

In Pursuit of an Understanding of Humility in the Organization: The Importance of Positive

Organizational Virtues

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Abstract

Long held as an undesirable personality trait, humility has been largely overlooked in the study of leadership. As recent events have illuminated the downfall of a bevy of arrogant or narcissistic leaders, the call for study of humility in leadership has expanded. Prior to the examination of humility, one must recognize that humility is not low self-esteem, or a poor view of oneself, but an accurate portrayal of self and others. When individuals hold such perspectives, it has previously been posited that they will be a greater asset to their organization, than those that have an unrealistic portrayal of self and/or others. Further, the encouragement and enactment of an organizational level perspective on humility is believed to promote learning, understanding of limitations and strengths, and the inclusion of other individuals.

In Pursuit of an Understanding of Humility in the Organization: The Importance of Positive Organizational Virtues

The idea of humility as a positive and striven after characteristic has largely been nonexistent in the mind of most individuals. Harvey and Pauwels (2004) question whether humility is appreciated at all in Western culture? Within the organization, humility has long been connected with poor performers and lack of ‘promotability’. Most often, individuals would characterize another as humble, in similar fashion as they would use the term modest, meek, soft, gentle, or easygoing. They would conceptualize this individual as helpful, not problematic or contrary, easy to get along with and not self-serving. Connected to this framework might also be the idea that this person is someone that is nice to have around, but certainly not the person to put in charge or to lead an important effort. That is, the common view of humble individuals is that they lack the ability to get things done.

It should be no surprise, given these ideas, that leaders have long been understood to be ‘great’ individuals who are able to go into battle on their own, riding the white horse, and fix all of the problems a group faces. They certainly aren’t typically defined as being humble. Many generations ago, Hume (1992) wrote that humility was a “monkish virtue” which served no real purpose for man, not advancing fortune or rendering him a vital member of society. In much the same way, the encouragement of humility in Western society goes against the movement toward self-esteem and pride that has been a central construction of the 1990’s and early 2000’s (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The emergence of and focus on positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship, humility is slowly being recognized for its benefits to both individuals and organizations. This and other related efforts which focus on positive, humanistic ideals have

crept into both the literature and practice of organization. As such, Youssef and Luthans (2005) note, “organizational leaders and other stakeholders, public policy makers, and even lay observers have become constantly on the watch for positive, innovative, and morally sound approaches to developing and managing for ethical performance at the self/individual, unit/group, and organizational levels” (p. 1-2). This new perspective on virtues in the organization, particularly humility, stands in stark contrast to previously held ideas about the construct.

In the midst of an individualistic Western culture, humility is often moved to the backburner (Exline & Geyer, 2004). Yet, this research seems to substantiate that when leaders display humility in relationship with their subordinates, they are more likely to find that their subordinates, in response, are committed to them. This corresponds with previous acknowledgements in the literature by Collins (2001), Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004), Morris et al. (2005), and Bekker (2008). When leaders act in a way that shows a willingness to view themselves accurately, appreciate the strengths of others, and be teachable (Owens, 2009a), great potential for professional and organizational growth can be realized (Morris, et al., 2005).

Humility and Religion

In order to construct a complete understanding of the conceptualization of humility, it is imperative to investigate the effects of religious beliefs on the development of the construct. Over time, humility has taken on varying levels of importance in different cultures due to its connection with religious bodies. Button (2005) notes, “if we are concerned to understand some of the most influential expressions of humility and how this has shaped the contemporary reception of this quality, it is important to recognize that humility has long been tied to a substantive metaphysic” (p. 844). As such, this section will offer a brief review of the three faiths

most likely found in the contemporary Western organization, with the greatest level of inquiry into Christianity.

Characteristic of the three Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) is the call to enact a humble livelihood. In each of these religions, humility is held up as the stance that one has, in their submission before God (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, humility is not simply being low, but being safe and thus not overlooked or uncared for by the Higher Power. Christians would note the characterization that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6, NRSV) as an encouragement to abstain from prideful actions and state, and in turn to pursue a course of humility. In similar fashion, According to the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Judaica (1992), humility is considered the most important of all Jewish virtues, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, NRSV). Much the same could be said within the Islamic faith, as Iqbal (2009), in discussing the posture of prayer for the Muslim, notes that it is as one is down on knees, with their hands on the ground and the nose and forehead on the ground, that they are closest to God, as they have enacted a humbled posture seeking the mercy of Allah. As this posture is taken on countless times in the life of a devoted Muslim, the idea of humility is constantly present within the individual’s mind. Thus, to characterize humility as a central part of these three major faith traditions would be both accurate and identifiable within the tenets of their faith.

While both Judaism and Islam promote humility of adherents, closest in proximity to Western nations is the influence of Christianity on the societal understanding of the construct. The influence of Christianity on understanding of humility has been shaped since the first century. New Testament texts such as Romans 12:3-8 and Philippians 2:1-11 have long held

great sway on the conceptualization of humility (and will be discussed below) (Sandage & Wiens, 2001). Further, church fathers such as Augustine, Benedict, Bernard, and Aquinas have significantly influenced our understanding of humility, as well (Button, 2005). Recently, positive psychologists have sought integration between Christian virtues and psychological sciences in order to increase positive human interactions (Davis, et al., 2010; Emmons, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sandage & Wiens, 2001; Worthington, 2008). We learn from these attempts that shifts have occurred in understanding what Christianity has to say about humility from the first to twenty-first century.

Much like the leadership orientation in Western nations of the 21st century, where leader is the most powerful, charismatic, or visionary individual – invested with power – to direct the organization to success, the first-century Roman world was well described by Christ to be a place in which, “the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them” (Matt. 20:25, NRSV). Yet, in the pattern of Jesus Christ, the exact opposite was incarnated:

It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:26-28, NRSV).

Further, the Apostle Paul in an Epistle to Christians in the Roman colony of Philippi wrote:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of

you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:1-11, NRSV).

In Roman Philippi, as a Roman colony, the notion of honor was extremely important within the male dominated society. As was previously discussed, the *cursus honorum* was an important aspect of the elite in Roman society, yet contrary to honor, following a crucified Jewish man who was more fitting of *cursus pudorum*, or “a succession of ignomies” (Hellerman, 2003) would have been fitting only of shame. Bloomquist (2007) notes the depth of the fear of shame in Roman society, “dread of suffering and death translated into fear of familial suffering and death in the form of dishonor and kinship pollution; political suffering and death translated into the ever-present threat of civil strife” (p. 271). For the Christian community of Philippi to willingly join Christ in descending into shame (or humility), by the standards of the society around them, would “presuppose an inversion to the relational orientation of the colony of Roman Philippi” (Hellerman, 2003, p. 424). Humility lacked acceptance as a virtue in the Greco-Roman world, and is purposely used here by Paul to bring contrast to the selfish ambition or conceit (common to the society) that would not be fitting as disciples of Christ. Sandage and Wiens (2001) wisely point out that Paul’s use of Christ as the model of humility, encouraged a

new perspective by which these Christians would understand the importance of unity within a community of diverse members. Christ exemplifies a low self-focus (which has been noted to be a large component of humility) as noted by McClain (1998) in that Christ' whole existence was focused on others in a "constant and gracious 'self-forgetfulness'" (p. 89).

This perspective of low self-focus and appreciation for the needs of others has informed much of the early understanding, by which followers of Christ, Moses, and Muhammad engaged life. However, it is important to note that even though early leaders of these religious movements emphasized this attitude, does not mean that later followers continued this type of perspective. In Christianity in particular, the comprehension of humility in the Middle Ages shifted from low self-focus to a seeming encouragement for self-hatred (Button, 2005). Even still this virtue has largely been lauded by each of these diverse faith traditions.

Traditional Views of Humility

While humility was once held as a cardinal virtue which individuals sought to fulfill, recent generations have largely overlooked its value (Button, 2005). In fact, at a macro level, a view of the post-Enlightenment period would show a shift in which Western societies have celebrated individuals who are charismatic, bold, visionary leaders, willing to go it alone in the face of battle, able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and more than willing to acknowledge just how talented/great they are to their followers. Due to ill-constructed ideas of humility, shaped both in and out of the church, the construct has largely taken on negative associations (Tangney, 2009). Peterson and Seligman (2004) point out that often individuals look at a humble person as being "weak and passive, with eyes downcast and lacking self-respect and confidence" (p. 463). Further, it may be considered that individuals enacting humility either are doing so falsely or because they have little self-care (Sandage & Wiens, 2001).

Church fathers such as Augustine, Benedict, Bernard, and Aquinas, along with humanist thinkers like Hume, Spinoza and Nietzsche have shaped beliefs about humility that are viewed today as ranging from worthless to harmful. Button (2005) in his fine work on the value of humility as a liberal-democratic ideal, noted that to Hume humility was a vice, to Spinoza it was weakness, and to Nietzsche it was resentment of self. On the other hand, the church fathers often times in separation from civilization, composed ideas of humility as self-resentment for sins, submission before God, extermination of all forms of pride, and even self-renunciation and personal punishment (Button, 2005). It is no wonder that given these traditional views of humility that its value is tragically overlooked in Western culture today.

Related Research Constructs

Beyond just past conceptualizations of humility, this construct has also suffered as it is often mistaken for other similar constructs. In many dictionaries, humility is described as lowliness or being of little worth (and thus often overlooked as a positive character attribute), or as virtually identical to being modest or having low self-esteem. Recent research by scholars has started illuminating a clearer understanding of humility, as encompassing an accurate portrayal of self, including a low self-focus or preoccupation (Owens, 2009a; Tangney, 2000; Templeton, 1997).

In order to bring a construct into proper clarity, understanding not only what it is, but what it isn't is of great importance. Humility is not, but may have some overlap with other positive constructs like, modesty, yet it is not lowliness, or self-hatred. Further, it is distinct from but useful in comparison to negative constructs like pride, arrogance, and narcissism. Tangney (2009) notes that humility is not low self-esteem, nor is it a lack of belief in one's self-worth or

abilities. Humility is also not to be confused with lack of ambition, shyness, passivity, or lack of confidence (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004).

While modesty and humility are often compared, Peterson and Seligman (2004) see humility as an inner-personal core that develops an accurate self-understanding and portrayal and modesty as a social virtue in which one moderates self-projection (including the minimization of personal beliefs in order to be socially acceptable). Tangney (2009) states that modesty focuses on moderating personal estimations of ability, achievements, etc., especially in context with others. Davis (2011) notes that modesty is distinguished from humility, in that while the exhibition of modesty may look like an accurate portrayal of self, it does not have the other important characteristics of humility. Further, humility has less to do with moderating one's expression of their abilities and achievements, than having a low focus on- and accurate portrayal of self, acknowledgement of personal limitations, willingness to learn and accurate portrayal of others (Davis, 2011; Owens, 2009a; Tangney, 2009).

In examining negative characteristics often association with humility, it is important to note that this construct is not the exact opposite of arrogance or, especially, narcissism, as narcissism is a classified mental health disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM) of the American Psychological Association (APA). Narcissism describes an clinical condition of perverse self-love (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) and is conceptually distinct from simply having an inflated ego. To be diagnosed as narcissistic, the APA states that one must exhibit a “pervasive pattern of grandiosity” and “need for admiration and lack of empathy” (American Psychological Association, 2000, p. 717). Arrogance, while not considered to have the same level of deviance as narcissism is still viewed as detrimental characteristic in interpersonal and organizational relationships (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

The reality is that humility is conceptually distinct from these other related constructs (Tangney, 2000), and may be well recognized, as posited by Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) as the mid-point between arrogance and lack of self-esteem. Investigation of this construct by Tangney (2000, 2009), Exline and colleagues ((2004; 1997), and Owens and colleagues (Owens, 2009a, 2009b; Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, in press), have identified core characteristics of humility as low self-focus, accurate portrayal of self and others, willingness to learn and to acknowledge the achievements of others.

Humility Measures

One important issue that has hampered research on humility research, noted by Tangney (2000), is that definitions of humility show a variance that has caused problems for measurement. Further, the value of humility as a social-scientific construct hinges on the ability of researchers to develop a valid, reliable measure to isolate this virtue. However, continual empirical studies have found a lack of validity in self-report measures of humility (Owens, 2009a; Tangney, 2000). Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner and Jennings (2010) point out that researchers are cautious when self-reports are high or low for humility, as those that are humble may underestimate their humility while those that are not very humble may overestimate it. As such, researchers have moved toward an *other*-report measure in which an individual reports perceptions of another's humility (sometime in connection with a self-report, as part of a 360 measure) (Davis, et al., 2010; Owens, 2009a).

Further, questions regarding the measurement of humility have focused on the ability to isolate the construct, timing of the construct, ability to examine the construct at various levels of analysis, and relation of the construct to other construct measures. Tangney (2000) notes that researchers should develop a distinction between humility from the situational and dispositional levels. Thus, any empirically sound research conducted on humility is of great value, due to the

challenges consistently stated by researchers in developing and enacting a valid measure for the construct. Recently, two dissertations have aimed at constructed a valid and reliable measure for humility in varying contexts. Owens' (2009a) work focused on the examination of humility in an organizational context, whereas Davis' (2011) research examined humility at a relational level.

In the work by Owens (2009a) on humility within organizations, a four factor model of humility is developed: willingness to have an accurate self-perspective, an appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, teachability and low focus on self. As Owens (2009a, 2009b) outlines in his development, his scale was shown to be validated and reliable for use as an other-rater of humility, however the self-rated humility scale also showed validity but at slightly questionable levels. The design asks participants to rate how characteristic each item is of another individual on a 5 point Likert scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. In the initial validation of the scale, the reported Cronbach alpha was .94 (Owens, 2009a, p. 22). Questions from the survey consisted of items like, this person - shows appreciation for the unique contributions of others, this person- is open to the advice of others, and this person- acknowledges when others have more knowledge and skills than themselves. A more recent adaptation of this initial validated survey includes a two-item addition to examine leaders.

Davis (2011) following the frustration of other researchers who have attempted to develop a valid, and reliable measure of humility (Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Rowatt, et al., 2006; Tangney, 2000) sought to examine the construct from a different perspective. In his development he outlines the challenge of various other models that have attempted to measure humility, including self-report, other-report, and implicit testing of humility. Due to the challenges of isolating and adequately measuring humility found in each of these prior attempts, Davis develops a relational-level measurement for humility. This model of

humility is based on four moderators: a good judge, a good target, a good trait, and good information. Davis following respected protocols for scale development and validation, and built an initial 71-item scale to measure humility. After initial testing, the scale was pared back to 16 items, found over 3 constructs (Global humility – 5 items, Superiority – 7 items, and Accurate view of Self – 4 items). The reported Cronbach alpha for the scale was .89, with each subscale being .82 or higher.

These two most recent attempts at developing a valid and reliable measure of humility have shown that there is hope that researchers will be able to reach consensus on how to measure this important virtue. It seems that opportunities still exist to recognize further contextual scales for humility including the potential of a humility scale that encompasses multiple individuals, such as a team humility or organizational humility scale.

Humility in Context

With the increasing level of focus on humility, researchers are beginning to point out that levels of humility may be bound in context, rather than simply being acknowledged as a universal trait (Davis, 2011; Owens, 2009a; Tangney, 2000). This realization has moved toward an understanding in which humility is isolated and examined from the role of another individual with relational history of the subject. As such, researchers are pointing toward the importance of humility in a particular context (i.e. relational, organizational, etc.). In one example, Davis et al. (2010) examined humility as a relational construct, examining one's other-orientedness, regulation of self-focus, and accurate portrayal of self. This research makes the statement that the display of humility in relationships serves to strengthen bonds between individuals.

While largely intuitive, research on humility in relationships helps illuminate the benefit of this virtue in developing and mature relationships. Peterson and Seligman (2004) note that

humble individuals are less interested in managing impressions. Due to a low self-focus, they are less likely to need to dominate and impress in relationships, which is typically deemed to be a positive interpersonal characteristic in the development of relationships. Emmons (2000) notes, that humility is not having a low opinion of self, but to “have an opinion of oneself that is no better or worse than the opinion one holds of others” (p. 164). The relationship between self and others is central to a proper understanding of humility in which one’s view of self and others is not based on a self-reprimanding or excessive self-sacrifice, but on an accurate portrayal of self and others (Sandage & Wiens, 2001; Tangney, 2009). Further, relationships are not dominated by humble people, who have a greater appreciation for others as Tangney (2000) posits the key elements of humility include: accurate assessment of one’s achievements and abilities, acknowledgement of one’s own mistakes and limitations, openness to new ideas and contrasting ideas, ability to place self in perspective to the world around oneself, relatively low focus on self, and appreciation for the value of others and their contributions.

Humility and Leadership

In the last two decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, a shift has occurred moving away from prideful interest in overly confident individuals and toward a new understanding of leader. Yet, while we are uncomfortable with incessant arrogance or narcissism from leaders, many individuals in multiple cultures and traditions have struggles to recognize the value of humility (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). This stems from the lack of understanding of what humility actually is and isn’t, as was noted previously.

Historically, leaders were recognized through their traits and characteristics that made them ‘great’ (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). This perspective, often times fed into an already inflated ego of individuals. Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006) note that a large number of world leaders have

held “grandiose belief systems and leadership styles” leading to both their rise to power and often their “downfall to their narcissistic grandiosity” (p. 617). They further propose that individual’s hold narcissistic perspectives often seek after leadership opportunities in order to enlarge their own notions of grandeur. While this has been a pattern recognizable throughout history, things are beginning to change.

Gone are the days of the untouchable boss in the corner cube with complete control over all aspects of the organization. No longer is the idealized version of a leader, someone who goes it alone, is rude or condescending toward subordinates and rules from a position of power. Thanks in part to increases in access to education and technology and a greater emphasis on teamwork and collaboration throughout the organization, followers today are not stuck worshipping the old ‘great man’ projection of leadership present in past generations. Yet, even though there has been substantial movement away from isolated, power brokers – as leaders, in both theory and practice, many issues still exist. Two recent periods of organizational tumult – the scandals of the 1990’s and the ‘too big to fail’ crash of the mid-to-late 2000’s, raise concerns over the presence of an oozing hubris in the organization of today.

The good news is that not all organizations are disregarding these positive organizational values. Humility has been shown to be present and encouraged in some organizational settings. Take, for instance, the example and legacy of such humble leaders as Sam Walton (Wal-Mart), Mary Kay Ash (Mary Kay, Inc.), Herb Kelleher (Southwest Airlines), Bill Pollard (ServiceMaster Industries, Inc.) and Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA), all of these leaders showed that success is not contingent on arrogance (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). The humility of these leaders stand in stark contrast to the hubris of leaders like Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling (Enron), Michael Saylor (MicroSystems), and even the once highly regarded guru, Lee Iacocca

(Chrysler). While each of these leaders has been revered at one point in time in the history of their organization, as success fades, so too does the admiration of the arrogant, while those that have exemplified humility that have endured years of review, graciously. Some go even further, positing that the success of the arrogant is less sustainable than that of the humble (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004).

When one examines the trends, changes, and ‘permanent white-water’ (Vaill, 1996) found in the present global economy, a humble approach would seem to be best-suited to navigate such turmoil. Weick (2001), a noted expert in the field of leadership studies, suggests that the increasing unpredictability and unknowability that organizations face will require 21st Century leaders to have “more humility and less hubris” (p. 106) yet, the evidence shows little to no change in the leadership of today’s organization. It is almost intriguing that many well-known leaders and organizational strategies have been copied and turned into an over-replicated, under-examined process. Yet, for some reason humility has never received such interest, even though it is posited and has been shown in exemplar cases that organizational success displays the effectiveness of a leader, and success is more easily maintained by the humble than the arrogant.

In a small scale study of followers (Greer, 2010), a higher level of supervisor-related was found when leaders were perceived to be more humble by their subordinates. It is recognizable that supervisors perceived to be arrogant or self-centered, are likely to alienate subordinates. This holds likely in that, individuals with a high focus on self, are less likely to recognize the accomplishments of others, less likely to admit personal mistakes/weaknesses, and less likely utilize others. In contrast, leaders that hold a realistic portrayal of self, a willingness to see the positive attributions and contributions of others, and a willingness to learn (Owens, 2009a; Tangney, 2000; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), are much more likely to hold the commitment

of their subordinates. Raelin (2003) makes the point that humility in leadership is very practical, in that it sends a message that the leader recognizes that they do not have a monopoly on good ideas within the organization.

Group/Organizational Humility

Why is humility important to group and organizational relationships? Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) note that humility can be of strategic importance to organizations as humble individuals hold an accurate portrayal of self and others. Having humble people within an organization can also be a benefit in that, humility has been closely linked to teachability (Owens, 2009a; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Further, Caza and Caza (2008) note simply that seeking after positive, proactive processes and variables helps move organizations out of a negative, deficit-driven approach that can hamper organizational culture.

Traditionally organizational scholarship has not been focused on positive outcomes and dynamics (Youssef & Luthans, 2005) however this is beginning to change as researchers and organizational leaders are recognizing the benefit of a virtuous workplace. Most individuals have started to realize that if organizations lack virtues such as humility, honesty, and integrity, these institutions will continue to be marred by another round of black eyes on the face of the organizational world. Further, organizations are beginning to see that humility has great value as an organizational value, as it is closely related to, and encourages the development of, other important organizational values like participation, collaboration, and respect for others (Raelin, 2003). Humility enacted is a connective, relational construct that can encourage trust and development throughout an organization.

Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004), posit the potential of organization-wide humility formed on the basis of the humility of strategic leaders, individual organization members, and via

the culture, systems, procedures and structure of an organization. They further posit, humility impacts organizational learning in six ways: openness to new paradigms; eagerness to learn from others; acknowledgement of their own limitations and mistakes, and ability to correct them; pragmatic acceptance of failure; ability to ask for advice; development of others; and performance outcomes. Through this type of development, we can see the emergence of humility, manifesting itself in three ways: in a genuine desire to serve, in respect toward others, and ability to share and not monopolize others. Individuals also may show a proclivity toward humility or a potential willingness to be humble (situationally) when they enact emotions that show respect and consideration of others. Such emotions may be empathy, love, guilt, or similar relational emotions, which allow others to recognize the possibility of humility in that individual (Davis, et al., 2010).

The possibility of examining humility in the organization, as a construct at a group or organizational level has become of great intrigue to leadership experts. Collins (2001) found that CEOs who exemplify both humility and a strong willpower in their field are leaders that can transform a company from good to great. Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) through qualitative interviewing, developed a 13 item list of ways, identified by executives and mid-managers, that humility affects the business setting. The items were: an openness to new paradigms, an eagerness to learn from others, acknowledgement of own limitations and mistakes with an attempt to correct, pragmatic acceptance of failure, seeks the advice of others, develops others, genuinely desires to serve, respects others, shares honor with whom they collaborate, reacts to success with simplicity, is not arrogant/narcissistic and does not encourage adulation or idolization, avoids self-complacency and is frugal.

Future Research

In an era of globalization, deeper study on the universality of humility and other virtues will have obvious benefits. Research by Peterson and Seligman (2004) contend that humility is among a core set of virtues that is accepted regardless of culture, however, it would be beneficial to examine this from an organizational perspective. It could be beneficial to examine the relationship to power distance in other cultures (Hofstede, 2001), preference for paternalistic leaders (Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr, 2008), and in-group relations (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Another area in which future research on humility can provide help is in examining the construct longitudinally. Tangney (2000) asked the question about the potential change in the construct over a period of time, wondering about whether individuals perceive others through a state or dispositional approach. It is quite likely that a subordinate's perception of their supervisor's humility may change over time; in turn it would be intriguing to see if a corresponding change is found in supervisor-related commitment.

While little has been discussed (Morris et al., 2005), even from a theoretical perspective, an area of future research that could be valuable from a development standpoint is, whether humility can be developed through training activities. Researchers have noted that an individual through focus on a virtue can find positive growth in that area, or through lack of attention can find the intensity of that virtue to diminish (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), so training and development activities may have a positive effect in this regard. Morris et al. and Bekker (2008), suggest that the most likely way to develop humility in leaders is through examining their own spirituality. As spirituality in the organization is a growing area of intrigue, such a focus may have potential. If this is so, this could be a tremendous area for human resource development professionals to pursue.

Conclusion

The intention of this review has been to illuminate and isolate the value of humility as a value for the organization. The movement toward humility among leaders at all levels of the organization, necessitates relinquishing the leadership archetype of narcissism, pomposity, and self-centeredness (Powers, Nam, Rowatt, & Hill, 2007). When leaders engage in an accurate portrayal of self and acknowledge the capacity of others, rather than focus only on the negative of others and positive in self, organizations will recognize greater capacity to face the challenges of today and tomorrow (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Such awareness of self and others, would be key attributes for discerning the capacity of an organization (Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010) in order to develop or alter strategy. The promotion of such realistic perspectives could potentially mean more realistic projections of earnings, human resource needs, and even human capital in an organization, tremendously altering the way an organization is conducted.

While it is largely intuitive, this research supports the notion that leaders who enact a humble attitude are more likely to find the commitment of their subordinates. In an economic state in which the only constants have seemed to be turmoil and change, supportive work relationships could mean the difference between organizational success and growth, or organizational failure or decline. It is imperative that researchers and practitioners continue to focus in on the importance and impact of humility in organizational studies. As Collins (2001) has noted, the presence of humility in the executive suite could easily be the difference between good and great.

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