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How Well Do You Know Yourself? Examining the Impact of Humility, Gratitude and Forgiveness on Self and Other 360 Ratings

ABSTRACT
 This study examines the role of humility in leaders' self and other 360-degree ratings. We found that leaders low in humility overestimate their abilities, showing significant discrepancies between their self-assessments and others' evaluations. In contrast, leaders high in humility exhibit greater alignment between self and others' ratings, leading to higher performance and growth assessments. Our findings highlight the value of humility in leadership, suggesting it promotes trust, collaboration, and better leadership outcomes. Organizations should integrate humility in leadership development for improved self-awareness and effectiveness.

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How Well Do You Know Yourself? Examining the Impact of Humility on Self and Other

360 Ratings

In recent years, leadership research has shifted to focus on emotional and relational qualities like humility. These traits are not only important for fostering trust, collaboration, and a positive organizational atmosphere (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Fehr et al., 2010), but they also enhance leadership effectiveness and team dynamics (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2023).

Leaders who demonstrate humility tend to acknowledge their limitations, stay open to new ideas, and value the contributions of others, which positively impacts team performance, cohesion, and job satisfaction (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Humility cultivates a collaborative and trusting environment that further enhances leadership effectiveness and employee satisfaction (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2023).

In addition to humility, gratitude and forgiveness play crucial roles in strengthening relationships and creating a culture of mutual respect and accountability (Fehr et al., 2010; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Grateful leaders make team members feel valued, increasing loyalty and effort (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Meanwhile, forgiving leaders promote psychological safety by framing mistakes as learning opportunities, reducing the fear of failure (Cameron & Caza, 2004).

Together, these qualities foster environments where collaboration thrives, team members feel valued, and leaders effectively navigate challenges, all while building trust, open communication, and encouraging innovation (Owens et al., 2013; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

Literature Review

Psychological humility refers to a leader's ability to maintain a balanced view of their strengths and weaknesses, fostering openness to feedback, mutual respect, and stronger team dynamics (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Humble leaders promote learning, collaboration, and essential traits like servant leadership and empathy, enhancing their ability to guide and connect with their teams (Owens et al., 2013).

Leadership humility is often examined using 360-degree feedback tools, where humble leaders tend to exhibit closer alignment between self-assessments and evaluations provided by others, such as peers and subordinates (Owens et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2010). This alignment fosters trust, strengthens relationships, and improves leadership effectiveness (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Chun et al., 2011).

Leaders with low humility often overestimate their abilities, leading to significant discrepancies between their self-ratings and the evaluations of others (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992). Misalignment between how a leader views themselves and how others see them can cause team members to perceive the leader as disconnected or overly confident, undermining team cohesion and eroding trust (Braddy et al., 2013).

Gratitude and forgiveness have been shown to improve leadership by fostering psychological safety and positive team dynamics (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Dutton et al., 2006). Grateful leaders acknowledge the efforts of their team members, fostering mutual respect and loyalty (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Leaders who practice forgiveness create environments where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth, thereby promoting trust and cooperation within teams (Fehr et al., 2010).

The purpose of the present study is to examine the potential relationship between humility and self-assessments and others' evaluations using 360-degree feedback. Specifically, it explores whether leaders high in humility provide more accurate self-assessments that align with others' ratings and how humility impacts leadership performance and growth. Additionally, we examine how different levels of humility impact performance assessments, potentially offering insights into humility's role in leadership development. We hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1. Those who are low in humility will rate themselves higher than others on ratings of general leadership competencies

Hypothesis 2. Those who are high in humility will have similar self-ratings to others ratings of them on general leadership competencies

Hypothesis 3. Leaders with high humility will be rated as having higher performance than those who have low humility

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 142 leaders in a variety of different industries at the director and executive level. Of these participants, 74% were male and 26% were female. In addition, 9% of the sample were Asian, 2% African American, 3% Hispanic, 2% Other, and 84% were White. As this was a 360 assessment, each participant was asked to identify other raters who had observed them at work frequently. Other raters included the participant's supervisors, direct reports, peers, and other raters who knew the participant's work well. The total number of other raters per participant ranged from 3 to 15.

Measures

The scales for this study were taken from a 360 assessment of leadership. These consists of 12 competencies that cover a wide range of important leadership competencies. The number of items for each of these scales ranged from 2 to 6 items, with 11 of the 12 competency scales having

at least 4 items. All competency items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale that asked raters to rate the extent to which they had observed the participant exhibiting the specific behavior. In addition, 3 one-item scales were used to evaluate Performance and Growth. These items were: *How would you rate this individual's overall performance during the past year* (Performance), *How likely is this individual to grow and develop as a leader* (Growth). The performance item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale with *Significantly Above Average* as the high point and *Below Average* as the low point. The Growth item was a 5-point scale with *Very Top Leader* as the high point and *Front-Line Leader* as the low point. In total, there were 63 items. Both the participant and raters identified by the participant rated these items.

As we use both self and other ratings in our study, and the differences between them, we will report the reliability of these scales for both self and other ratings. For the other-ratings of competencies, reliability was considered acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.64-0.88. For self-ratings, reliability was lower, but considering it was self-ratings it was also considered acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.49-0.79.

Self-Other Agreement

To calculate self-other agreement, we used the difference between other and self ratings for each competency, such that the average other rating of a competency was subtracted by the self-rating. This method is similar to the approach used by others to calculate self-other agreement (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Baird, 1977). Using this method, values closer to 0 were considered to have mover self-other agreement. Negative values indicate the participant tended to rate themselves higher than others rated them and positive indicate the participant tended to rate themselves lower than others rated them.

Low, Middle, and High Humility

Three of the leadership competencies evaluated in the 360 assessments were humility, gratitude and forgiveness. An exploratory factor analysis of the relevant items for these competencies found only one explainable factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1. Therefore, given this analysis and the conceptual similarity between the competencies of humility, gratitude, and forgiveness, it was considered reasonable to combine these items into a single "Humility" scale. There were 6 total items in this scale. Example items from the humility scale included *Represents own contributions accurately* and *Acknowledges and takes responsibility for own mistakes.* The Cronbach's alpha for the humility scale was 0.84. To divide participants into low, middle, and high humility groups for the analysis, we took the average rating of humility from other raters for each participant. Then we calculated a percentile rank value for each participant on humility. Those who were in the 33rd percentile or lower were categorized as the "low humility" group, those who were above the 66th percentile were categorized as the "high humility" group, and everyone else was in the "middle humility" group.

Results

We conducted a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to examine differences in leadership competency self-other rating gaps (i.e., difference scores) based on levels of humility, as assessed by others' ratings of Humility, Gratitude, and Forgiveness. Participants were categorized into three groups: Low humility, Middle humility, and High humility, based on their other ratings of humility. We then used the humility groups as the independent variable and various leadership competency self-other difference scores as the dependent variables. ANOVAs were also run with humility groups as the independent variable and Performance and Growth items as the dependent variable. Means and Standard Deviations were calculated for each group, Low, Middle, and High Humility. See Table 1 in the Appendix for results.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that individuals low in humility would rate themselves higher on general leadership competencies compared to others' ratings. The ANOVA results indicated significant group differences in all but two of the competencies. Specifically, participants in the low humility group showed negative differences (suggesting they tended to rate themselves as higher in the competency than others' rated them) in all competencies, including Personal Integrity (M = -0.353, SD = 0.446), Courage (M = -0.346, SD = 0.491), and Commitment to Stakeholders (M = -0.329, SD = 0.509). Only the Perseverance and Commitment to Excellence competencies showed non-significant differences across groups, meaning the difference between self and other ratings was relatively stable across groups. Tukey's post-hoc test was run to examine the interactions between groups. In all ANOVAs with significant differences, the difference between the low and high humility groups were significant.

To further test this hypothesis, a series of one sample t-tests were run for the low humility group for all the competency differences, where mu=0. This was done to see if there was a significant difference between the mean difference score and 0, where 0 would indicate there is no difference between self and other ratings on the competency. Results (See Table 2) showed that the mean difference scores were significantly different than 0 in all but one competency, Influence (p=0.05). These results lend further support to Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that individuals high in humility would have more aligned self-other ratings (differences closer to 0). To test this hypothesis, a series of one sample t-tests were run for the high humility group for all the competency differences, where mu=0. Results for these t-tests are in Table 3. For the high humility group, difference scores were significantly different than 0 for 5 competencies, suggesting the self-other ratings were substantially different for these competencies. For the other 7 competencies, there was no significant difference, lending support

to the hypothesis that those high in humility would have similar self-other ratings in those competencies. In addition, we ran the same series of one sample t-tests for the middle humility group, in order to compare to the mean difference in the high humility group. Results for these t-tests are in Table 4. The mean difference for the high humility group was higher than the 95% confidence interval for the middle humility group in 10 of the 12 competencies, suggesting that the high humility group was significantly higher than the middle humility group. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that leaders with higher humility would be rated as having higher performance by others compared to those with lower humility. An ANOVA was run with the humility group as the IV and the performance item as the DV. In addition, the item for growth was used as a DV in subsequent ANOVAs (See Table 1 for results). There were significant differences across humility groups for all three, performance and growth. To further examine the interactions between the groups, Tukey's post-hoc test was run. Results showed those participants who were in the high humility group had significantly higher ratings than all other groups in Performance and Growth. Thus the results supported Hypothesis 3.

In summary, the results supported Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3, indicating that those with low humility tend to overestimate their competencies relative to others, while those with high humility exhibit higher performance. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported, as the high humility group differences were not significantly different in 7 of the 12 competencies.

Discussion

The study provides key insights into how humility influences leaders' self-assessments compared to evaluations from others, as measured through 360-degree feedback. The findings suggest that leaders low in humility consistently rated themselves higher than others did,

providing evidence in support of Hypothesis 1. This overestimation, especially in areas like personal integrity, courage, and commitment to stakeholders, indicates a tendency among low-humility leaders to inflate their self-perceptions. This gap between self-assessment and external evaluations may stem from overconfidence, self-protective biases, or a lack of openness to critical feedback (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

Leaders high in humility generally showed closer alignment between their self-ratings and others' evaluations. However, the partial support for Hypothesis 2 suggests that even humble leaders may sometimes misjudge their abilities, possibly due to modesty or the inherent challenge of objective self-assessment (Nielsen et al., 2010). Some humble leaders might undervalue their strengths, resulting in slight discrepancies with others' positive evaluations. Despite this, high-humility leaders received higher ratings for both performance and growth compared to their low-humility counterparts, supporting Hypothesis 3. Humility fosters openness to feedback, collaboration, and trust, which directly enhances leadership performance and team outcomes (Owens & Hekman, 2012). High-humility leaders are seen as approachable and willing to learn, positively impacting team dynamics and improving organizational performance (Judge et al., 2009).

The findings highlight the importance of considering humility when interpreting 360-degree feedback. Leaders with lower humility often overestimate their abilities, resulting in discrepancies between their self-ratings and others' evaluations (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992). If these gaps are not recognized, development efforts may become misguided. Thus, organizations should incorporate humility as a key factor in leadership assessment and development through 360-degree feedback. Doing so should enable more accurate interpretations

of self-assessments and offer a clearer understanding of how humility influences a leader's effectiveness in the eyes of their team members (Owens et al., 2013; Braddy et al., 2013).

In addition, these findings provide more information on the level of trust that should be given to self-ratings of competencies. For those low in humility, results would suggest that their own perception of their performance in these competencies is significantly different that what others would rate them. Even for those high in humility, there was a general was some evidence of a disconnect between self and other ratings. These findings would suggest exercising caution when interpreting self-ratings of competencies.

Limitations & Future Research Directions

This study, while offering valuable insights into the relationship between humility and leadership evaluations, has several limitations. First, the sample was composed primarily of leaders at the director and executive levels, which may not fully represent leadership behaviors across all organizational levels. The overrepresentation of male leaders (74%) also limits the generalizability of the findings to female leaders or those from more diverse backgrounds. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents conclusions about causality between humility and leadership outcomes, limiting the ability to assess long-term impacts of humility on leadership effectiveness.

Future studies should aim to address these limitations by exploring the role of humility in leadership across different organizational levels and industries. Expanding the diversity of the sample, particularly in terms of gender, cultural background, and industry, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how humility affects ratings of leadership behaviors in various contexts. Additionally, future research could examine how humility interacts with other leadership traits, such as emotional intelligence or resilience, to further refine leadership

development programs. Finally, studies should explore how humility at the leadership level influences broader team outcomes, such as innovation, employee well-being, and organizational culture, offering deeper insights into its potential as a driver of overall organizational success.

Conclusion

Leaders who exhibit high humility are more likely to have self-assessments that align with others' perceptions, which fosters trust, collaboration, and higher team performance (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2023). The results highlight the importance of cultivating humility in leadership as a way to enhance organizational success. Future leadership training programs should place a greater emphasis on developing traits like humility, gratitude, and forgiveness, as these emotional and relational qualities are key drivers of effective leadership and positive organizational outcomes (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). By integrating these traits into leadership development, organizations can promote a culture of openness, trust, and continuous growth.

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Appendix

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Differences in Self-Other Ratings Across Humility Groups

Measure	Low Humility		Mid Humility		High Humility		F-statistic	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Growth	4.045	0.411	4.221	0.351	4.461	0.249	18.58***	0.211
Performance	3.770	0.378	3.976	0.235	4.186	0.371	18.55***	0.211
Courage	-0.346	0.491	-0.100	0.397	0.093	0.459	11.54***	0.142
Commitment to Stakeholders	-0.329	0.509	-0.210	0.403	0.070	0.465	9.746***	0.123
Critical Thinking	-0.212	0.594	-0.005	0.538	0.280	0.533	9.733***	0.123
Humility	-0.303	0.519	-0.131	0.471	0.097	0.448	8.64***	0.111
Vision	-0.188	0.481	0.021	0.499	0.234	0.525	8.61***	0.11
Capacity to Know	-0.198	0.644	0.090	0.628	0.269	0.624	6.738***	0.088
Personal Integrity	-0.353	0.446	-0.272	0.408	-0.086	0.437	4.96***	0.067
Managing Relationships	-0.210	0.507	-0.068	0.481	0.097	0.533	4.462**	0.06
Influence	-0.172	0.583	-0.050	0.473	0.129	0.555	3.85**	0.052
Personal Development	-0.287	0.533	-0.297	0.561	-0.061	0.478	3.201**	0.044
Perseverance	-0.767	0.522	-0.837	0.476	-0.659	0.568	1.399	0.02
Commitment to Excellence	-2.230	0.447	-2.128	0.485	-2.124	0.576	0.654	0.009

$^{**}p < .05$, $^{***}p < .01$, N= 142

Table 2. One Sample T-Test for the Low Humility Group

Dependent Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Critical Thinking Difference	-2.42	45	0.02*	-0.21	-0.39	-0.04
Vision Difference	-2.65	45	0.01*	-0.19	-0.33	-0.05
Influence Difference	-2.00	45	0.05	-0.17	-0.35	0.00
Capacity to Know Difference	-2.09	45	0.04*	-0.20	-0.39	-0.01
Perseverance Difference	-9.97	45	<0.001*	-0.77	-0.92	-0.61
Commitment to Excellence Difference	-33.86	45	<0.001*	-2.23	-2.36	-2.10
Managing Relationships Difference	-2.81	45	0.01*	-0.21	-0.36	-0.06
Personal Development Difference	-3.65	45	<0.001*	-0.29	-0.44	-0.13
Commitment to Stakeholders Difference	-4.38	45	<0.001*	-0.33	-0.48	-0.18
Integrity Difference	-5.36	45	<0.001*	-0.35	-0.49	-0.22
Courage Difference	-4.77	45	<0.001*	-0.35	-0.49	-0.20
Humility Difference	-3.96	45	<0.001*	-0.30	-0.46	-0.15

Notes: *significant difference. One sample t-test where the null hypothesis=0. N=46

Table 3. One Sample T-Test for the High Humility Group

Dependent Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Critical Thinking Difference	3.79	51	<0.01*	0.28	0.13	0.43
Vision Difference	3.21	51	<0.01*	0.23	0.09	0.38
Influence Difference	1.67	51	0.10	0.13	-0.03	0.28
Capacity to Know Difference	3.11	51	<0.01*	0.27	0.10	0.44
Perseverance Difference	-8.36	51	<0.01*	-0.66	-0.82	-0.50
Commitment to Excellence Difference	-26.58	51	<0.01*	-2.12	-2.28	-1.96
Managing Relationships Difference	1.31	51	0.20	0.10	-0.05	0.25
Personal Development Difference	-0.92	51	0.36	-0.06	-0.19	0.07
Commitment to Stakeholders Difference	1.09	51	0.28	0.07	-0.06	0.20
Integrity Difference	-1.43	51	0.16	-0.09	-0.21	0.04
Courage Difference	1.47	51	0.15	0.09	-0.03	0.22
Humility Difference	1.56	51	0.12	0.10	-0.03	0.22

Notes: *significant difference. One sample t-test where the null hypothesis=0. N=52

Table 4. One Sample T-Test for the Middle Humility Group

Dependent Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Critical Thinking Difference	-0.06	43	0.95	-0.01	-0.17	0.16
Vision Difference	0.28	43	0.78	0.02	-0.13	0.17
Influence Difference	-0.7	43	0.49	-0.05	-0.19	0.09
Capacity to Know Difference	0.95	43	0.35	0.09	-0.10	0.28
Perseverance Difference	-11.65	43	<0.01*	-0.84	-0.98	-0.69
Commitment to Excellence Difference	-29.10	43	<0.01*	-2.13	-2.28	-1.98
Managing Relationships Difference	-0.95	43	0.35	-0.07	-0.21	0.08
Personal Development Difference	-3.51	43	<0.01*	-0.30	-0.47	-0.13
Commitment to Stakeholders Difference	-3.46	43	<0.01*	-0.21	-0.33	-0.09
Integrity Difference	-4.43	43	<0.01*	-0.27	-0.40	-0.15
Courage Difference	-1.67	43	0.10	-0.10	-0.22	0.02
Humility Difference	-1.85	43	0.07	-0.13	-0.27	0.01

Notes: *significant difference. One sample t-test where the null hypothesis=0. N=44