

When Humble Leadership Works: The Roles of Perceived Team Engagement and Organizational Culture in Work Success

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Abstract

Leadership research increasingly recognizes humility as a relational resource, yet less is known about its association with multidimensional work success and whether organizational culture strengthens its benefits. Integrating job demands-resources theory with a contextual perspective on organizational culture, this study tests five hypotheses linking humble leadership, perceived team engagement, work success, and two culture-based interaction effects. Cross-sectional survey data from a hierarchical public-sector work setting were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Humble leadership was positively related to perceived team engagement and work success, and perceived team engagement was positively related to work success. Organizational culture strengthened both the humble leadership-engagement and humble leadership-work success relationships, although its main associations with both outcomes were not significant. The model explained 43.1% of perceived team engagement variance and 66.6% of work success variance. These findings position humility as a context-dependent social resource whose benefits are stronger when culture supports involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. The study shows that organizational culture may function primarily as an enabling condition and offers implications for leadership development and supportive organizational systems.

Keywords: *Humble Leadership; Perceived Team Engagement; Organizational Culture; Work Success.*

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INTRODUCTION

Sustained work success in contemporary organizations requires more than completing formally assigned tasks. Employees must also cooperate, take initiative, and adapt when priorities, technologies, or stakeholder expectations change. Accordingly, individual work performance is increasingly treated as a multidimensional domain comprising task performance and contextual performance,

while adaptive performance has become especially important in uncertain environments (Koopmans et al., 2014; Pulakos et al., 2000). This broader view is particularly relevant to public organizations, where effectiveness must coexist with procedural accountability, interdependence, and the responsible exercise of authority (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022; Van Wart, 2013). Explaining work success in such settings therefore requires attention to the social and motivational conditions under which employees mobilize their capabilities.

Leadership is one such condition. Although public-sector leadership has often been examined through transformational, transactional, and servant-leadership lenses, growing evidence points to the value of leader behaviors that acknowledge fallibility, appreciate followers' strengths, and invite learning (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Silard et al., 2025). Humble leadership is not self-denigration or weak authority. It is an interpersonal pattern through which leaders maintain an accurate self-view, recognize others' contributions, and remain teachable (Owens et al., 2013). Such behavior can reduce the interpersonal risks of speaking up, normalize learning from error, and communicate that expertise is distributed rather than monopolized by rank. These signals may be especially consequential in hierarchical organizations, where status differences can otherwise suppress participation and upward communication.

The literature has established that leader humility is associated with favorable follower and team outcomes, but three unresolved issues limit understanding of its relevance to work success. First, performance consequences are often examined narrowly or without distinguishing the energetic work experience that accompanies effective contribution. Meta-analytic evidence confirms the incremental relevance of leader-expressed humility but also shows conceptual heterogeneity and meaningful contextual variation (Silard et al., 2025). It is therefore useful to examine humble leadership alongside perceived team engagement and a broad criterion incorporating task, contextual, and adaptive contributions.

Second, engagement research often focuses on individual job engagement, whereas collective work depends on a shared or socially embedded energetic state. Team work engagement has been conceptualized as an emergent motivational state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in collective work (Costa et al., 2014). When evidence is collected from individuals without aggregation statistics, however, the defensible construct is each employee's perception of engagement in the immediate work team. This perceived team-engagement lens still captures an important proximal experience: whether work is approached with energy, meaning, persistence, and immersion. It may explain why humble leadership yields task, contextual, and adaptive contributions rather than merely favorable attitudes.

Third, leader behavior is embedded in organizational culture. Culture supplies shared expectations about participation, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Schein & Schein, 2017). A leader who seeks input and acknowledges limitations sends one set of signals; organizational systems that reward voice, teamwork, learning, and clear direction send another. When the two are aligned, humble behavior should be more credible and easier to translate into engagement and successful action. When systems contradict the leader's behavior, employees may regard invitations to contribute as symbolic or unsafe. Culture may consequently matter less as an additive cause than as a boundary condition that determines whether humility becomes a usable resource.

This study addresses these issues by testing three direct relationships and two moderation effects. Humble leadership is expected to relate positively to perceived team engagement and work success, perceived team engagement is expected to relate positively to work success, and organizational culture is expected to strengthen both humble-leadership relationships. Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory provides the central explanatory logic: humble leadership offers social and developmental resources that support energetic involvement and successful action, while an enabling culture increases the accessibility and credibility of those resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). A contextual cultural perspective complements this logic by specifying why identical leader behavior may produce different outcomes across organizational environments.

The study makes three contributions. It first places perceived team engagement and work success within one parsimonious structural model, clarifying their distinct associations with humble leadership. It then distinguishes the main effect of culture from its enabling role, showing that culture can be consequential even when its isolated association with an outcome is weak. Finally, it extends humble-leadership research into a hierarchical public-sector context, a setting in which status, rules, and accountability make the combination of relational openness and institutional support theoretically informative. By testing two culture-contingent leadership relationships, the study moves beyond the question of whether humility works to the more useful question of when its benefits are most pronounced.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Humble leadership as a relational job resource

Humble leadership is expressed through three interrelated behavioral tendencies: willingness to acknowledge personal limits and mistakes, appreciation of followers' strengths and contributions, and openness to feedback and learning (Owens et al., 2013). These behaviors are observable and relational. They differ from dispositional humility, which concerns a person's underlying tendency, and from broader leadership styles that may include humility among many components (Silard et al., 2025). Keeping the construct behaviorally specific is important because employees respond to the signals leaders enact in day-to-day exchanges.

From a JD-R perspective, resources are aspects of work that facilitate goal attainment, reduce the costs of demands, or stimulate learning and growth (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Humble leader behavior can supply several such resources simultaneously. Acknowledging fallibility legitimizes learning and reduces the pressure to preserve an appearance of perfection. Appreciating others confers competence recognition and relational value. Seeking feedback increases voice opportunities and makes information exchange more reciprocal. These behaviors can therefore create psychological and social conditions in which employees are more willing to invest effort, share expertise, and persist through difficulty.

The logic also accords with social-information processing. Employees infer acceptable behavior from leaders, who are salient representatives of the organization. When a leader openly learns and credits others, employees receive cues that questions, constructive dissent, and contribution are legitimate. Humble leadership can thus loosen status-based constraints without eliminating standards or accountability. Its value should be especially pronounced where formal hierarchy

would otherwise encourage deference. Yet humility is not unconditionally beneficial: its meaning depends on leader competence, consistency, follower expectations, and the larger context (Owens & Hekman, 2016; Silard et al., 2025). This contextual sensitivity motivates the inclusion of organizational culture later in the model.

Humble leadership and perceived team engagement

Engagement denotes an energetic and fulfilling connection with work, commonly reflected in vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli et al., 2002). At the team level, engagement emerges as members interact, exchange affect, coordinate effort, and interpret common work experiences (Costa et al., 2014). At the individual perceptual level examined here, perceived team engagement represents an employee's experience of that collective energy and involvement.

Humble leadership should foster this experience for several reasons. First, appreciation communicates that employees and their capabilities matter, satisfying needs for competence and belonging. Second, leader openness gives employees greater latitude to contribute ideas and seek feedback, which makes effort more self-endorsed and meaningful. Third, the admission of limitations reduces defensive interaction and encourages mutual help. Together, these resources make it more likely that work-group members approach their tasks with sustained energy, pride, and concentration. Humble leaders also model learning behavior, allowing setbacks to be reframed as problems to solve rather than threats to status. This should preserve collective vigor under demanding conditions.

Prior studies link leader humility to psychological safety, team learning, psychological capital, and team effectiveness (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Rego et al., 2017, 2019). Engagement is a theoretically adjacent but distinct construct: it captures the active investment of energy rather than only a belief that interpersonal risk is safe or that the team possesses positive psychological resources. On this basis:

H1. Humble leadership is positively related to perceived team engagement.

Humble leadership and work success

Work success is defined here as effective accomplishment across task, contextual, and adaptive domains. Task performance concerns planning, timely completion, accuracy, and the execution of core duties (Koopmans et al., 2014). Contextual performance comprises discretionary behaviors that sustain the social and psychological environment, such as helping and initiative. Adaptive performance concerns responding constructively to novel demands and solving unfamiliar problems (Pulakos et al., 2000). The label *work success* emphasizes the joint practical value of these domains rather than a narrow productivity metric.

Humble leadership can directly support all three domains. By inviting input, a leader improves the flow of task-relevant information and increases the probability that errors are identified early. By crediting others, the leader strengthens reciprocity and willingness to assist colleagues. By demonstrating teachability, the leader models adaptive learning and signals that revising an approach is legitimate. These behaviors also reduce the waste associated with impression management: employees can redirect energy from protecting status toward accomplishing work. Empirical research has connected leader humility with follower performance and team

effectiveness through learning, psychological capital, and more effective task allocation (Owens et al., 2013; Rego et al., 2019).

The direct pathway is retained because not all performance benefits require an engaged motivational state. Better information, role coordination, and access to follower expertise can enhance the quality of decisions even when employees' level of energetic involvement is unchanged. Accordingly:

H2. Humble leadership is positively related to work success.

Perceived team engagement and work success

Engaged employees bring physical, cognitive, and emotional energy to role performance (Rich et al., 2010). Vigor supports persistence, dedication connects effort to purpose, and absorption sustains attention. When engagement is experienced as a feature of the immediate team, these qualities can be amplified through coordination and social contagion: one member's energy makes prompt assistance and reciprocal effort more likely, while shared dedication aligns attention around collective objectives (Costa et al., 2014).

This energetic investment should affect each component of work success. Focus and persistence enable reliable task completion. A sense of collective purpose encourages initiative and helping behavior. Cognitive availability and willingness to experiment facilitate adaptation to new problems. In JD-R theory, engagement is the principal motivational state through which resources are converted into performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Thus:

H3. Perceived team engagement is positively related to work success.

Organizational culture as an enabling condition

Organizational culture represents shared assumptions, values, and practices that guide interpretation and action (Schein & Schein, 2017). The Denison framework emphasizes involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission as mutually reinforcing features of organizational effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Involvement creates participation and capability; consistency provides coherent norms; adaptability supports learning and external responsiveness; and mission supplies direction. Together, these features determine whether leader behavior is supported by routines and systems or remains an isolated interpersonal gesture.

An enabling culture should strengthen the link between humble leadership and perceived team engagement. In a culture that values involvement and learning, a leader's request for input is consistent with broader expectations, so employees can respond without fearing that formal systems will penalize them. Consistency makes humble behavior more predictable rather than idiosyncratic, while mission helps employees connect participation with collective purpose. In a less supportive culture, the same leader behavior may be discounted because employees encounter conflicting signals from rules, incentives, or senior authority. The resource is offered locally but cannot be used safely or effectively. Hence:

H4. Organizational culture positively moderates the relationship between humble leadership and perceived team engagement, such that the relationship is stronger when culture is more supportive.

Culture should also strengthen the direct relationship between humble leadership and work success. Leader openness can improve decision quality only if structures permit information to move and employees to act. Recognition can encourage initiative only if discretionary contribution is valued. Learning from mistakes can improve adaptation only if the organization tolerates revision and supports innovation. A culture characterized by involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission aligns interpersonal leadership with organizational infrastructure. Under such alignment, the information and coordination benefits of humility should translate more readily into successful work. Therefore:

H5. Organizational culture positively moderates the relationship between humble leadership and work success, such that the relationship is stronger when culture is more supportive

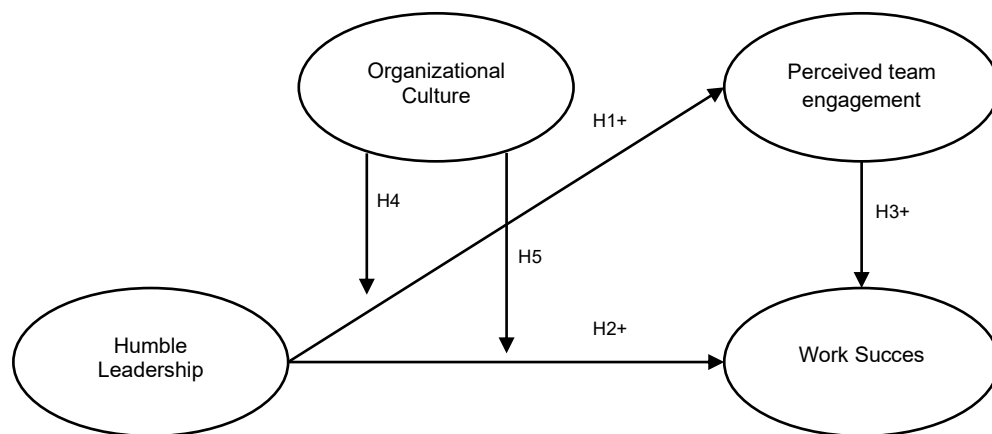


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model

METHODOLOGY

Research design, setting, and census

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The population was the Development Division of the Human Resources Bureau within the Office of the Deputy Attorney General for Development, Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Indonesia. Saturated, or census, sampling was used because the full population was accessible. The population and analytic census consisted of 132 employees; all available complete records were retained for analysis. Census coverage eliminates sampling selection within this organizational unit but does not make the case statistically representative of other units or institutions.

The design examined employee perceptions at one point in time. Humble leadership, organizational culture, perceived team engagement, and work success were therefore modeled at the individual level of analysis. The label *perceived team engagement* is used deliberately: the data capture each employee's perception of energetic involvement in the immediate work group, not an aggregated team-level emergent state. No team identifiers or within-team agreement statistics were available to justify aggregation.

A sensitivity analysis was used in place of the outdated ten-times rule to describe the detectable effect for the most complex endogenous regression. With four focal predictors, a two-tailed alpha of .05, and power of .80, the analytic census could detect an incremental effect of approximately $f^2 = .094$. This supports the analysis of

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small-to-medium structural effects while cautioning that very small effects may remain unstable (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

Measures

The questionnaire comprised 29 substantive items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items were adapted to the work context from established conceptual and measurement sources. The supplied study records described an Indonesian, context-adapted instrument; they did not document a formal back-translation protocol or a separate pilot study. Accordingly, no such procedures are claimed here, and future replication should document them explicitly.

Humble leadership. Eight items operationalized admitting mistakes and limitations, appreciating employees' strengths and contributions, and openness to feedback and learning (Owens et al., 2013). Example content included the leader's willingness to acknowledge an error and to request employee input.

Perceived team engagement. Six items represented vigor, dedication, and absorption, based on engagement scholarship and adapted to employees' work-group experience (Costa et al., 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Example content concerned sustained energy during difficulty and pride in meaningful work.

Work success. Seven items captured three task-performance behaviors, two contextual-performance behaviors, and two adaptive-performance behaviors. Task and contextual content was informed by the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (Koopmans et al., 2014); adaptive content was informed by the adaptive-performance taxonomy of Pulakos et al. (2000). This hybrid operationalization avoids incorrectly attributing adaptive performance to the original IWPQ.

Organizational culture. Eight items represented involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Content addressed participation in decisions, teamwork, consistent values, agreement about work practices, responsiveness to change, innovation, goal clarity, and understanding of strategic direction.

Procedure and common-method considerations

The research protocol used a structured questionnaire and reported procedural remedies intended to reduce common-method bias: anonymity, clear and non-evaluative wording, conceptual separation of the constructs, and instructions emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Because the focal variables were collected from the same source at the same time, procedural safeguards cannot eliminate method variance. A statistical diagnostic was therefore added. Full-collinearity variance inflation factors (VIFs) were 1.740 for humble leadership, 1.033 for organizational culture, 2.356 for perceived team engagement, and 2.821 for work success, all below the conservative 3.3 benchmark proposed by Kock (2015). This result reduces, but does not remove, concern about common-method bias.

Analytical strategy

The hypothesized model was estimated using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. PLS-SEM was appropriate because the study emphasized prediction and explanation of two endogenous composites, included interaction terms, and did not rely on multivariate normality (Becker et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2019). All four constructs were specified reflectively. The PLS algorithm used standardized data, path weighting, a maximum of 300 iterations, and a convergence criterion of 10^{-7} .

The measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT), and collinearity diagnostics. Loadings of .708 or higher, reliability between .70 and .95 where possible, AVE above .50, HTMT below .85 or .90, and VIF values below 5 were used as reference criteria (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). Structural assessment considered path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and confidence intervals. Model fit indices were reported as diagnostics rather than as decisive PLS-SEM acceptance tests.

Moderation was modeled with a two-stage product-score approach using standardized latent-variable scores. The same humble leadership $\times$ organizational culture interaction was included as a predictor of both endogenous constructs. The interaction coefficients tested H4 and H5, and standardized simple-slope point estimates were calculated at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of organizational culture to describe the interaction pattern. Inference used complete bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrapping, two-tailed tests, and $\alpha = .05$, matching the supplied analytical output.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The unweighted item-composite means were 3.136 for humble leadership, 3.134 for organizational culture, 3.150 for perceived team engagement, and 3.166 for work success. The corresponding standard deviations were 1.094, 1.077, 1.076, and 1.065. These values indicate substantial dispersion across the five-point response scale and no obvious ceiling concentration. Inner VIFs ranged from 1.001 to 1.756, while indicator VIFs did not exceed 3.908, suggesting that collinearity did not threaten estimation.

All indicators met conventional loading criteria. Loadings ranged from .817 to .891 for humble leadership, .795 to .907 for organizational culture, .785 to .885 for perceived team engagement, and .826 to .866 for work success. As Table 1 shows, Cronbach's alpha and rho_A exceeded .92 for every construct. Composite reliability ranged from .941 to .957, and AVE ranged from .719 to .737. Composite reliability reached .957 and rho_A reached .983 for organizational culture. Values near or above .95 can indicate item redundancy, although the broad dimensional coverage and non-identical item wording reduce concern that the measures are purely duplicative. Collectively, the results support indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity, while future instrument refinement should examine the unusually high culture reliability.

Table 1. Reflective measurement-model assessment

Construct	Items	Loading range	Cronbach's α	rho_A	CR	AVE
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Humble leadership	8	.817–.891	.949	.953	.957	.737
Organizational culture	8	.795–.907	.946	.983	.954	.720
Perceived team engagement	6	.785–.885	.924	.927	.941	.726
Work success	7	.826–.866	.939	.940	.950	.731

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

HTMT values among the four substantive constructs ranged from .073 to .806 (Table 2), remaining below both the liberal .90 criterion and the more conservative .85 criterion. Discriminant validity was therefore supported. The exported SmartPLS model listed two identically scored interaction nodes—one linked to each endogenous variable—and consequently returned an HTMT value of 1.00 between those duplicate product terms. Because they represent the same interaction score rather than two distinct theoretical constructs, they were excluded from the substantive discriminant-validity matrix.

Table 2. Heterotrait–monotrait ratios

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Humble leadership	—			
2. Organizational culture	.073	—		
3. Perceived team engagement	.581	.088	—	
4. Work success	.665	.124	.806	—

The structural estimates are presented in Table 3. Humble leadership was positively related to perceived team engagement ($\beta = .553$, $t = 8.818$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa CI [.425, .662]), supporting H1. It was also positively related to work success ($\beta = .371$, $t = 4.740$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa CI [.216, .528]), supporting H2. Perceived team engagement was positively related to work success ($\beta = .488$, $t = 6.830$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa CI [.336, .611]), supporting H3.

Organizational culture did not have a statistically significant main association with engagement ($\beta = .108$, $p = .209$) or work success ($\beta = .095$, $p = .161$). These nonsignificant main effects do not invalidate moderation because an interaction tests whether a slope changes across levels of the moderator, not whether the moderator has an average additive association.

The humble leadership $\times$ organizational culture interaction positively predicted perceived team engagement ($\beta = .321$, $t = 4.110$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa CI [.180, .457]), supporting H4. The interaction also positively predicted work success ($\beta = .145$, $t = 2.534$, $p = .012$, 95% BCa CI [.044, .261]), supporting H5. Thus, humble leadership was more strongly associated with both endogenous outcomes when organizational culture was more supportive.

Table 3. Structural path estimates

Hypothesis/path	β	SE	t	p	95% BCa CI	Decision
H1: Humble leadership $\rightarrow$ Engagement	.553	.063	8.818	< .001	[.425, .662]	Supported
H2: Humble leadership $\rightarrow$ Work success	.371	.078	4.740	< .001	[.216, .528]	Supported
H3: Engagement $\rightarrow$ Work success	.488	.071	6.830	< .001	[.336, .611]	Supported
H4: Humble leadership $\times$ Culture $\rightarrow$ Engagement	.321	.078	4.110	< .001	[.180, .457]	Supported

H5: Humble leadership × .145 .057 2.534 .012 [.044, .261] Supported
Culture → Work success

Note. Two-tailed tests; BCa = bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence interval; engagement = perceived team engagement.

For transparency and reproducibility, Figures 2 and 3 reproduce the supplied SmartPLS graphical outputs. Figure 2 displays the PLS algorithm results, including standardized indicator loadings, structural path coefficients, and the R^2 values of the endogenous constructs. Figure 3 displays the corresponding bootstrap t statistics for the measurement and structural relationships.

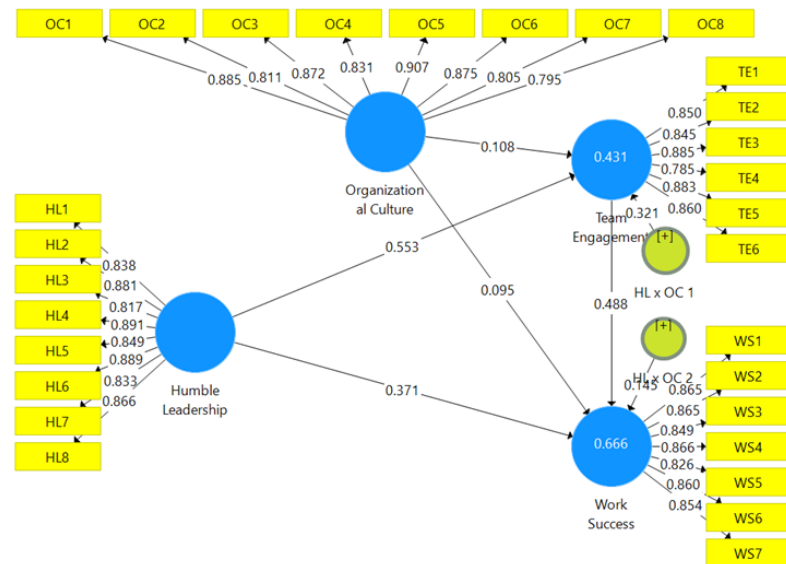


Figure 2. SmartPLS PLS algorithm results

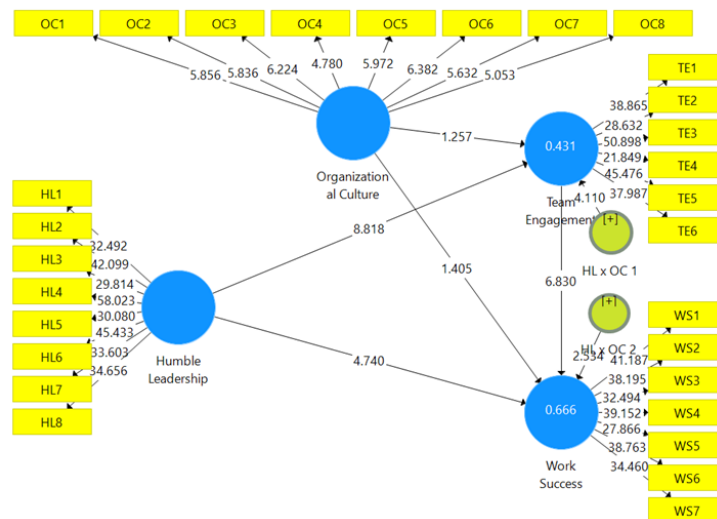


Figure 3. SmartPLS bootstrapping results

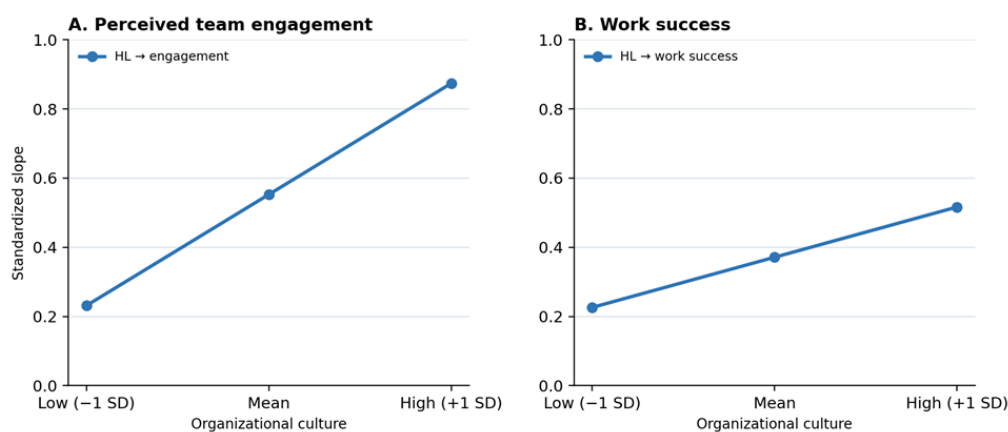
The model explained 43.1% of the variance in perceived team engagement ($R^2 = .431$; adjusted $R^2 = .417$) and 66.6% of the variance in work success ($R^2 = .666$; adjusted $R^2 = .655$). Humble leadership had a large effect on engagement ($f^2 = .537$) and a medium effect on work success ($f^2 = .268$). Engagement had a large effect on work success ($f^2 = .405$). The interaction contributed a medium effect to engagement ($f^2 = .210$) and a small effect to work success ($f^2 = .060$). Culture's main-effect sizes were small.

Table 4. Explanatory power and local effect sizes

Endogenous construct/predictor	R ²	Adjusted R ²	f ²	Magnitude
Perceived team engagement	.431	.417		Moderate explanatory power
Humble leadership			.537	Large
Organizational culture			.021	Small
Humble leadership × Culture			.210	Medium
Work success	.666	.655		Substantial explanatory power
Humble leadership			.268	Medium
Perceived team engagement			.405	Large
Organizational culture			.027	Small
Humble leadership × Culture			.060	Small

Model-diagnostic values were mixed. The estimated-model standardized root mean square residual was .052, which is below the common .08 reference. The normed fit index was .877, below a conventional .90 reference, and rms_theta was .121, marginally above .12. These diagnostics suggest acceptable residual fit but also room for model refinement; they do not justify claiming globally excellent fit.

Simple-slope point estimates were calculated at one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean of organizational culture. The humble leadership slope predicting engagement increased from .232 at low culture to .553 at the mean and .874 at high culture. The humble leadership slope predicting work success increased from .226 to .371 and .516, respectively. These point estimates illustrate the hypothesized amplification pattern; because conditional bootstrap intervals were not included in the supplied output, they are presented descriptively rather than as separate significance tests.

**Figure 4.** Conditional associations at low, mean, and high organizational culture

Note. Values are standardized point estimates at -1 SD, the mean, and +1 SD of organizational culture. Panel A displays the humble leadership slope predicting perceived team engagement; Panel B displays the humble leadership slope predicting work success.

This study examined how humble leadership relates to perceived team engagement and work success and when its benefits are most likely to be realized. All five hypotheses were supported. Humble leadership was positively associated with both outcomes, perceived team engagement was positively associated with work success, and organizational culture strengthened the two relationships originating from humble leadership. The model therefore shifts interpretation from a context-free leader-effect account toward a contingent view in which leader behavior,

energetic team experience, and organizational conditions jointly explain work success.

The strong humble leadership–engagement relationship is consistent with the view of humility as a social job resource. A leader who acknowledges limitations, values employee strengths, and invites feedback reduces defensive interaction while increasing recognition and voice. These behaviors appear to matter not only for psychological safety or learning, which dominate earlier explanations, but also for the energy with which employees experience collective work. This extends JD–R reasoning by identifying behavioral humility as a relational resource capable of energizing perceived team engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). It also complements work showing that humility contributes to team psychological capital and task allocation (Rego et al., 2017, 2019).

The positive engagement–work success relationship is equally informative. Employees who perceive their teams as vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed also report stronger task accomplishment, contextual contribution, and adaptive performance. This result is consistent with the JD–R proposition that energetic investment is closely connected with effective work behavior (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). At the same time, the significant humble leadership–work success coefficient shows that leader openness, recognition, and teachability retain a distinct association with successful work after engagement is included in the model. The findings therefore support treating leadership and perceived team engagement as complementary explanatory factors without inferring a causal sequence from the cross-sectional data.

The moderation findings offer the clearest contextual contribution. Culture had nonsignificant main associations with both endogenous constructs after leadership, engagement, and interactions were considered, yet both interaction paths were significant. This pattern suggests that culture functioned as infrastructure for leadership rather than as an autonomous motivational force. Participation norms, coherent practices, adaptability, and mission may not automatically make employees engaged or successful; instead, they make a humble leader's invitation to contribute more credible and actionable. In other words, culture altered the return on leader behavior.

Considering the two interactions together supports a configuration view: leader humility and supportive culture are complementary. At higher levels of organizational culture, humble leadership showed stronger relationships with both perceived team engagement and work success. Interpersonal openness appears most productive when organizational systems provide participation, consistency, learning capacity, and strategic direction. Culture therefore changes the strength of the focal leadership relationships rather than merely adding an independent average effect.

These relationships are theoretically salient in a hierarchical public organization. Formal authority can create silence and impression-management pressures even when employees possess relevant expertise. Humility offers a way to preserve authority while making learning and contribution legitimate. The findings should not be interpreted as evidence that hierarchy is inherently dysfunctional or that humble leaders should minimize standards. Rather, they indicate that authority may become more effective when exercised with epistemic openness and reinforced by supportive organizational arrangements. This interpretation aligns with public-leadership research that emphasizes the contextual and institutional character of

leadership outcomes (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022; Tummers & Knies, 2016; Vogel & Masal, 2015).

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

First, the study advances humble-leadership theory by positioning perceived team engagement as a distinct proximal correlate of leader humility and a strong predictor of work success. Earlier research established learning, psychological safety, psychological capital, and relational explanations (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Rego et al., 2017, 2019). Perceived team engagement adds an energetic dimension: employees may feel safe yet remain unenergized, or feel capable but lack dedication to collective work. Future longitudinal research should examine how these states develop over time and whether they operate sequentially, reciprocally, or in parallel.

Second, the findings refine organizational-culture theory by separating additive and interactive influence. A nonsignificant culture main effect does not mean culture is irrelevant. Culture can govern whether local leader behavior is interpreted as authentic, safe, and actionable. This is consistent with a systems perspective in which practices acquire meaning through alignment. Culture research may therefore benefit from shifting some attention from “Does culture improve performance?” to “Which leadership and work practices does culture enable, constrain, or make credible?”

Third, the study contributes to contingency research by demonstrating two specific culture-based interaction effects within the same model. Organizational culture strengthened the humble leadership–engagement relationship and the humble leadership–work success relationship, with a larger local effect on engagement. This pattern provides a more precise account than asserting that culture generally improves outcomes: culture appears to shape the effectiveness of a proximal leadership resource, and the magnitude of that contextual leverage differs across outcomes.

Fourth, the study broadens the criterion domain. Work success combines core task execution with contextual and adaptive contributions. Leader humility is therefore relevant not only to whether employees meet formal duties but also to whether they help, initiate, and adjust. This broader operationalization is appropriate for interdependent, change-exposed work, while the hybrid measure also underscores the need for future validation of work success as a higher-order or composite criterion.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Leadership development should treat humility as a disciplined set of observable behaviors rather than a vague personality ideal. Programs can train managers to acknowledge uncertainty without abdicating responsibility, request specific feedback, identify employee expertise publicly, and describe what they learned after an error. Behavioral rehearsal, upward-feedback routines, and post-decision reviews can make these practices concrete. Selection and promotion systems can also evaluate teachability and appropriate credit sharing alongside decisiveness and technical competence.

Organizations should avoid expecting individual leaders to compensate for unsupportive systems. Invitations to speak up must be matched by meeting routines that allocate voice, nonretaliation safeguards, transparent follow-through, and

performance criteria that value collaboration and adaptation. If employees are asked for input but decisions remain opaque, humility will lose credibility. Likewise, a culture of experimentation requires clear boundaries and mission so that learning does not become drift.

Managers can use engagement as an early diagnostic indicator. Short pulse measures of energy, dedication, and absorption can reveal whether employees experience an energized work environment alongside humble leadership practices. Such measures should support diagnosis and conversation, not employee surveillance or ranking. Where engagement remains low, leaders should examine workload, role clarity, resources, fairness, and system consistency rather than assuming a motivational deficit in employees.

Finally, interventions should be aligned across levels. Leader coaching, participation practices, learning routines, and strategic communication are likely to be more effective as a bundle than as isolated initiatives. The results imply that improving culture can magnify the impact of leadership development, while humble leadership can activate cultural values that would otherwise remain abstract.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations define the boundaries of the findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal precedence or causality. Engagement and perceptions of leadership may influence each other, and successful work may shape retrospective evaluations of both. Longitudinal, cross-lagged, diary, or field-experimental designs are needed to test directionality and within-person dynamics.

Second, all focal constructs came from one questionnaire source. The full-collinearity diagnostic was below the stated threshold and procedural remedies were reported, but neither can rule out common-method variance. Future studies should obtain leader behavior from employees, engagement from repeated team assessments, and work success from supervisors, administrative indicators, or peers. Temporal separation and marker-variable designs would provide stronger evidence.

Third, the research concerns one organizational case and does not establish external validity beyond that setting. Replication across agencies, occupational groups, administrative systems, and national cultures is required. Comparative research could test whether hierarchy, power distance, or public-service motivation changes the meaning and effectiveness of humble behavior.

Fourth, team engagement was modeled as an individual perception. Without multiple identified teams and evidence of within-team agreement and between-team reliability, no claim can be made about an emergent team-level construct. Multilevel studies should estimate *rwg*, ICC(1), and ICC(2), distinguish individual work engagement from team engagement, and examine cross-level leader and culture effects.

Fifth, the work-success instrument combined task and contextual content from individual-work-performance research with adaptive content from a separate taxonomy. Although the measurement diagnostics were strong, future studies should evaluate content validity, compare alternative factor structures, and test predictive validity against objective or supervisor-rated outcomes. The Indonesian adaptation should also be documented using forward translation, independent back-translation, cognitive interviews, and a pilot test.

Finally, inferential precision is limited by the supplied bootstrap run. The reported BCa statistics were based on 500 bootstrap replications. Coefficient directions and effect magnitudes were coherent, but confidence intervals and *p* values should be reproduced with a substantially larger resampling run and a fixed seed before the manuscript is finalized. Future analyses should additionally report out-of-sample prediction, robustness to alternative interaction specifications, and conditional-effect confidence intervals.

CONCLUSION

Humble leadership was positively associated with perceived team engagement and work success, while perceived team engagement was positively associated with work success. Organizational culture strengthened both relationships originating from humble leadership. The findings show that humility is not simply a personal virtue or universally effective style; it is a relational resource whose effectiveness is contingent on a culture that makes openness, recognition, participation, and learning credible and actionable. The most promising route to successful work is therefore not leader development or culture change alone, but their alignment.

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