



An Understanding of Humility-Based Leadership Impacting Organizational Climate

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Humility has been studied both as a separate entity and as seen within various forms of ethical leadership. Collins (2005) describes 'Level 5 leadership' as one where the leader combines intense professional will with personal humility. Humble leaders place the needs of the followers above the organization, and this humbleness allows an organization to move forward. Using social-rhetorical criticism on Peter's writings to newly converted Christians demonstrates the importance of a humble heart attitude. Humility includes a lowliness of mind, an occasion to witness through leadership and the need for peacefulness despite the situation. A review of the literature notes that presence of validated scales for self-assessment, and one scale for follower assessment of humility which has not had further development. More work should be done to develop the understanding of humility-based leadership, an understanding of follower valuation of humility-based leadership and the impact of humility on organizational culture.

"Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (Yukl, 2013, p.7). Importantly while leading, leaders must account for three variables: the followers themselves, the follower's tasking, and the environment within which each follower and task exists (Konopaske, Ivancevich, & Matteson, 2014). Differing models of leadership have been developed, including transformational leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership has a moral component not seen with transformational leadership, and emphasizes the needs of the followers (Patterson, 2003). Servant leadership theory emphasizes the leader's service to others and recognizes that the role of the organization is to build up followers (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Humility is of itself a virtue, and can be seen contained within servant, authentic and spiritual leadership. "Humility involves (a) an accurate or moderate view of one's

strengths and weaknesses as well as being (b) interpersonally other-oriented rather than self-focused, marked by the ability to restrain egotism (i.e., self-oriented emotions such as pride or shame) in ways that maintain social acceptance" (Mcelroy, Rice, Davis, & Hill, 2014, p. 20). However, while there are generally accepted definitions of modesty, humility is more difficult to define (Davis et al., 2011). For clarity throughout this article, humility and humbleness are synonyms. As humility is the quality or state of being humble, both terms are used interchangeably.

Humble leaders place the needs of the followers above the organization, and this humbleness allows an organization to move forward. Humility has been noted as a key component of 'Level 5 leadership' (Collins, 2005), where a leader combines intense professional will with personal humility. However, it is unclear whether humility-based leadership is sub-segmented within servant leadership or is a separate form of leadership. This article will expand our understanding of humility-based leadership: from Scripture, from the literature, and its impact on organizational culture.

A Theological Approach to Humility-Based Leadership

Ayers argues that both theology and leadership can be examined using ontology, methodology and teleology (Ayers, 2006). This approach reconciles the case that while theology is an explanation of God and leadership studies are an explanation of man, a theological approach can be used when examining leadership. Socio-rhetorical criticism is one way to examine Scripture as it "persuades its hearers at every level" (DeSilva, 2004, p. 23) by the interpreter employing (a) a detailed analysis of the text, (b) an understanding how the text communicates with other texts; (c) an examination of the world during the time of the text, and (d) an examination of how that text affected that world. Historical intertexture references a specific time in which the work is written, social intertexture confirm the common practices at that time (Pierce, 2013) and ideological analysis examines the "comprehensive patterns of cognitive and moral beliefs about humans, society and the universe that are intended to function in the social order" (Robbins, 1996, p. 193).

Humility Based Leadership as Seen Through Historical and Social Intertexture Analysis of 1 Peter

While sometimes contested, the authorship of 1 Peter is the Apostle Peter, written in the fourth decade. The audience was predominantly Gentile Christians, who had formerly been pagans (1 Pet 2:9, 4:3-4), and are addressed as 'the exiles of the dispersion'. Through their salvation, they have become foreigners and exiles (2:11 παροικος (paroikos) and παρεπίδημος (parepidēmos) within their own society (Stenschke, 2009). They now belonged to a religious minority with distinct patterns of behaviour in a land with latent anti-Judean feelings. As new Christians, they are called to a holy life (1:15-16) by the quotation from Leviticus 11:44. The use of Old Testament concepts and

imagery provides these Christians with a new identity and the foundation for a new character (Stenschke, 2009). The readers were considered 'Godfearers', having joined the Synagogue, and their resident foreigner status resulted in persecution and economic hardship (2:12, 3:16), with the potential of sharing a similar economic status as household servants (οικέται) (van Rensburg, 2011). However, this economic hardship and state of being a foreigner in their own land was overshadowed by the knowledge that "they were grafted into an entity with a proven past, dignity and with the legitimacy of history" (Stenschke, 2009, p. 115). Peter's letter therefore, meant to encourage them in the midst of their temporary sufferings (4:3-4).

While the letter as a whole has eight sections (Lea, 1982), the pericope chosen (1 Peter 5:5-7) is contained within the third preaching section which focuses on assurances for faithful servants and encouragement for all Christians who endure in humility (5:1-9).

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Pet 5:5-7, English Standard Version).

Peter encourages humbleness and humility in this passage (Greek: *tapeinophrosunē* defined as 'humbleness of mind', *tapeinos* defined as 'figuratively depressed or humiliated in circumstances' and *tapeinoō* defined as 'to bring low') (Strong, 1890). Notably, this word is used multiple times in the New Testament (Matt 11:29, Rom 12:16; Phil 2:3; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12). David also speaks to humility in Psalm 25: "He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way." (25:9, ESV), and the Hebrew word used is ענין (Heb: `ânâv), meaning poor, oppressed, afflicted, humble. It is used of persons who are not proud; haughty; supercilious; self-assertive; low in rank nor position but can be used by persons who put themselves after others in importance (Gibbons, 2011). Notably, while the word humility can be used to refer to persons with rank and position who adopt a position of humility, King David was surrounded by wealth (2 Sam 7:1-2) yet remained an example of humility (7:18, Acts 13:22).

An Ideological Texture Analysis of 1 Peter 5:5-11

Humbleness is a lowliness of mind (Lea, 1982). Jesus identified Himself as gentle and humble in heart ("Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' Matt 11:29), so this recollection of Jesus' actions would help the Christians remember their new heritage. It would also spur the Christians to imitate Jesus by serving one another.

Humility was an occasion for leaders to witness through their conduct. The New Testament Gospels chronicle Jesus' teaching on humility (Matt 5:5; 18:4; 23:12). The

witness via conduct reaches past the specific pericope (1 Pet 2:12-17; 2:23; 3:7). This humility allowed the Christian to keep their conscience clear so that those who abuse them would be put to shame. Köstenberger in his book *Mission in the General Epistles* is quoted by Stenschke (2009) as "Peter believes that Christian lifestyle, if it is a consistently holy lifestyle, has certain unique qualities that will render the gospel proclamation attractive" (p. 119).

Humbleness includes the understanding that leaders are not in control of their circumstances. The simple understanding that God could conquer their problems (Luke 12:4-7 'the sparrows in the field' and 22-24 'do not be anxious'), in times of opposition or persecution, can allow leaders to maintain the state of peacefulness and humbleness in spite of their situation. The phrase the 'hand of God' is figuratively used to remind the readers that God upholds and preserves, punishes and determines/controls the destinies of men (Thayer, 1889). This expression 'hand of God' (verse 6) is seen in two other locations in the New Testament, in 1 Pet 3:22 ("who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him"), and in Rom 8:34 ("Who then will condemn us? No one – for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us"). 1 Peter 5:6 is unique as it refers to the reader being under God's direct protection, not God's judgment.

Exegetical Summary

1 Peter was written for newly converted Gentile Christians living in the eastern Mediterranean. 1 Peter 5 speaks to leadership motivation, and the pericope (5:5-7) specifically speaks to the need for humility, especially under persecution. Humility is not limited to Christianity but is also noted in Buddhist and Taoism teachings (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However while Buddhist and Taoist approaches humility as a losing of self, Judaism, Islam and Christianity approach humility as a submission before God (Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005). The understanding of humility includes: (a) humbleness is not related to low position, but rather an attitude of the heart towards people; (b) humility was an occasion to witness through their conduct; and (c) humbleness included the understanding that they were not in control of their circumstances. This understanding is relevant to present day leaders. Gibbons (2011) writes that it is not position or status that determines humility, but a heart attitude. This same understanding of humility-based leadership can be seen in the academic literature.

A Literature Approach to Humility-Based Leadership

Humility is a virtue, which doubts itself as a virtue (Morris et al., 2005), and ironically pride in one's humility is seen as proof that it is lacking. While a virtue, humility is "not merely a stance to be adopted but a concept to be lived" (Molyneaux, 2003, p. 360), and

can be seen as “down to earth, patient, compassionate, concerned and authentic in its sincerity. Leaders with humility act with modesty and restraint” (Lawrence, 2006, p. 116). Humility has been described as “the mid-point between the two negative extremes of arrogance and lack of self-esteem” (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004, p. 395). Humility has been seen as a critical component of leadership, can be considered a complementary characteristic to courage (Kallasvuo, 2007) and appears as a marker of a leader’s willingness to serve (Collins, 2005). Kouzes & Posner (2002) note five practices of exemplary leadership including acknowledging, recognizing, and celebrating the contributions others make to the organization, and this practice of recognition appears to be part of our understanding of humility.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) note six integral elements of humility: an accurate sense of one’s abilities and achievements; the ability to acknowledge one’s mistakes; openness to new ideas, or contradictory information; keeping one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective; ability to “forget the self”; and appreciation of the value of all things. This is echoed by Winston (2002), who notes that humble leaders place the needs of the followers above the organization, and that this humbleness allows an organization to move forward.

Developing a stand-alone measure of humility-based leadership remains problematic. For example, Lee et al (2003) developed an honestly-humility personality trait survey, with humility being the opposite of entitlement to status, wealth, and special treatment. Yet this does not suffice, as lack of entitlement does not equate with a presence of humility. Self-rating scales of humility may be inaccurate due to the reasons described above, and observer scales need to be developed. However, observer scales may also misinterpret humility as ‘low self-esteem’.

Regardless, Elliott (2010) utilized a humility-based leadership assessment tool using 86 US undergraduate students. In addition to the Elliott 32-item humility scale (Cronbach alpha of .79), respondents completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), Spiritual Well Being scale, Faith Maturity scale, Empathy scale, Religious Maturity Scale, Religious commitment scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale. The humility score negatively correlated to the NPI ($r = -.21, p < .05$), negatively correlated to the narcissistic entitlement subscale ($r = -.23, p < .05$) and positively correlated to religious commitment ($r = .35, p < .01$) “suggestive of concurrent validity” (p. 54). Despite two additional studies completed utilizing this scale, the sampling of undergraduate students is too small to allow generalization of this tool beyond Caucasian American undergraduate students.

Landrum (2011) completed pilot testing on the costs and benefits of humble behavior, along with parental transmission of humility traits to children, and social implications/influences of humble behavior. 341 undergraduate students completed a 69-item survey. Items with eigenvalue > 2.0 and factor loading $> .50$ were kept, resulting

in a 33 item/six factor scale. Cronbach alpha scores for each of the six factors ranged from .57 to .87. Factors 1 (the highest correlation score) and 5 were felt to represent the context of humility. Given the adequate sample size and rigorous evaluation of items, the Dispositional Humility Scale is a validated tool for self-assessment of humility in students, but not the follower valuation of humility.

Owens, Johnson and Mitchell (2013) developed a measure of expressed humility. Initially developed and retested in a total of 400 undergraduate students, a further sampling of 511 employees in a large health maintenance organization demonstrated similar results to the confirmatory factor analysis ($\alpha=.94$), however, this remains a survey of expressed humility, and not a follower's value of a leader's humility.

Finally, in an effort to quantify equal parts personal humility and professional will from Collins' (2005) work, Reid, West, Winston and Wood (2014) reviewed all of Collins' works to extract references to humility and professional will. Using DeVellis' (2012) method for scale development, a total of 99 characteristics (55 representing personal humility and 44 representing professional will) were used to form an item pool. After truncation by a panel of experts, 347 respondents completed an online survey of humility and personal will in leaders. Using principal component analysis, the scale was truncated to a 10-item instrument with 5 items each measuring the domains of personal humility and professional will (Cronbach α of .83 and .83 respectively). This scale is entitled the Level 5 Leadership Scale (L5LS) (Reid et al., 2014; Reid III, 2012).

Humility Within Other Leadership Models

Humility, as part of 'knowing thyself' has also been seen within authentic leadership (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; George, 2003). Given the lack of a stand-alone survey of follower valuation of humility, we must examine servant leadership and the elements of humility contained within that model. Given the moral component of servant leadership, van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) examined the characteristics of servant leadership and distilled them into six behaviors leading to the validated development of the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) which quantitatively measures servant leadership qualities including humility. The Cronbach α scores were empowerment (.89), for accountability (.81), standing back (.76), humility (.91), authenticity (.82), courage (.69), forgiveness (.72) and stewardship (.74).

Developed as an online assessment tool, the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (R. S. Dennis, 2004) measures the seven domains as noted in Patterson's (2003) work on servant leadership including humility, defined as "the ability to keep one's accomplishments and talents in perspective, which includes self-acceptance" (p. 75) and included items on praising follower achievements using a six point Likert scale (0 = not applicable/total disagreement and 6 = most agreement possible). The total cumulative variance explained by the model was 71.2% (R. Dennis & Bocârnea, 2007, p. 609). As

structure matrix revealed correlation amongst items, an Oblimin Rotation method was used where Factor 7 included humility items (Cronbach $\alpha = .92$). Therefore, the SLAI appropriately measures humility as a subscale.

Finally, while humbleness is not universally endorsed as a sole leader attribute according the GLOBE study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), it is globally endorsed as part of a humane oriented leadership model, and is a cross-cultural marker that may be used in the creation of a humility-based leadership survey. Humane orientation represents a leader who is generous, compassionate, patient and modest. SE Asian, Confucian Asian, and Anglo cultures score higher on humane orientation than Eastern European cultures (Hoppe, 2007).

Humility and Organizational Culture

Humility may provide benefit in achieving organizational goals. A leader's display of humility has positive motivational effects on individual employees (Owens et al., 2013) and is positively related to job engagement after controlling for demographic differences (Owens et al., 2013). Additionally, humility-based leadership removes barriers and generates personal and organizational trust in followers (Argandona, 2015) and these leaders are more likely to form supportive relationships with their followers (Morris et al., 2005) impacting the organizational culture. An extension of humility-based leadership can be seen within spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), where organizations understand that workplace spirituality can engage followers into the mission of the organization (Weinberg & Locander, 2014), however humility is seen as a component of spiritual leadership.

Finally, Collins notes that 'Level 5' leaders combine extreme personal humility with intense personal will (Collins, 2005), and it is this personality (combined with other factors) that allowed companies to outperform their competitor companies, demonstrating a positive impact on the organizational culture.

However, despite these points from Owens (2013), Argandona (2015) and Morris (2005), there remains a paucity of literature on the impact of humility-based leadership on organizational culture.

Conclusions

Humility has been studied both as a separate entity and as seen within various forms of ethical leadership. Humility based leadership importantly does not refer to position or status, but a Scripturally encouraged heart attitude as seen in 1 Peter 5. A review of the literature notes that the Dispositional Humility Scale (Landrum, 2011) and the scale by Owens et al. (2013) are validated for self-assessment of humility. The L5LS (Reid et al.,

2014; Reid III, 2012) appears to be an emerging scale for follower assessment of humility, while the SLAI (R. Dennis & Bocârnea, 2007) has a subscale for humility.

While generally comprised within ethical forms of leadership including servant, authentic and spiritual leadership, more work should be done to develop the understanding of humility-based leadership as a separate theory of leadership along with a validated scale for the understanding of humility-based leadership from a follower valuation perspective. This could include the use of the Level 5 Leadership Scale (Reid et al., 2014). Additionally, there remains room for understanding the impact of humility-based leadership upon organizational culture.

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