuring relational identification to the leader (Sluss et al., 2012) to measure relational identification to coworkers. We asked participants to rate the extent to which they feel in the specific imagined team context. Sample items included "My relationship with my team coworkers is an important part of who I am at work" (Cronbach's alpha= .79).

In-role performance. We measured followers' in-role performance using an adapted four-item scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). Sample items included "In this team, I will try my best to meet performance expectations" (Cronbach's alpha= .70). We rephrased the items to assess followers' willingness to engage in in-role performance (Wu et al., 2021).

OCBI. We assessed followers' OCBI using an adapted four-item scale originally developed by Farh et al. (1997) in Taiwan and later modified and validated by Hui et al. (1999) for a sample of mainland Chinese individuals. We adapted the altruism subscale to measure OCBI (Lin & Peng, 2010). Sample items included "In this team, I am willing to help colleagues solve work-related problems" (Cronbach's alpha= .69). We rephrased the items to assess followers' willingness to engage in OCBI (Wu et al., 2021).

Manipulation checks. We asked participants to rate leader humility using a nine-item

scale developed by Owens et al. (2013). Sample items included "Team leader Liu Yang takes notice of others' strengths" (Cronbach's alpha= .98).

Study 1 Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. One-way ANOVA results showed a significant main effect for the leader humility manipulation, F (1, 78) = 247.29, p< .001, such that $M_{\text{high leader humility}}$ = 5.24, and $M_{\text{low leader humility}}$ = 2.37. Thus, our manipulations were successful.

Insert Table 1 about here

One-way ANOVA on follower relational identification to the leader indicated a significant main effect of leader humility on follower relational identification to the leader, F (1, 78) = 27.31, $p < .001$, showing that follower relational identification to the leader was higher ($M = 4.77$) in the high leader humility condition, than in the low leader humility condition ($M = 3.63$). One-way ANOVA on follower relational identification to coworkers indicated a significant main effect of leader humility on follower relational identification to coworkers, F (1, 78) = 8.25, $p < .01$, showing that follower relational identification to the leader was higher ($M = 4.74$) in the high leader humility condition, than in the low leader humility condition ($M = 4.29$).

One-way ANOVA on follower in-role performance indicated a significant main effect of leader humility on in-role performance, F (1, 78) = 29.77, $p < .001$, showing that in-role performance was higher ($M = 5.28$) in the high leader humility condition, than in the low leader humility condition ($M = 4.50$). One-way ANOVA on follower OCBI indicated a significant main effect of leader humility on OCBI, F (1, 78) = 13.98, $p < .001$, showing that

OCBI was higher (*M* = 5.12) in the high leader humility condition, than in the low leader

humility condition (*M* = 4.63).

To test our hypothesis, we used Preacher and Hayes (2004) bootstrapping estimation

approach with 1,000 samples. Results shows that the indirect effect of leader humility on in-

role performance through relational identification to the leader was significant, indirect effect

= .36, *SE* = .12, 95% CI = [.16, .65], supporting hypothesis 1. The indirect effect of leader

humility on OCBI through relational identification to coworkers was significant, indirect

effect = .22, *SE* = .07, 95% CI = [.09, .40], supporting hypothesis 2. Moreover, we compared

the effects of the two mediations on the in-role performance and OCBI. We examined the

indirect effects of leader humility on in-role performance through relational identification to

the leader and through relational identification to coworkers. Results shows that relational

identification to the leader is a dominant predictor of in-role performance (i.e., leader

humility $\rightarrow$ relational identification to the leader $\rightarrow$ in-role performance, indirect effect

= .25, *SE* = .12, 95% CI = [.05, .49]) than relational identification to coworkers (i.e., leader

humility $\rightarrow$ relational identification to coworkers $\rightarrow$ in-role performance, indirect effect

= .13, *SE* = .07, 95% CI = [.13, .30]). The indirect effects of leader humility on OCBI through

relational identification to the leader and through relational identification to coworkers were

also estimated. Results shows that relational identification to the leader is a little bit stronger

predictor of OCBI (i.e., leader humility $\rightarrow$ relational identification to the leader $\rightarrow$ OCBI,

indirect effect = .20, *SE* = .10, 95% CI = [.02, .43]) than relational identification to coworkers

(i.e., leader humility $\rightarrow$ relational identification to coworkers $\rightarrow$ OCBI, indirect effect

= .17, *SE* = .07, 95% CI = [.06, .34]).

Study 1 offered initial support for our hypotheses that leader humility facilitates followers' relational identification to the leader and to coworkers and corresponding foci performance. Specifically, relational identification to the leader plays a prominent role in mediating the effect of leader humility on followers' high willingness to engage in in-role performance. Relational identification to coworkers mediates the effect of leader humility on followers' high willingness to engage in OCBI. Although these results support our hypotheses, their generalizability to organizational settings is an empirical question. Thus, we conducted Study 2 and the participants were from 36 organizations in China. In Study 2, followers reported their team leaders' humility and leaders evaluated followers' actual in-role performance and OCBI.

Study 2 Method

Participants and Procedure

We administered a two-wave survey investigation in Study 2. Before we conducted the first survey, we explained to the participants that the purpose of this study was to explore attitudes and behaviors in the workplace and all their responses would be for academic purposes only. Meanwhile, they were told that their participation would be anonymous and that companies will not receive any individual responses. We collected data from 84 teams consisting of leaders and followers who were employed in law firms and legal teams from general enterprises in China. 38 teams were from 12 law firms and 46 legal teams were from 24 general enterprises. In specific, these 24 enterprises are involved in the internet and manufacturing industries. The companies involved in our sample are mainly located in northern China, and only three are located in southern China. We chose law firms and legal

teams due to the compatibility of legal professional work teams with the notion of leader humility. Task assignments in legal teams are project-based with clear expectations and deadlines and they must satisfy the need from internal and external clients (Morgeson et al. 2010) of organizations. Members in legal teams are highly professional knowledge workers who coordinate and cooperate in projects, rather than taking orders from the team leader as in typical hierarchical structures. Moreover, employees in law firms and legal teams are younger and have grown up in a more democratic culture, which is emphasized in leader humility (Chiu et al., 2016). Thus, we believe that this work context is appropriate for exploring leader humility. Ultimately, we obtained valid data from 82 team leaders and 298 team members. According to their human resource managers, these law firms and private companies together employed a total of 84 team leaders and 315 team members. We restricted our sample to full-time staff members. Our responses were from 97.6% of leaders and 94.6% of followers in these businesses.

To guarantee data quality, we conducted data collection in two waves, time 1 and time 2, with an interval of 1 month. We prepared and administered two different sets of questionnaires to team leaders and team members to minimize common method bias (CMB) effect in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Yoshida et al., 2014). Team leaders rated their own workplace status (at time 1), team members' performance (at time 2), and OCBI (at time 2), while team members rated leader humility (at time 1), relational identification to the leader (at time 2), and relational identification to coworkers (at time 2). Team members completed their questionnaires in different locations and at different times; leaders and followers were separated from each other. All participants completed paper surveys in a conference room or

on site during paid working hours. One or two members of our research team were present while the surveys were being completed to answer study participants' questions. Each questionnaire included a numeric identification code to ensure that respondents would remain anonymous within the participating firms but could still be recognized by the research team and participant teams matched for the analysis.

On average, team leaders were 38.11 years old (SD = 5.89), male (62%), and had completed college or graduate school (54.7%) or higher (45.3%). Team members were on average 28.03 years old (SD = 3.76), 42% were male, and 70.8% held bachelor's degrees while 23.6% held higher degrees. Team members had worked with their team leaders for an average of 26.42 months (SD = 18.89).

Measures

We asked participants to rate their level of agreement with statements about their leaders or themselves using Likert-type scales. As in study 1, all responses were measured on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Leader humility. Leader humility was measured with a nine-item scale developed by Owens et al. (2013) as in Study 1. Sample items included "My team leader takes notice of others' strengths" and "My team leader is open to the advice of others." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .93. We aggregated this construct to the group level by calculating the mean level of leader humility reported by each follower of the group. Aggregation indices indicated that leader humility was meaningful at the group level (mean r_{wg} = .92; ICC[1] = .49; ICC[2] = .78), compared with commonly accepted cutoff values (Bliese, 2000; r_{wg} > .70; ICC[1] > .12; ICC[2] > .70).

Workplace status. Leader workplace status was measured using a five-item scale

developed by Djurdjevic et al. (2017). Sample items included "I have a great deal of prestige

in my organization" and "I occupy a respected position in my organization." In this study, the

Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Relational identification to the leader. Relational identification to the leader was measured

by a four-item scale developed by Sluss et al. (2012) as in Study 1 and its sample items

included "My relationship with my immediate supervisor is an important part of who I am at

work" and "My relationship with my immediate supervisor is important to my self-image at

work." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Relational identification to coworkers. We adapted a four-item scale measuring relational

identification to the leader (Sluss et al., 2012) to measure relational identification to

coworkers as in Study 1. Sample items included "My relationship with my team coworkers is

an important part of who I am at work" and "My relationship with my team coworkers is

important to my self-image at work." For this study and scale, the Cronbach's alpha was .85.

In-role performance. We measured followers' in-role performance using a four-item scale

developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) as in Study 1. Sample items included "This

particular employee performs the tasks that are expected as part of the job" and "This

particular employee meets performance expectations." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha

was .91.

OCBI. We assessed followers' OCBI with a four-item scale originally developed by Farh et

al. (1997) in Taiwan and later modified and validated by Hui et al. (1999) for a sample of

mainland Chinese individuals. We used the altruism subscale to measure OCBI (Lin & Peng,

2010) as in Study 1. Sample items included "This employee helps colleagues solve work-related problems." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Control variables. At the individual level (i.e., level 1), we controlled for demographic variables, including followers' age, gender (1 = male, 0 = female), education level (1 = junior high school, 2 = senior high school or technical secondary school, 3 = junior college, 4 = undergraduate, 5 = master, 6 = doctor), and tenure with team leader, all of which have been found to be linked to work-related attitude and behaviors (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2013; Qu et al., 2015; Yoshida et al., 2014). We controlled for leaders' demographic variables at the group level (i.e., level 2), including age, gender (1 = male, 0 = female), education level (1 = junior high school, 2 = senior high school or technical secondary school, 3 = junior college, 4 = undergraduate, 5 = master, 6 = doctor). As participants are from different corporates, we also control organization type (1 = law firm, 0 = general enterprise).

Data Analysis

Prior to testing of our hypotheses, we conducted analyses of variance (ANOVA) and calculated the aggregation indices of relational identification to the leader and of relational identification to coworkers to test whether there were significant differences between groups (teams). The ANOVA analyses results of relational identification to the leader and with coworkers were $F(81, 216) = 2.28$, $p < .001$ and $F(81, 216) = 2.09$, $p < .001$, respectively. These results demonstrated significant differences between groups and indicated that potential nested effects and multilevel modeling should be employed.

We also conducted a set of multi-level confirmatory factor analyses (MCFAs) to ensure adequate discriminant validity among the six latent variables (leader humility, leader

workplace status, relational identification to the leader, relational identification to coworkers, performance, and OCBI). We then used multilevel path analysis to test our hypotheses using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015), which allowed us to test all the relationships in the model simultaneously. The between-group variables, leader humility and leader workplace status, were modeled as level-2 variables, and the within-group variables, including relational identification to the leader, relational identification to coworkers, performance, and OCBI, were modeled as level-1 variables using random slopes for the hypothesized paths. We grand-mean centered the level-2 predictors and tested our hypotheses involving mediation and moderation by employing a multilevel path analysis. For significant interactions, we estimated slopes for one standard deviation below and above the mean of the moderator (Preacher et al., 2010).

To test the indirect effect, we used a Monto Carlo simulation procedure with repetitions=10000 in the software *R*, and created 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) for each indirect effect (Selig & Preacher, 2008).

Study 2 Results

Descriptives

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations, scale reliability, and inter-correlations among the focal variables. The cross-level correlation between leader humility and relational identification to the leader was positive and significant ($r = .25$, $p < .01$) as well as the cross-level correlation between leader humility and relational identification to coworkers ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), performance ($r = .21$, $p < .01$), and OCBI ($r = .15$, $p < .01$).

Insert Table 2 about here

Measurement Model

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted MCFAs to assess the fit of the measurement

model. The MCFAs results showed that our six-factor baseline model was a good fit with the

data, with χ^2(205, n = 298) = 469.22, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, SRMR$_{within}$ = .04, SRMR$_{between}$

= .07, and RMSEA = .07. We performed a series of MCFAs to assess the fit of several

alternative models; those results are presented in Table 3. The results indicated that our

proposed six-factor model was superior to the five-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 386.16, p < .001),

four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 682.85, p < .001), three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 1575.71, p < .001), two-

factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 1767.71, p < .001). These results indicated satisfactory construct validity

of the six latent variables.

Insert Table 3 about here

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 and Figure 2 present the multilevel path analysis results. We included employee's

gender, age, education level, and tenure with the current supervisor as level 1 control

variables, and supervisor's gender, age, education level as level 2 control variables.

Moreover, as we collected data from several companies, we created a dummy variable (i.e.,

law firms = 1, general profit-making enterprise = 0) and added the organization type as level

2 control variables.

Insert Table 4 and Figure 2 about here

Leader humility exhibited a significant positive relationship with followers' relational

identification to the leader (β = .40, SE = .11, p < .001) and with followers' relational

identification to coworkers (β = .30, *SE* = .11, *p* < .05). Relational identification to the leader exhibited a significant positive relationship with in-role performance (β = .48, *SE* = .06, *p* < .001), and relational identification to coworkers exhibited significant positive relationship with OCBI (β = .60, *SE* = .17, *p* < .001). The direct effect of leader workplace status on relational identification to the leader (β = .03, *SE* = .06, *n.s.*) and relational identification to coworkers (β = .00, *SE* = .08, *n.s.*) were not significant.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive, indirect effect of leader humility on followers' in-role performance through relational identification to the leader. Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive indirect relationship between leader humility and followers' OCBI via relational identification to coworkers. We then test the indirect effects using a Monto Carlo simulation procedure in *R*, the results showed that the indirect effect of leader humility on follower in-role performance via relational identification to the leader was significant with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals excluding zero (indirect effect = .12, *SE* = .06, *p* < .05; 95% CI = [.02, .24]). The indirect effect of leader humility on follower OCBI via relational identification to coworkers was significant with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals excluding zero (indirect effect = .18, *SE* = .07, *p* < .05; 95% CI = [.05, .34]). Thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive moderating effect of leader workplace status on the relationship between leader humility and relational identification to the leader. The results in Table 3 indicated that this moderating effect was not significant (β = .06, *SE* = 0.13, *n.s.*); thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive moderating effect of leader workplace status on the relationship between leader humility and relational

identification to coworkers. The results indicated that the positive moderating effect was significant ($\beta = .25$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .05$). Figure 3 shows the interaction pattern. The slope for leader humility with a high workplace status was positive ($\beta = .57$, t $= 3.73$, $p < .001$) while the relationship was no more significant for leader humility with a low workplace status ($\beta = .07$, t $= .42$, *n.s.*). These findings showed that leader humility was related to higher relational identification to coworkers when the leader had higher workplace status; thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

We then test the moderated mediation effect using a Monto Carlo simulation procedure in *R*. As shown in table 5, results suggested that the conditional indirect effect of leader humility on in-role performance via relational identification to the leader was not significant (95% CI $= [-.06, .11]$). In specific, when leader workplace status was high, the conditional indirect effect of leader humility on in-role performance via relational identification to the leader was significant (indirect effect $= .13$, $SE = .06$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $= [.01, .25]$). While, the conditional indirect effect of leader humility on in-role performance was not significant when leader workplace status was low (indirect effect $= .10$, $SE = .07$, *n.s.*, 95% CI $= [-.03, .23]$), and the difference between high and low was not significant (Δ indirect effect $= .03$, $SE = .06$, *n.s.*, 95% CI $= [-.09, .14]$). The conditional indirect effect of leader humility on OCBI via relational identification to coworkers was significant (95% CI $= [.01, .28]$). In details, the indirect effect of leader humility on OCBI via relational identification to coworkers is stronger for leaders have high workplace status (indirect effect $= .28$, $SE = .09$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $= [.11, .46]$) than those have low workplace status (indirect effect $= .08$, $SE = .08$, *n.s.*). Moreover, the difference of conditional indirect effect between high and low

workplace status was partial significant (i.e., Δ indirect effect= .20, *SE* = .10, *p* < .05, 95% CI = [.01, .40]).

Insert Table 5 and Figure 3 about here

Supplementary Analysis

We further test the indirect effect of leader humility on follower in-role performance through relational identification to coworkers and the indirect effect of leader humility on follower OCBI through relational identification to the leader. The path analyses results showed that these two indirect relationships are not significant (i.e., leader humility → relational identification to the leader → OCBI, indirect effect = .04, *SE*= .12, *n.s.*, 95% CI = [-.21, .28]; leader humility → relational identification to coworkers → in-role performance, indirect effect = -.02, *SE*= .07, *n.s.*, 95% CI = [-.16, .12]).

Discussion

In this research we sought to understand the impact of leader humility on followers' relational identities based on the leader's other-oriented mindset (Carnevale et al., 2019; Owens & Hekman, 2012). Based on relational identity theory, we examined how leader humility impacts followers' different foci relational identification and subsequent different foci performance, and the role of leader workplace status in these effects. Across two studies, we find that followers' relational identification to the leader mediates the relationship between leader humility and in-role performance, and relational identification to coworkers mediates the relationship between leader humility and OCBI. Further, leader humility is more positively related to followers' relational identification to coworkers and subsequent OCBI when the leader has high workplace status, with the interaction effect explaining considerable

variation across groups. However, as Study 2 shows, leader workplace status has a non-significant facilitating effect on the relationship between leader humility and followers' relational identification to the leader and subsequent in-role performance. We consider the following possible explanations. First, due to the hierarchical differences inherent in positions, leader and follower interactions connote hierarchical authority (Basford & Offermann, 2012) brought about by formal positions in organizations. Followers' perceived role relationship between the leader and follower itself contains the leader's role identity based on the leader's position and workplace status (Ziegert & Dust, 2020). Therefore, relational identification to a leader developed by followers based on essentially hierarchical role relationships might no longer be moderated by leaders' workplace status. Meanwhile, followers' relational identifications with coworkers are essentially peer relationships without hierarchical differences based on the role relationships among team members. In this type of relationship, leaders' characteristics and behaviors exert influence on followers' cognition and behavior as primary external influencing factors (Banks et al., 2014). In addition, Study 2 was carried out in China. Therefore, cultural factors, such as power distance, may play a role in the Chinese workplace. Followers may attach importance to their leaders spontaneously (Mesquita, 2001), leading to an unforeseen value of the role relationships with leaders. The cognitive focus on the relationship with the leader contributed greatly to the follower's relational identification to the leader. Future studies could explore various types of national and organizational culture settings and examine the role of status and relationship identification in humble leadership research.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study has several theoretical and practical implications. First, this research contributes to the leader humility literature by theorizing the relational identity mechanism through which leader humility influences followers' multi-foci performance. We suggest that, in the workplace interpersonal process, humble leaders establish influence on followers' self-orientations and motivate followers to identify workplace role relationships and to define who they are as individuals. Although prior research shows that leader humility relates to followers' classic identification to the leader (Carnevale et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2010; Owens & Hekman, 2016), leader humility is more likely to play an important role on relational identification because humble leaders facilitate development-oriented relational identity (Owens & Hekman, 2012). As Owens and Hekman (2012) suggested, leader humility influenced followers' self-perceptions at work and catalyzed a development-oriented relational identity through relational interactions. Specifically, our study adds to the leader humility literature by emphatically theorizing relational identity and empirically testing relational identification mechanisms through which leader humility influences followers' desirable outcomes.

Second, the dual focus on relational identification to both the leader and coworkers provides theoretical and empirical suggestions for the leadership and relational identification literature. Prior research has used relational identification to the leader to understand the mechanism between transformational leadership (Qu et al., 2015), servant leadership (Yoshida et al., 2014), moral leadership (Gu et al., 2015), and follower outcomes. Historically, relational identification to the leader and to coworkers have been studied separately. However, the influence on followers' identity can have a transference effect

(Anderson & Chen, 2002) and followers tend to change their cognitive pattern based on identities. As we suggest, leader humility is embedded in interpersonal process, directly exerts influence on follower's relational identity as a follower and facilitates follower's particularized relational identification to his/her leader. Due to the transference effect, followers are stimulated to develop generalized relational identification to coworkers. Combining different role relationships can help to form a more comprehensive view of the work environment (Banks et al., 2014; Pan et al., 2017). Our study is the first to take relational identification to coworkers into account in the context of leadership and to empirically explore the dual relational identification mediation paths linking leader humility with follower performance. Moreover, by distinguishing the different performance outcomes of dual relational identifications, this research refines the performance outcomes of leader humility.

Third, our work contributes to the understanding of boundary conditions under which leader humility affects follower outcomes, thereby responding to the call for the contingency of humility influence (Hu et al., 2018; Mao et al., 2019; Ou et al., 2017). Prior research has suggested that leader humility is contextually sensitive and followers may not respond positively to humility (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Liu, 2019), such as associating humility with incompetence. This research focuses on the moderating role of leader workplace status and suggests that leaders who have higher workplace status bring more structure advantages (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Piazza & Castellucci, 2014) to role relationships and have greater charismatic social power when they express humility. Moreover, our study has implications for research on workplace status. Prior research on status tends to focus on individuals'

psychological advantages of their own high status and strategies for high status (Anderson et al., 2006; Anderson et al., 2012). Since workplace status represents the relative status that an individual deserves (Djurdjevic et al., 2017), its formation and influence are closely related to others' perceptions of an individual's qualities and behaviors. We focus on the impact of a leader's workplace status on followers' perception of leader behaviors and suggest that an individual's workplace status has a positive effect on others' perception and evaluation of his or her behaviors. Thus, this research has extended the scope of workplace-status outcomes research.

There are several implications for managers. First, we reaffirm the benefits of leader humility, showing that leader humility, especially who have high workplace status, positively relates to followers' performance and suggest that leader humility could improve follower task performance and OCBI. Accordingly, humility should be advocated in organizations and teams. Knowing that leader humility has a positive effect on followers should motivate leaders to behave humbly in ways that can benefit both their organization and their followers. We recommend that leaders and organizations remain cognizant of these effects and proactively develop humble leadership behaviors or a humble management climate through intervention, employee training, slogan posting and so on. For example, in recruitment and selection, attention could be paid to the humility of candidates in order to select and promote the right people to managerial roles. In addition, organizations and leaders should attach importance to employee psychology states, which is important for multi-foci performance. Our research demonstrates that leader humility triggers self-expansion in followers, guiding them to develop relational identifications. In this way, leader humility and followers' multi-

foci performance are linked by followers' multi-foci relational identification. Organizations can establish more formal and informal communication channels between superiors and subordinates and between peers, encouraging ways of fostering frequent and satisfying leader–follower interactions to strengthen identifications within organizations.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although our study makes quite a few theoretical contributions, it has the following limitations. First, future research is necessary to explore other boundary conditions of the impacts of leader humility. This study was conducted in China; it is not clear whether and how the results could be generalized to a Western context. Due to cultural factors, such as power distance, collectivism, and traditionalism, it is not a foregone conclusion that leader humility is viewed and reacted to similarly in Eastern and Western contexts (Carnevale et al., 2019; Kirkman et al., 2009). Future research should account for the role of cultural factors, such as leaders' and followers' traditionalism orientation, in shaping psychological and behavioral responses to leader humility. However, as Liu (2019) argued, leadership is necessarily embedded in a broader power structure, and thus, there are factors beyond cultural factors that influence how followers react to leader humility, such as race, gender, age, and class, all of which suggest intersecting power dynamics. Thus, to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which leader humility exerts influence, it is worth considering not only cultural contexts, but also factors in contexts of power dynamics.

Using an adapted scale to measure relational identification to coworkers may be another limitation of our research. Although the Cronbach's alpha of the adapted version was .79 in

Study 1 and .85 in Study 2, which predicts a relatively high reliability, it is still lower than the unadapted scale to measure relational identification to the leader (Cronbach's alpha of .90 in Study 1 and 2). Prior studies have used scales adapted by organizational or collective identification to measure relational identification to coworkers (Cooper, 2013), but we argue that measures from a role-relationship perspective fit this construct better. Thus, we call for future research to improve the adapted scale measurement or to develop other detailed scales to better capture the occurrence of relational identification to coworkers. Moreover, existing research on the relational identification to coworkers treats generalized coworkers as an identity target and uses a normal scale measure (Li et al., 2015). Future research could explore the dyadic or network method of measurement, so that we could more accurately grasp the relational identification to coworkers at the interpersonal level. This may present further opportunities to investigate the dynamic schema of particularized relational identification to coworkers, such as exploring the reciprocity between particularized and generalized relational identification to coworkers. Moreover, the evolution of measurement methods may facilitate communication between different fields of research, such as discussing the development of relational identification from a network perspective and considering the formation, evolution, and collapse of teamwork at the relational level. In addition, we carried out an experiment (i.e., Study 1) and collected data in two waves of surveys and obtained supervisor ratings for follower performance and OCBI (i.e., Study 2). The multimethod design helps establish the internal and external validity of our findings and reduce concerns about common method bias. We suggest that future research would benefit from a longitudinal research design.

Conclusion

Leader humility has been firmly established as an effective type of leader behavior at the individual, team, and corporate levels. It is critical to understand why and when leader humility positively influences followers' behaviors and attitudes. Our findings indicate that leader humility promotes positive outcomes in the form of in-role performance and OCBI by affecting followers' deep level psychology, that is, by fostering followers' relational identification to both leaders and coworkers. We further emphasize leader workplace status as a contingency that amplifies the effect of leader humility on followers' relational identification to coworkers. These findings extend our understanding of leader humility and followers' positive work attitudes and behaviors and provide insight for organizations and employees.

Declarations

Ethical Approval This study was conducted following the American Psychological

Association's ethical guidelines and the guidelines laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Conflict of Interest Statement On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that

there is no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included

in the study.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations in Study 1

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Leader humility manipulation	.50	.50					
2 Relational identification to leader	4.20	1.12	.51**	(.90)			
3 Relational identification to coworkers	4.51	.72	.31**	.54**	(.79)		
4 In-role performance	4.89	.74	.53**	.63**	.56**	(.70)	
5 OCBI	4.88	.62	.39**	.61**	.65**	.77**	(.69)

Note. n = 80; n = 40 in the humble leader condition; n = 40 in the control condition. For the leader humility manipulation, control condition = 0; humble leader condition = 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported along the diagonal in bold. *p < .05; **p < .01(two-tailed).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Focal Study Variables in Study 2

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Level-1 variables								
1 Relational identification to leader	4.19	1.05	**(.90)**	.63**	.11	.09	.37**	.12*
2 Relational identification to coworkers	4.31	.86	.46**	**(.85)**	.27**	.16**	.40**	.02
3 Performance	4.68	.78	.06	.06	**(.91)**	.63**	.42**	.23**
4 OCBI	4.75	.82	.08	.14*	.60**	**(.89)**	.29**	.10
Level-2 variables								
5 Leader humility	4.77	.63	.25**	.26**	.21**	.15**	**(.93)**	.17**
6 Leader workplace status	4.54	.73	.08	.01	.12*	.05	.17**	**(.88)**

Note. Level 1: *n* = 298. Level 2: *n* = 82. The correlations above the diagonal represent team-level correlations (computed using employees' aggregated scores). The correlations below the diagonal represent cross-level correlations. Leader humility and leader workplace status are Level-2 variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported along the diagonal in bold. For a full table of means, standard deviations, and correlations, including all controls, please refer to Appendix B.

*p < .05; **p < .01(two-tailed).

Table 3

Results of Multilevel Confirmatory Factor Analysis in Study 2

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	$SRMR_{within}$	$SRMR_{between}$
6-factor model	469.55	205			.93	.92	.07	.04	.07
5-factor model	837.71	208	368.16	3	.84	.81	.10	.08	.07
4-factor model	1152.40	210	682.85	5	.76	.72	.12	.10	.07
3-factor model	2045.26	211	1575.71	6	.53	.45	.17	.21	.07
2-factor model	2237.26	212	1767.71	7	.48	.40	.18	.21	.19

Note: Level 1: n = 298. Level 2: n = 82. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean residual. LH= leader humility, RIL= relational identification to leader, RIC= relational identification to coworkers, LWS= leader workplace status, IRP= in-role performance, OCBI= interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior
6-factor model: LH, LWS, RIL, RIC, IRP, OCBI
5-factor model: LH, LWS, RIL+RIC, IRP, OCBI
4-factor model: LH, LWS, RIL+RIC, IRP+OCBI
3-factor model: LH+LWS, RIL+RIC, IRP+OCBI
2-factor model: LH+LWS, RIL+RIC+IRP+OCBI

Table 4

Multilevel Path Analysis Results of Leader Humility in Relation to Relational Identification and Followers performance in Study 2

Path	Estimate	S.E.	Lower and upper 95% CI limits
Direct relationships			
Leader humility → relational identification to leader	.41***	.11	[.20, .61]
Leader workplace status → relational identification to leader	-.00	.10	
Relational identification to leader → in-role performance	.28*	.11	[.06, .51]
Leader humility → relational identification to coworkers	.32**	.10	[.13, .52]
Leader workplace status →relational identification to coworkers	-.01	.08	
Relational identification to coworkers → OCBI	.56***	.13	[.30, .82]
Indirect relationships			
Leader humility → relational identification to leader → in-role performance	.12*	.06	[.02, .24]
Leader humility → relational identification to coworkers → OCBI	.18*	.07	[.05, .34]
Interaction effects			
Leader humility × leader workplace status → relational identification to leader	.06	.13	[-.20, .33]
Leader humility × leader workplace status → relational identification to coworkers	.25*	.12	[.01, .49]

Notes: Level 1: *n* = 298. Level 2: *n* = 82. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. CI = confidence interval, OCBI = interpersonal organizational behavior. The 95% CIs of the indirect relationships are based on Monto Carlo simulation.

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

Table 5

Multilevel Path Analysis Results of Conditional Indirect Effect in Study 2

Path	Estimate	S.E.	Lower and upper 95% CI limits
Indirect relationships			
Leader humility → relational identification to leader → in-role performance	.12*	.06	[.02, .24]
Conditional indirect relationships			
High leader workplace status (+1SD)	.13*	.06	[.01, .25]
Low leader workplace status (-1SD)	.10	.07	[-.03, .23]
Difference between high and low	.03	.06	[-.09, .14]
Indirect relationships			
Leader humility → relational identification to coworkers → OCBI	.18*	.07	[.05, .34]
Conditional indirect relationships			
High leader workplace status (+1SD)	.28**	.09	[.11, .46]
Low leader workplace status (-1SD)	.08	.08	[-.09, .24]
Difference between high and low	.20*	.10	[.01, .40]

Notes: Level 1: n = 298. Level 2: n = 82. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. CI = confidence interval, OCBI = interpersonal organizational behavior. The 95% CIs of the indirect relationships are based on Monto Carlo simulation.
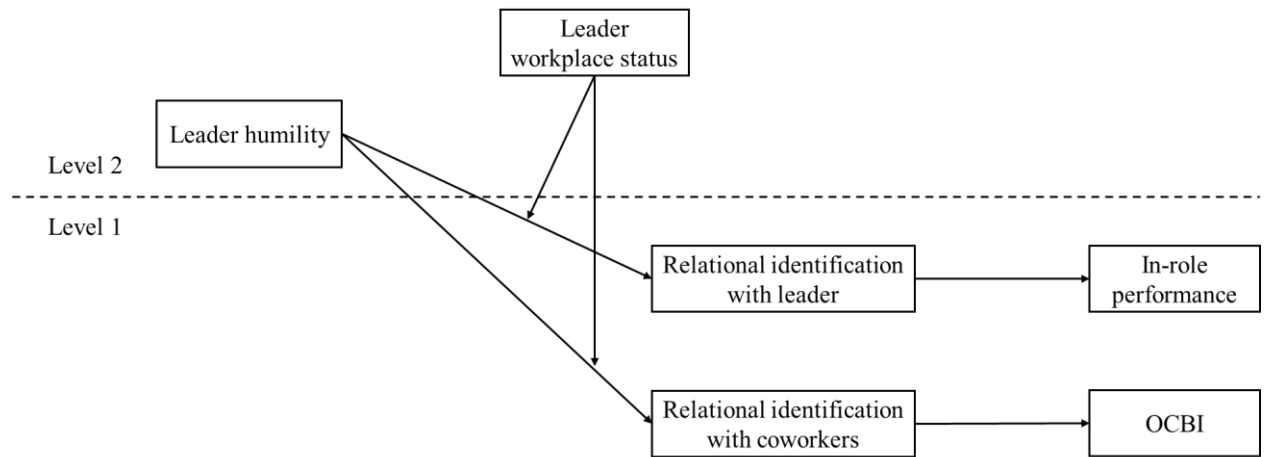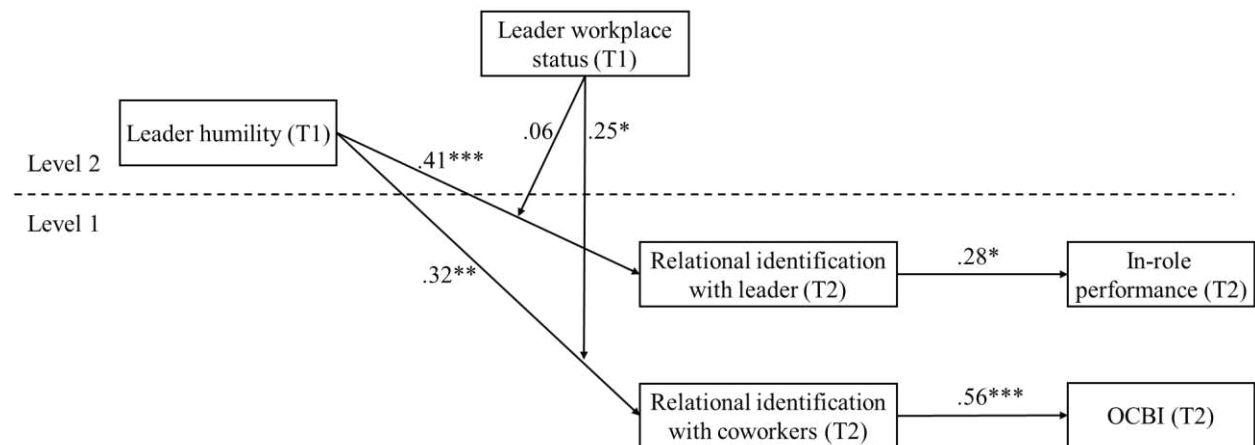
*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

Fig 1. Hypothesized Model

Fig 2. Hypothesized Model with Coefficient Estimation Results of Study 2

Note. Level 1: n=298. Level 2: n=82. The main effect of leader workplace status is not included in this figure for simplicity purpose. Please refer to Table 4 for these effects.

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001.

Fig 3. Moderating Role of Leader Workplace Status on the Relationship Between Leader Humility and Relational Identification with Coworkers of Study 2
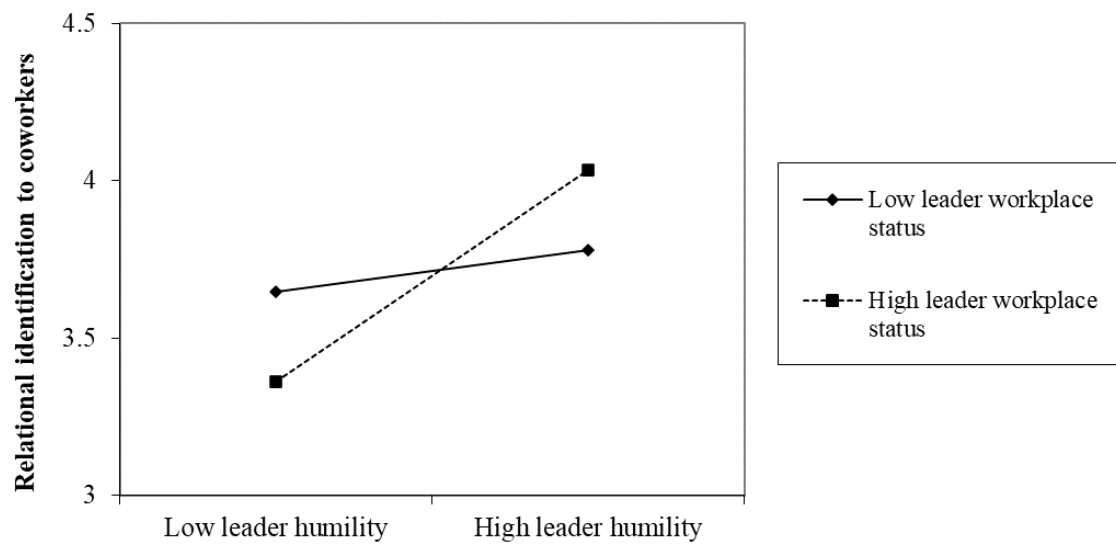
Appendix A

Manipulation Materials in Study 1.

High leader humility condition.

In this simulation, imagine you have working on a consulting team for 3 years. The team consists of the team leader – Liu Yang and three team members – you, Xiao Hong and Xiao Ming. You work together to complete projects. Since you start your position, you have experienced the following in your work environment.

Last month, at a meeting, you clearly and completely presented your design to your client. Your supervisor Liu Yang also listened the presentation and was very satisfied with it. After the meeting, he said that your presentation was more professional and logical than his and gave you a free hand to attend the meeting in future.

Last week, your team faced a new project. At the first meeting of the new project, your team discussed how to do the ranking task. Your supervisor Liu Yang proposed a plan first, but you have another idea. You volunteered your idea, Liu said "Yes! Great idea! What do the rest of you think? Although I'm the leader, I may not be the smartest in ranking task and I welcome your suggestions." You discussed with Xiao Hong and Xiao Ming, and finally reached an agreement to your idea. After that, Liu Yang announced that ranking task would be do according to the plan you finally approved.

Low leader humility condition.

In this simulation, imagine you have working on a consulting team for 3 years. The team consists of the team leader – Liu Yang and three team members – you, Xiaohong and

Xiaoming. You work together to complete projects. Since you start your position, you have experienced the following in your work environment.

Your team need to design a template for the multi-project information collection within your enterprise. Last month, at a meeting, your supervisor Liu Yang said that the template you designed was relatively rough and your idea was somehow simple and more detailed information should be considered and added.

Last week, your team faced a new project. At the first meeting of the new project, your team discussed how to do the ranking task. Your supervisor Liu Yang proposed a plan first, but you have another idea. You volunteered your idea, while Liu said "No, let's follow my suggestion. I like my way more. I am also glad I was appointed as the leader. The position really fits me personality." Liu Yang announced that ranking task would be do according to his plan.

Appendix B
Table 6 *Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for All Study Variables in Study 2*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Level 1 variables																
1 Follower age	28.03	3.76		.11	.13*	.49**	.02	-.03	.13*	-.00	.28**	.10	.19**	-.37**	.02	.28**
2 Follower gender	.42	.49	.15*		.18**	.12*	-.06	.04	.06	-.07	.16**	.06	.21**	-.12*	-.17**	.06
3 Follower education level	4.18	.51	.14*	.04		.01	.07	.15**	.17**	.16**	-.01	-.12*	-.12*	.13*	.23**	.15*
4 Tenure with leader	26.42	18.89	.48**	.09	.00		.01	-.03	.14*	-.01	.16**	-.01	.11	-.30**	.02	.15**
5 Relational identification to leader	4.19	1.05	-.00	-.07	.03	-.03	(.90)	.63**	.11	.09	.09	-.09	.15*	-.06	.37**	.12*
6 Relational identification to coworkers	4.31	.86	-.03	-.04	.05	.00	.46**	(.85)	.27**	.16**	.08	-.16**	.08	-.07	.40**	.02
7 Performance	4.68	.78	.08	.09	.00	.06	.06	.06	(.91)	.63**	.15*	.32**	.24**	-.23**	.42**	.23**
8 OCBI	4.75	.82	.03	.06	.03	.01	.08	.14*	.60**	(.89)	.07	.24**	.17**	-.07	.29**	.10
Level 2 variables																
9 Leader age	38.11	5.89	.18**	.10	-.01	.11*	.06	.06	.07	.04		.28**	.06	-.28**	-.10	.26**
10 Leader gender	.62	.49	.07	.04	-.07	-.01	-.06	-.11	.16**	.13*	.28**		.18**	-.10	-.04	.12*
11 Leader education level	4.50	.58	.12*	.13*	-.07	.08	.10	.05	.12*	.09	.06	.18**		-.22**	.12*	.05
12 Organization type	.50	.50	-.24**	-.08	.07	-.21**	-.04	-.04	-.12*	-.04	-.28**	-.10	-.22**		.04	-.21**
13 Leader humility	4.77	.63	.02	-.10	.13*	.01	.25**	.26**	.21**	.15**	-.10	-.04	.12*	.04	(.93)	.17**
14 Leader workplace status	4.54	.73	.18**	.04	.09	.11	.08	.01	.12*	.05	.26*	.12*	.05	-.21**	.17**	(.88)

Note. Level 1: *n* = 298. Level 2: *n* = 82. The correlations above the diagonal represent team-level correlations (computed using employees' aggregated scores). The correlations below the diagonal represent cross-level correlations. Leader humility and leader workplace status are Level-2 variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported along the diagonal in bold. Gender (1=male, 0=female) were dummy variables. Followers' tenure with leader was calculated based on employees' tenure with the current supervisor which measured in months. Education: primary school degree =1, junior high school degree = 2, high school and secondary school degree = 3, junior college degree = 4, undergraduate degree = 5, graduate degree = 6. Organization type: law firms=1, general profit-making enterprise=0.