

The Effect Of Humble Leader Behavior, Leader Expertise, And Organizational Identification On Employee Turnover Intention


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ABSTRACT

As a bottom-up leadership style, humble leadership has attracted increasing attention from scholars in recent years. But its effectiveness and mechanism still lack rigorous empirical study. In this study, we investigate the mechanism and boundary condition by which humble leader behavior exerts influence on followers' turnover intention. Two-wave data collected from 249 scientific and technological personnel in China supported our hypothesized model. We found that humble leader behavior is significantly negatively related to follower turnover intention. The relationship is further partially mediated by organizational identification, and moderated by leader expertise. Implications for theory, practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Humble Leader Behavior; Turnover Intention; Organizational Identification; Leader Expertise

INTRODUCTION

 Employees' willingness, intentions, and actions to quit from the current work bring about extraordinary expenditure and psychological price for organizations and individuals (Glebbeek, 2004). Being deficient in job satisfaction and organizational commitment is perceived as two main predictors of employee turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). How to promote employees' positive cognition and emotion toward organization is thus becoming a vital task for managers in corporations. Indeed, the leadership in team is irrefutable a promoting or inhibiting force in followers' undesired attitudes and behaviors, due to the direct supervisors' role in directing and evaluating followers' work, facilitating or impeding their access to resources and information, and in other ways of emotional and working touch (Amsbile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013). In particular, leadership behaviors that are humble, openness and subordinate-oriented are more likely to encourage trustful relationships between leaders and subordinates (Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010), subsequently inspire followers' positive and proactive behaviors, along with decreased turnover intention (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013).

Leader, in previous research, usually be referred to as idol, hero or omniscient *demi-god* (Morris, Brotheridge, & Urhanski, 2005). However, as organizational environment becoming more uncertain and unpredictable, it becomes increasingly difficult for leaders to "figure it all out at the top" (Senge, 1990). Thus, a humble approach is appealed in leadership process and high degree of humility is requested in leader's personal trait (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004; Morris et al., 2005). Humble leaders, in contrary to other leadership styles, tend to view themselves more objectively, others more appreciatively, and new information or ideas more openly (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Morris, et al., 2005; Owens & Hekman, 2012). These behavioral characteristics suggest that humble leaders lay emphasis on followers' and themselves' growth and development, and allow followers' psychological freedom, and it is thus expected that subordinates of humble leaders are less likely have the intention to quit.

Despite the ever-increasing attention from scholars, most research still focuses on theoretical exploration of the efficiency of humble leadership (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2010). Among the few empirical studies, research on its mechanism and boundary condition is surprisingly scant (Oc, Bashshur, Daniels, Greguras, & Diefendorff, 2015). Based on this, we attempt to explore the explanatory mechanism and contingency of the relationship between humble leadership behavior and follower turnover intention. We suggest that organizational identification could interpret the psychological process in humble leadership approach. From the perspective of intrinsic motivation theory, organizational identification is recognized as a critical premise of employee retention (Payne & Huffman, 2005). In response, we theoretically discuss how organizational identification transfer the effect of humble leader behavior on followers' turnover intention, and verify, on the other hand, the mediating role empirically. Besides leaders' behavior, the perception of leader competence also exerts pivotal impact on followers' reactions (Darioly, 2010; Mumford et al., 2000). Humble behaviors expressed by expert leader are usually viewed as admired virtue, yet by non-specialist are viewed as weakness or coward (Owens & Hekman, 2012). In this regard, followers' reaction to humble leader behavior is particularly shaped by the degree of leader's professional ability. We thus predict in this research that leader expertise moderates the relationship of humble leader behavior and followers' turnover intention, and postulate that humble leader behavior integrated with high leader expertise threaten more to followers' turnover intention.

In conclusion, we set out to explore the relationship of humble leader behavior and followers' turnover intention. The present research contributes to humble leadership literature by (1) broadening our existing knowledge of humble leadership theory, (2) verifying the mediating role of organizational identification in humble leadership approach, (3) verifying the moderating role of leader expertise in humble leadership approach.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Humble Leader Behavior

Humility, in Western culture, originated from the Latin word *humus* or *humi*, literally means “on the ground” or “earth” (Owens & Hekman, 2012), while in Eastern culture means “modesty, and not conceited”. Thus for both culture combined, people with humility usually take the initiative to lower their status, do things down-to-earth, and also view themselves and others in a bottom-up approach. In fact, academic research on humility derived from the perspective of positive psychology, regarding humility as a stable and enduring human trait (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Morris, et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2010). As Nielsen et al (2010) stated, true humility is “a desirable personal quality reflecting the willingness to understand the self (identities, strengths, limitations), combined with perspective in the self's relationship with others”. Yet some scholars, in response to the international recommendation that management study should return to management practice, turn to humble leader behavior which is expressed in the interaction of leaders and their subordinates (Owens, 2009; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Owens et al., 2013). Owens & Hekman (2012) identified three distinct features in humble leader behavior: (a) admitting mistakes and limitations; (b) spotlighting follower strengths and contributions; (c) modeling teachability.

There are some intriguing evidences that humble leader behavior relates to organization and individual outcomes. In organizational level, Ou et al (2014) found that humility among CEOs is connected to the integration of the top management team. Besides, leader humility was shown to enables the fluency of organizational operation, as well as moves continual micro-change in organizing (Owens & Hekman, 2012). In individual level, humble leader behavior has been shown to positively impact subordinate's attitudes and behaviors, such as encouraging follower engagement and psychological freedom (Owens & Hekman, 2012), facilitating follower self-efficacy, motivation, identification and trust in leader through socialized charismatic leader behavior (Nielsen et al., 2010), and promoting employee retention as mediated by job satisfaction (Owens et al., 2013). Thus, we expect that followers who perceived leaders' humble behavior are less likely to generate turnover intention.

Humble Leader Behavior and Followers' Turnover Intention

Turnover intention, described the psychological tendency to quit from the current organization, is a crucial predictor for actual turnover behavior (Shore & Martin, 1989). It is a general reflection of job dissatisfaction, intention to quit,

preference for a new job and the possibility to get one (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingworth, 1978). The immediate supervisor is perhaps one of the most influential factors in one's work life, influencing subordinates' job performance, attitudes and behaviors (Perry, Witt, & Penney, 2010). Indeed, leadership behavior has been shown to be a powerful predictor of employee turnover intention (Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013; Wells & Pwachey, 2011). In particular, leaders who acknowledge faults and limitations in public are deemed to empathize with others easier, which eliminate followers' concern of exposing themselves in inexperience and mistakes (Weick, 2001). In addition, leaders who recognize followers' potential advantage and strengths and usher them in the most suitable projects are most likely to retain their followers (Graen, Liden & Hoel, 1982). Further, leaders who show openness are more likely to listen to and adopt followers' voice, even for ideas that opposed to him. Previous study has shown that participating in organizational decisions can promote followers' organizational identification, which in turn reduce their turnover intention (Mitchell et al., 2001). Thus, we posit:

Hypothesis 1: Humble leader behavior is negatively related to followers' turnover intention.

The Mediating Role of Organizational Identification

Organizational identification has been developed quite sufficient in Organizational Behavior field, despite the rich definitions, most of them imply the congruence of individual and organization. Specifically list, that is "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to" the organization, the organizational membership linked with one's self-concept, and the consensus of individual and organizational values (Tajfel, 1978; Ashforth & Meal, 1989; Riketta, 2005). As subordinate of humble leader, continual growth and progress promote individual's organizational identification, which in turn positively affect one's attitude and behavior. This may interpret the mechanism of how humble leader behavior inhibit follower's turnover intention. Thus, the mediating mechanism is theorized and hypothesized through two steps: the effect of humble leader behavior on one's organizational identification, and the effect of organizational identification on one's turnover intention.

Humble leader behavior may have positive effect on followers' organizational identification by enhancing followers' membership and their internalization of organizational goals and values (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Based on emotional contagion mechanism (Barsade, 2002), leader's positive emotions have direct influence on followers', which leads to the emotional convergence (Bono & Ilies, 2006). Humble leader's loyalty and commitment to the organization are contagiously spread to his or her followers, encouraging followers to identify with their memberships. Besides, the way humble leader treat his or her subordinate is likely to be imitated by followers and treat each other like that, which promote authentic, trustful relationship among organization members. Taking another perspective, leader with humility always draw followers' attention to organizational goals and values, rather than pursue selves' reputation (Reave, 2005). Collins (2001) mentioned characteristics of humble leader: "they showed the most plaudits to the merits of the corporate or other senior executives; whereas reticent when talking about themselves'." Such behaviors spotlight organization strengths. Organization members later grant more faith in the significance and reliability of organization goals and values, and generate more psychological attachment and sense of belonging toward the organization. In fact, previous studies have shown evidence that humble leader behavior positively affect follower's developmental organizational identification (Dutton et al., 2010; Qu et al., 2013).

Organizational identification has strong influence on one's working attitudes, behaviors, and motivations, considering that individual's organizational membership closely linked to the self-concept (Riketta, 2005; Ashforth et al., 2008). Employees with high organizational identification are willing to adopt converging goals and involve in extra-role behavior in order to achieve collective performance. Riketta's (2005) meta-analysis showed that organizational identification has relatively high correlation with job involvement, in-role and extra-role performance. It thus seems likely that employees with high organizational identification are motivated to generate more emotional attachment and more likely to remain in the organization. Abrams, Ando and Hinkle's (1998) research showed the negative correlation between organizational identification and turnover intention. Bamber and Iyer (2002) further verified the same relationship through reducing organizational-professional conflict. In fact, turnover is easily occur unless organizational goals and values are adopted and shared by employee (Payne & Huffman, 2005).

As stated above, humble leader behavior positively affects followers' organizational identification (Qu et al., 2013), and followers are less likely to quit if identified with their organizations (Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013). In this sense, organizational identification transmit the effect of humble leader behavior on turnover intention. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Humble leader behavior is positively related to followers' organizational identification.

Hypothesis 3: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between humble leader behavior and followers' turnover intention.

The Moderating Role of Leader Expertise

Leader competence in organizational context generally contains task-competence and social-competence (Darioly et al., 2011), whereas the present study is concerned with the task-competence perceived by subordinate, namely leader expertise. Leaders, severed as experts, usually have more knowledge and skills about a given domain than novices and are able to organize their knowledge in more meaningful ways (Hunter, Tate, Dzieweczynski, & Bedell-Avers, 2011). When it comes to problem-solving, leaders are required to have the ability to identify the problem, comprehend it, define it, and guide followers to solve it (Mumford, Friedrich, Caughron, & Byrne, 2007). Hence, leader expertise is critical in effective problem-solving and decision making (Sternberg, 2003; Goodall & Pogrebna, 2014). Coincidentally, humble leader devote to enhance follower's development and growth, which could be realized when humble leader is perceived as an expert leader, and has the ability to provide effective assistance and guidance for followers when they are in difficulty. Leader's willingness and capability of promoting followers' development journeys enhance followers' commitment, dedication and retention in the organization.

Furthermore, humility and expertise are viewed as two key dimensions of professional spirit in most business context (Owens & Hekman, 2012), for example medical care personnel (Butler et al., 2011), and lawyer and judge (Nava, 2010). The effectiveness of humble leader behavior is greatly reduced if the leader is perceived as non-expert. Especially when acknowledging faults and limitations, a humble leader may be mocked as cowardice, and lose reputations and followers' confidence in leader and organization, which impact organizational productivity and performance, resulting in follower's turnover intention (Price & Garland, 1981). In contrast, if the leader is perceived as professional and specialized, followers will cherish leader's humble behavior, for example, show gratitude to leader's support, and appreciate leader's compliment. In this case, followers of humble leader are willing to engage in more team work and have more satisfaction, instead of willing to quit, when perceiving the leader is expert and professional. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: Leader expertise moderates the relationship between humble leader behavior and followers' turnover intention. This negative relationship will be stronger under condition of higher rather than lower leader expertise.

METHODS

Sample and Procedure

In order to test hypotheses, 350 knowledge workers were solicited to participate in this research. Participants consisted of R&D personnel, technical support representatives and project leaders of IT companies and high-technology industries in the Southeast China. Data collection was separated into two time sessions to reduce common method bias as mentioned by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff (2003). During the first wave of data collection, participants were given a survey that contained measures of their perceived sense of humble leader behavior and leader expertise. We received 312 completed surveys (89%). Approximately three weeks later, participants who completed the Time 1 survey were asked to report their organizational identification and turnover intention. After matching and filtrating, 249 samples left with efficient and complete data at both Time 1 and Time 2 (80%).

In the sample, there were 147 males and 102 females. Among them, (1) 23.3% were less than 25, 73.5% were between 25 and 35. (2) 70.7% were unmarried, 29.3% married. (3) 48% had bachelor's degree, 45% masters and 7%

doctors. (4) 46% working in the current organization less than two years, 42% were between three to five years, 10% were between five to ten years and 1% longer. (5) 15.3% were managers, 45.8% were research and development personnel, 32.1% were technical supporter. The demographic generally confirm to the features of young generation of scientific and technological personnel in China.

Measures

In this study, all items were scored on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Humble leader behavior was measured with Owens et al's (2013) nine-item scale. Example items include: "This person actively seeks feedback, even if it is critical"; "This person is willing to learn from others." The humble leader behavior instrument yielded an adequate internal reliability ($\alpha=0.93$).

Leader expertise was measured with Podsakoff, Todor & Schuler's (1983) three-item instrument. Example item is "Nobody knows the jobs better in my department than my supervisor". The leader expertise instrument yielded an adequate internal reliability ($\alpha=0.86$).

Organizational identification was measured with a six-item instrument developed by Meal & Ashforth (1992). Example items include: "When I talk about my organization, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'"; "When someone criticizes the organization, it feels like a personal insult". The organizational identification scale yielded an adequate internal reliability ($\alpha=0.88$).

Turnover intention was measured with a four-item instrument developed by Farh, Tsui, Xin, and Cheng (1998). There were three positive items, such as "I often think of quitting my present job", and one negative item "I am planning long-term development in this company". The turnover intention scale yielded an adequate internal reliability ($\alpha=0.78$).

According to previous studies, we controlled some demographic variables in regression analyses, including age, gender, marital status, education degree, tenure in current organization and position type.

RESULTS

Measurement Issues

We first conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using AMOS software and maximum likelihood technique to test the distinctiveness of the study constructs. Results showed that the four-factor measurement model (humble leader behavior, leaders expertise, organizational identification, turnover intention) fits the data quite well ($\chi^2=203.357$, $df=98$, $GFI=.954$, $IFI=.988$, $CFI=.987$, $RMSEA=.053$). We further tested four alternative models through combining highly correlated factors and compared them with the proposed model. As shown in Table 1, all the alternative models fitted the data significantly worse than the hypothesized model, suggesting that our hypothesized model was most appropriate for the factor structure.

We also fitted a common method model (bottom part of Table 1) with all indicators from Time 1 loading on a common method factor and all indicators from Time 2 loading on another to deal with the potential common method bias. This is similar to Harman 1 factor test except given two separated time points. The common method model also fitted the data well ($\chi^2=207.225$, $df=97$, $GFI=.934$, $IFI=.966$, $CFI=.966$, $RMSEA=.057$). However, the chi-square test of model fit comparison suggested that the hypothesized model fits the data much better ($\Delta\chi^2=3.868$, $\Delta df=1$, $p<.01$). Hence, the procedures do not eliminate concern of common method bias but suggest it does not appear to play a significant role in our data.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Measurement Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized four-factor model	203.357	98	2.075	.954	.988	.987	.053
Three-factor model A <i>Humble leader behavior and organizational identification were combined into one factor</i>	471.32	101	4.67	.751	.838	.837	.122
Three-factor model B <i>Humble leader behavior and leader expertise were combined into one factor</i>	276.08	101	2.73	.873	.924	.923	.084
Two-factor model <i>Humble leader behavior, leader expertise and organizational identification were combined into one factor</i>	542.64	103	5.27	.728	.808	.807	.132
One-factor model	585.18	104	5.63	.715	.790	.788	.137
Common method factor model	207.225	97	2.136	.934	.966	.966	.057

Note: GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables. As expected, humble leader behavior was positively related to organizational identification ($r=.58, p<.01$), and negatively related to turnover intention ($r=-.68, p<.01$). In addition, organizational identification ($r=-.50, p<.01$) and leader expertise ($r=-.69, p<.01$) were negatively related to turnover intention. These results provided preliminary support to our hypotheses.

Table 2. Mean, Reliability, Standard Deviation, and Correlation

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	1.80	0.48	-									
2. Gender	1.41	0.49	-.18	-								
3. Marriage	1.29	0.46	.37	-.05	-							
4. Education	2.59	0.61	-.02	-.05	-.17**	-						
5. Tenure	1.67	0.72	.29	-.06	.22**	-.07	-					
6. Position	2.56	1.10	-.26	.22**	-.05	-.02	-.14*	-				
7. Humble leader behavior	3.63	0.78	.07	.01	-.06	.13*	-.08	-.08	(.93)			
8. Leader expertise	3.46	0.89	.11	-.05	-.02	.14	-.04	-.08	.74**	(.85)		
9. Organizational identification	3.66	0.73	.06	-.06	-.09	.08*	-.09	-.05	.58**	.54**	(.87)	
10. Turnover intention	2.65	0.77	-.09	-.00	-.04	-.13*	.07	.10	-.68**	-.69**	-.50**	(.78)

Note: N=249. * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$. two-tailed. Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients are reported in diagonal.

Hypothesis Testing

Relied on the most extensive work by Baron & Kenny (1986), we used SPSS 20.0 to test the simple mediation and moderation models. We further bootstrapped the confidence intervals to access whether organizational identification mediated the indirect effect (Preacher, & Hayes, 2004) of humble leader behavior and followers' turnover intention, and conducted a simple slope test to access whether leader expertise moderated the relationship. The mediating and moderating model regression tests are reported in Table 3.

As shown there and consistent with Hypothesis 1, Model 4 showed that humble leader behavior was negatively related to followers' turnover intention ($\beta=-.65, p<.001$). This block of variables accounted for 47% of the variance in turnover intention. Additionally, consistent with Hypothesis 2, Model 2 showed that humble leader behavior was positively related to organizational identification ($\beta=.54, p<.001$). Thus, the first two conditions of mediation hypothesis were met. To examine the third condition of the mediation, we regressed turnover intention on organizational identification with the effect of humble leader behavior controlled (Model 5). The results supported our Hypothesis 3 because organizational identification remained negatively related to turnover intention ($\beta=-.19, p<.01$), while the negative effect of humble leader behavior on turnover intention reduced ($\beta=.55, p<.001$), thus

indicating a partial mediation effect. The indirect effect of humble leader behavior on turnover intention via organizational identification was estimated as -.0965 with the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. Since the confidence interval (-.179 to -.013) did not including zero, the indirect effect was statistically significant ($p < .01$), providing additional support for Hypothesis 3.

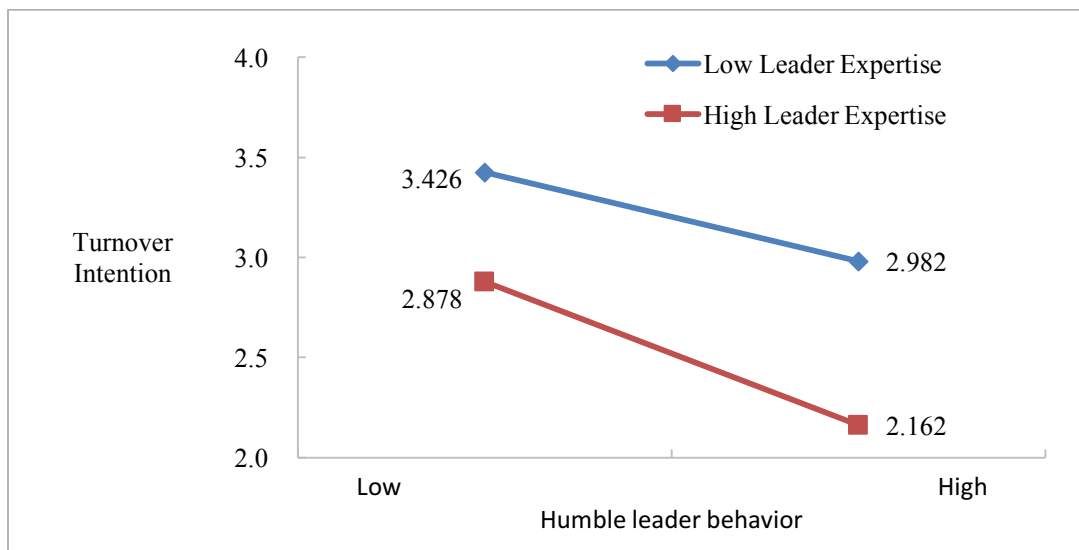
Table 3. The Results of Hypotheses Test

	Organizational Identification		Turnover Intention				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M7	M8
Intercept	3.72***	1.97***	3.20***	5.31***	5.68***	2.86***	2.85***
<i>Control variables</i>							
Age	.17	.06	-.15	-.03	-.01	.01	.03
Gender	-.07	-.11	-.06	-.02	-.04	-.05	-.04
Marriage	-.16	-.10	-.07	-.15	-.16	-.14	-.13
Education	.07	-.01	-.17	-.07	-.07	-.05	-.04
Tenure	-.10	-.04	.11	.04	.03	.04	.04
Position	-.02	-.01	.06	.03	.03	.03	.03
<i>Independent</i>							
Humble Leader behavior		.54***		-.65***	-.55***	-.34***	-.37***
<i>Mediator</i>							
Organizational identification					-.19**		
<i>Moderator</i>							
Leader expertise						-.37***	-.39***
<i>Interaction</i>							
Humble leader behavior × Leader expertise							-.10**
R ²	.03	.35	.04	.47	.49	.55	.57
R ² change	.03	.32	.04	.43	.02	.51	.02
F-statistic	1.37	18.25***	1.82	30.17***	28.57***	36.71***	34.60**

Note: N=249. **p<.01, ***p<.001, two-tailed.

Model 8 of Table 3 shows the results of examining whether leader expertise moderates the negative effect of humble leader behavior on turnover intention. The interaction term of humble leader behavior and leader expertise was significant ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .01$) and explained an additional 2% of the variance in turnover intention. Consistent with our expectation, as shown in Figure 1, the negative relationship of humble leader behavior and turnover intention is relatively stronger for employees who perceived higher leader expertise. The simple slope test further verified that, at high level of leader expertise, humble leader behavior was negatively and significantly related to turnover intention (simple slope = $-.46$, $t = -6.65$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, at low leader expertise, the relationship of humble leader behavior and turnover intention was not significant (simple slope = $-.28$, $t = -4.07$, *n.s.*). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Figure 1. Humble Leader Behavior - Leader Expertise Interaction for Turnover Intention



DISCUSSION

We proposed and found support for a psychological process in which humble leader behavior affects follower turnover intention directly and indirectly through organizational identification. In addition, our results revealed that leader expertise moderates the direct effect of humble leader behavior. The effect of humble leadership behavior on follower turnover intention is much stronger with high leader expertise rather than low. Our findings contribute to the current humble leadership literature in several ways.

Theoretical Implications

First, we advance humble leadership research by constructing and verifying the theoretical model of humble leader behavior and follower’s turnover intention. Humility and leadership were considered as two contradictory terms in the past, because humble leaders usually be misinterpreted as incapable to motivate followers and hardly to gain their reputations (Ou et al., 2014). However, our study shows that there is a significant negative relationship between humble leader behavior and follower turnover intention. This finding demonstrates that humble leader behavior should be considered as an important predictor in follower’s positive work-related outcome. Further, the impact of humble leader behavior on follower turnover intention serves as an important contributor for verifying the efficiency of humble leadership in Chinese context.

Second, our study has contributed to addressing the insufficient attention paid to the explanatory mechanisms linking humble leader behavior to follower outcomes. Drawing from the perspective of intrinsic psychological motivation, we found that organizational identification acts as important mediating mechanism between humble leader behavior and follower turnover intention. Identifying with the organization is an important contributor to follow outcome, especially to humble leadership process.

The research also provides a new insight into understanding the boundary conditions on the relationship between humble leader behavior and follower turnover intention. Our findings indicated that leader expertise serves as an important moderator in the negative relationship between humble leader behavior and follower turnover intention. Employees perceived high level of leader expertise, in comparison with low leader expertise, have less turnover intention when exposure to high level of humble leader behavior. Thus, we contribute to the research stream by addressing the important question of when humble leader behavior matters more by identifying leader expertise as an crucial individual difference.

Practical Implications

Our findings provide important managerial implications for practitioners. First, the results suggest that humble leader behavior should be encouraged within organizations because it inhibits followers' turnover intention by promoting their organizational identification. Specifically, leaders with humility are more likely to succeed because "lack of humility has been cited as a key reason leader or their organizations fail" (Nielsen et al., 2010). The inner virtue of humility is thus critical important for effective leadership. However, expressed humility is more operational and easier to cultivate, relative to the stable trait of humility. Our results have verified the efficiency of humble leader behavior in alleviating followers' turnover intention. As noted above, we suggest that whether managers have the virtue of humility or not, they will perform better in motivating followers and achieving better job performance when they lead with humble approach and demonstrate more humble behaviors in their interaction with subordinates.

Furthermore, organizations should put more emphasis on reducing employee's turnover intention considering its costly consequence. The results show that the inhibiting effect of humble leader behavior on follower turnover intention significantly magnified in the context of high leader expertise, which provides us a new insight in dealing with employee turnover intention. Besides leader's behavior, leader expertise that perceived by followers also exerts pivotal impact on follower turnover intention. Thus strong and solid leader expertise should be advocated in organizations. More specifically, professional knowledge and skill could be considered as selection criteria in promotion system, and further developed through leadership training and development program.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study has several limitations that future research should address. First, although the data was collected in two different phases with a three-week span, data were all rated by employees, the potential common method bias could not be removed completely (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Further research could conduct longitudinal researches with data collected from multiple sources.

Second, the generalizability of our findings is limited because it is just based on scientific and technological personnel particularly in southeast China. Despite as a bright contribution, it is still unknown whether the relationships identified here remain unchanged when replicated to other regions or different kind of organizations, as culture factors potentially shaping employee's interpretation of perceived leader behavior. Thus, future researchers are encouraged to investigate the relationship of humble leadership and follower turnover in cross-culture context.

Third, our research was based on individual level, but leadership, in essence, is a multi-level and complicated process. The extension of humble leader behavior to organizational level can help to fully understand the affecting process of humble leadership (Greer, 2013). In addition, the role of different levels of identifications (i.e. social identification, team identification, relational identification) should be taken account in humble leadership process. We believe, therefore, it would be theoretically meaningful for future research to examine the multi-level effects of humble leader behavior.

Finally, we focused only on the interaction of humble leader behavior and leader expertise, but other boundary conditions might be important as well. For example, followers with high power distance will be more sensitive to leader's humble behavior, and subsequently will aris more work engagement (Tang, Long, & Zhou, 2015). Owens & Hekman (2012), as well, recommended several contingencies of humble leader behavior, including perceived sincerity, the presence of extreme threat and time pressure, and organizational culture of learning. Thus, the establishment of humble leader behavior and the contingencies of its influence represent a promising and important future research direction.

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