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## Article

# The bright and dark side of humble leadership for project success: A conservation of resources perspective

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## The bright and dark side of humble leadership for project success: A conservation of resources perspective

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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The bright and dark side of humble leadership for project success: A conservation of resources perspective

Saad Hassan<sup>1\*</sup>, Hira Nasim<sup>1</sup>, Muzammel Shah<sup>1</sup>, Amir Ishaque<sup>1</sup> and Mahin Fiza<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Drawing on conservation of resources theory, this study explores the bright and dark side of humble leadership by examining the mediating role of project commitment and workplace deviance between humble leadership and project success. Data were collected from 315 IT employees followed by partial least square structure equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypotheses. Findings indicate that humble leadership positively effects project success through the mediation of project commitment. However, workplace deviance does not mediate the link between humble leadership and project success. Study contributes to the nascent literature by highlighting humble leadership as an effective leadership style for project success.

**Subjects:** Work & Organizational Psychology; Organizational Communication; Business, Management and Accounting

**Keywords:** humble leadership; workplace deviance; project commitment; project success

## 1. Introduction

One of the most debated topics in the literature of project management is project success. Initially, the project success was assessed as the completion of the project with the pre-stated objectives like predefined schedule, cost and budget; however, it was revealed later that a project can still face failure even if it is done according to predefined time, cost and schedule (Ali & Rasheed, 2020). Over the past few decades, researchers acknowledged the critical quality elements that determine the success of the project (Ahmadabadi & Heravi, 2019; Sandbank et al., 2020; Unterhitzenberger and Bryde, 2018). However, a fundamental flaw in this project management literature is that it does not place enough attention on project managers' leadership behavior and their contribution to the project's success (Takanashi & Lee, 2019). Several researchers contend

## PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Humble leaders provide comfortable environment for creativity, cooperation and mutual respect. They allow their subordinates to freely share fresh ideas and express issues. This leadership style can significantly impacts on the success and performance of any organization. Therefore, current research was conducted to empirically examine the impact of humble leadership on the project success through the mediating role of project commitment and work place deviance behavior of employees. Findings conclude that humble leadership not only has a significant direct impact on project success but also through the mediation of project commitment. Moreover, study results show that workplace deviance does not mediate between humble leadership and project success. Following conservation of resources theory, present research significantly contributes in existing body of knowledge by examining both the positive and negative perspective of humble leadership.

that leadership role of project manager is indispensable pertaining to the success of project (Ali et al., 2020). Moreover, among all well-known factors contributing to project success, leadership is as an important success factor to the performance of the project (Scott-Young et al., 2019; Zaman et al., 2019).

Considering this, recent scholars started to examine the effect of numerous leadership styles (like shared leadership, servant leadership and empowering leadership) on project success (Aga et al., 2016; Hassan & Ul Hassan, 2015; Khattak et al., 2022; Müller et al., 2011). However, humble leadership has attained a greater attention across different organizational settings (Ou et al., 2018; Swain & Korenman, 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Wolfteich et al., 2021). Research of Argandona (2015) has stressed that it is extremely important to study to mechanism that how humble leadership leads to the desired outcomes. Despite the fact that Brière et al. (2015) found out that humility is seen as one of the most crucial quality for project managers, there has been little empirical research on the association among humble leadership and success of the project (Ali et al., 2021).

A plethora of research studies have been conducted to explore different important factors being affected by humble leadership such as, psychological empowerment (Chen et al., 2018), team potency (Liu et al., 2020), workplace spirituality (Naseer et al., 2020), altruism (Mallén et al., 2019), deep acting behavior (Zhou & Li, 2018), goal clarity, team building and innovative work behavior (Ali et al., 2021). Nevertheless, very little emphasis has been given to commitment perspective of sub-ordinates towards the project. Humble leadership is a bottom up leadership approach which is characterized as leaders' self-awareness, appreciation of employees' contributions and efforts, counseling of subordinates, receptive attitude, openness to novel ideas and feedback (Zhou et al., 2021). This leadership style impacts on the psychological states of employees and as result employees can depict loyalty and commitment (Ali et al., 2021). Moreover, most projects accompany unique outcomes, realizing such project goals often calls for unique and novel practices from project participants (Tyssen et al., 2014). Consequently, humble leader can encourage traits that can create a sense of responsibility among employees to accept the project goals & values and commit to its completion.

However, contrary to this study of Mallén et al. (2019) is of the view that negative impact of humble leadership has not been studied empirically. Humility of a leader may lead to negative outcomes as well (Ali et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has also been suggested by many previous scholars to study whether humility of a leader leads to adverse effects such as deviant work place behavior that might have an influence on the project quality and its success (Ali et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2014; Weidman et al., 2018). Therefore, based on the gap in previous literature which requires further research pertaining to humble leadership impact on project success; present research empirically examined the mediating role of employee's project commitment and workplace deviance behavior between the humble leadership and project success. Novelty of the study lies in a fact that it empirically studies positive and negative perspective of humble leadership through mediation of employee's project commitment and workplace deviance.

## 2. Theoretical exposition

The current study empirically considers a theoretical framework depicting a link between humble leadership and project success, with project commitment and workplace deviance serving as a mediating variable. The proposed study is based on the conservation of Resource theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989) which consider leader as a resource. The traits or things people appreciate are usually referred to as a resource (Hobfoll, 2001).

Study of Arnold (2017) discovered that a leader's role can be considered as an example of a resource that assists the firm in the shape of positively growing followers. Moreover, COR theory suggests that the goal of individuals is to develop, preserve and retain the resources (Ahmed et al., 2022). Resources are referred to as an individual's capabilities or traits (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). With these capabilities or traits, a leader helps an organization in the form of follower's growth

that leads to project success. Leaders who are not unethical or servant positively influence on the growth and satisfaction of employees (Jiménez-Estévez et al., 2023; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2021). Similarly, humility tends to be a vital resource for a project manager since it encourages followers to work dedicatedly contributing to project success (Ali et al., 2021).

Additionally, COR theory is a stress theory that talks about implementation and managing of the stress. Theory posits that depletion of resources is more harmful than resource gain (Hobfoll & Hobfoll, 2014). Linking the theory to research model of study, humble leadership might lead to deviant behavior of employees at work place, which is a sign of stress. The project objectives cannot be met due to worker's deviant workplace environment. It might have a negative influence on the quality of the project resulting in failure, which is a source of stress for the leader as well as the organization.

### 3. Literature review

#### 3.1. Humble leadership

Humble leadership is referred to as an interpersonal attribute of a project manager that helps him to communicate with his employees. It has three primary characteristics: a desire to see someone accurately, open to new ideas and feedback, and appreciation of others' strengths (Owens et al., 2013). Moreover, humble leaders also possess a high moral character (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Previous literature has recognized humble leadership as a personal behavior trait of a leader that enables him to assess his subordinates without putting them in a good or bad light, demonstrating that he has a practical, reliable, and non-defensive self-view (Ding et al., 2020). Humble leaders provide a comfortable and welcoming environment for their subordinates to freely express their issues (Liu et al., 2017). Humble leaders are receptive to fresh ideas from their staff and may instill confidence, cooperation, and creativity in their workplace (Rego et al., 2019). Such leaders have a warm and welcoming approach toward their workers and treat them with respect (Jeung & Yoon, 2018). Humble leaders seek advice from their subordinates to eradicate power distance (Walters & Diab, 2016).

#### 3.2. Project success

Meeting project goals within the stipulated scope, cost, and timeframe are referred to as project success (Ahmed et al., 2016). If a project fits the needs of the end-user and is well received by the stakeholders, it is termed a successful one (Ika et al., 2012). Müller and Turner (2010) believe that for a project to succeed, stakeholders' satisfaction and customer approval of the specified budgeted project is critical. According to PMI (2013), there seem to be two aspects to project success: the first is project completion within time, scope, schedule, and budget; the second is stakeholder satisfaction. According to Aga et al. (2016), project success factors are particularly significant for a company since they are not only concerned with customer and stakeholder satisfaction but also give marketing advantages to the firm.

#### 3.3. Project commitment

Project commitment has been derived from organizational commitment. Organizational commitment has been referred to as a relationship between the organization and employees (Xiuxia et al., 2016). Organizational commitment is defined by Becker (1960) as an emotional dependence that is determined by some non-economic elements. In the management context, those individuals who invest in an organization through commitment develop a psychological bond with the firm (Spanuth & Wald, 2017). The commitment develops a sense of belonging among the employees which surpass the constraints of benefit (Morrow et al., 2012).

"Commitment refers to a sense of duty that the individual feels to achieve the project's goals and to the willingness to do what's needed to make the project successful" (McDonough, 2000). Project commitment refers to those employees who are linked to a project realize the goals of the project and their responsibilities. The employees work dedicatedly in order to achieve the goals of

the project (Hoegl et al., 2004; Kline & Peters, 1991). Project commitment can be described by identification, involvement, and devotion. The employees are not only liable for the project work assigned to them but also feel pride in being a part of the project (Zhu et al., 2021).

### **3.4. Workplace deviance**

Deviant workplace behavior of the employees refers to such behavior on the part of the employees which do not meet the standards of the organization and is not acceptable to the organization (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). It comprises activities like destroying the organization's property, coming to the office late, doing illegal activities, not paying heed to the boss's advice, and humiliating the leader (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Ferris et al., 2012). Due to employees' deviant behavior at the workplace, the employees do not fulfill the responsibilities and work assigned to them. Their behavior becomes hostile and they get involved in theft (Chirumbolo, 2015). Workplace deviance comprises individual as well as organizational deviance. A company can suffer severely in terms of cost in case of deviant workplace behavior of employees (Marasi et al., 2018). Past studies have also shown that the cost of work employees' deviant behavior in the United States economy is in Billions of dollars and they have continued to increase since then (Bowling & Gruys, 2010).

### **3.5. Humble leadership and project success**

Leadership traits of a leader have always influenced project productivity and project effectiveness (Podgórska & Pichlak, 2019; Tabassi et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2018). Supportive leaders encourage their subordinates to build relationships with one another and keep an eye out for critical information that will help the project fulfill its goals and succeed (Dust et al., 2018; Gumusluoğlu & İlsev, 2009). Leaders who communicate the project goals to their subordinates may assist them in enhancing their efficiency (Owens & Hekman, 2016). Similarly, many researchers are of the view that performance of the project is affected by the leadership styles of the manager (Chaudhry et al., 2019; Hassan et al., 2017; Turner & Müller, 2005), particularly, leader's humility that enhances the effectiveness of the project (Ali et al., 2020; Brière et al., 2015).

Humble leaders assist their subordinates in reaching their greatest potential, both as a team and as an individual (Argandona, 2015). Humble leaders recognize and try to meet the particular demands of their subordinates (Kesebir, 2014). Humble leadership, which is similar to servant leadership, have a positive correlation with leader-follower social interactions and enhances followers' social interactions and personal social capital (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2021; Zoghbi-Manrique de Lara & Ruiz-Palomino, 2019). Further, humble leaders are able to develop different aspects of teamwork features among their subordinates such as communication between the team, cohesion and resolution of conflicts among the team members (Gonçalves & Brandão, 2017; Ou et al., 2018). Humble leadership grants freedom to their employees and give importance to each member of the team. Because of this freedom, team members consider themselves an important factor for achieving the project success and work with complete dedication to achieve project objectives (Ali et al., 2021). The following hypothesis is proposed based on the literature review:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Humble leadership has a significant and positive impact on project success.

### **3.6. Humble leadership and project commitment**

Leadership style is the epitome of a manager's personality which may influence an employee's psychological condition. Humble leadership is collaborative; the leader is interested in hearing his staff's ideas and putting them into practice (Ou et al., 2014). Employees may feel free and comfortable as a result of such humble and welcoming conduct.

Humble leaders admire their employees' efforts and contributions, and they are prepared to counsel their subordinates on issues they don't understand to increase employees' sense of self-

worth and urge them to do more (Zhou et al., 2021). The leadership style of a leader can have an impact on the psychological states of employees. Because humble leadership is transparent and inclusive, subordinates can feel free and safe (Ali et al., 2021). Humble leaders are open to the feedback and views of their employees. As a result, employees completely contribute their loyalty to the firm (Rhoades et al., 2001) and work with complete commitment.

According to McDonough (2000), among the most critical element that contributes to the project's success is the workers' commitment to the project as a team. Higher management must keep an eye on the leaders' contentment, dedication, and faith in the project and the organization, since these factors are critical to the project's success in highly complicated conditions (Rezvani et al., 2016). Study of Dinc and Nurovic (2016) reported that there is a favorable and strong link between leadership and employee attitude. Moreover, humble leaders generally possess high moral character (Owens & Hekman, 2012) and such moral intangibles generates commitment among employees (Lleo et al., 2023). Additionally, when a manager is humble, he will foster trustworthiness that can be a key for employees to be effective and achieve effectiveness in the group goals (Lleo et al., 2021). Therefore, based on the literature discussed above the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a significant positive effect of humble leadership on project commitment.

### **3.7. Project commitment and project success**

Literature suggests that project success can only be achieved when there is high degree of engagement and communication between team members tied to a project (Yang et al., 2011). Moreover, if project goals are clear and there are some realistic criteria for success, it may aid in earning the confidence of senior management and stakeholder which might lead to project success (Hussein et al., 2015). Effective performance of the employees can be achieved through affective commitment to the project and organization, which is directly linked to the performance of the project (Chen & Francesco, 2003).

Similarly, a dedicated team and leader can enhance employees' knowledge about the objectives of the project, responsibilities, teamwork and problem solving abilities which aids in the success of the project (Aga et al., 2016). Likewise, Gelbard and Carmeli (2009) argued that organizational support is vital for project commitment in completing project successfully. Moreover, an employee's commitment to the project as well as the organization contributes to deliver the project successfully (Dwivedula et al., 2016). A high level of commitment of the employees to the project and organization is necessary to meet the project's objectives leading to project success (Tyssen et al., 2014). Thus, based on the literature mentioned above, following hypothesis is formulated:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a significant positive impact of project commitment on project success.

### **3.8. Mediation of project commitment**

Behavior of leaders develops and motivates commitment of employees towards organization and project, resulting in accomplishment of project within the desired objectives. It has been investigated that leadership style of the leader not only enhances the employees' performance and the efficiency of the project, but it also strengthens the association between the employees and leader (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Turner and Müller (2005) were of the view that project success is influenced by the satisfaction and commitment of team members with the management. Project is a link of commitments so a joint commitment is needed to save a project from getting failed (Culmsee et al., 2012). It has been investigated that job satisfaction level of the employee as well as the commitment is



positively linked by the leadership styles of the leader (Golabdost & Rezaei, 2017). Moreover, commitment of employees towards the project has a positive impact on employee's performance (Fu & Deshpande, 2014).

It is evident that with positive attitude towards project, employee work with full efficiency contributing to the success of the project. Study of Rose (2016) portray that the project's success is dependent on a combination of leadership, commitment and motivation. The commitment of the employee shows whether his performance is good enough to execute the project successfully (Dwivedula et al., 2016). Likewise, Brinkhoff et al. (2015) stated that successful project outcomes would require managers to immediately begin emphasizing the importance of employee commitment towards project and find ways to boost it.

Following hypothesis is formulated for the foregoing discussion:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Project commitment mediates the relationship between humble leadership and project success.

### **3.9. Humble leadership and workplace deviance**

Humility is directly linked to leadership style of the leader (De Vries, 2012). Humility tends to be an essential trait of a good leader, but it may be harmful when it is shown in an excessive way. If a leader is too humble it may lead to distrust in leader's abilities and the employees may show reduced involvement in workplace (Yuan et al., 2018). Moreover, if the leader tells about his shortcomings to his sub-ordinates, they are most likely question his ability and do not pay heed to his leader (Owens & Hekman, 2012); results in reduction of employees' interest towards his work (Mayer & Gavin, 2005).

Humility of a leader is typically perceived as an optimistic quality that leads to positive and appropriate outcomes of followers (Wang et al., 2018), organizations (Ou et al., 2018) and teams (Owens & Hekman, 2016). However, recent studies have started to explore darker side of humility. When employees consider humility of leader to self-serving intentions, the followers experience more psychological empowerment and may tend to show deviant behavior at workplace (Qin et al., 2020). Therefore, based on above discussion, following hypothesis is formulated:

**H<sub>5</sub>:** There is a significant impact of humble leadership on workplace deviance.

### **3.10. Workplace deviance and project success**

Previous studies show that project managers find difficulty to manage the project because of different risk involved such as rejection which is caused by stress among the employees due to identify and analyze the risk (Mubarak et al., 2018). Such involvements have an impact on performance of project in a way that managers sometimes overlook these types of risk, which may impact the project outcome and later the project fails due to these issue (Ika, 2009).

As projects are complicated, manager must constantly pay attention to meet stakeholder's expectations, as these expectations are directly related to the success of the project (Jugdev & Müller, 2005). The success criteria of project vary from one to the next and may be classified as project's performance (Ojiako et al., 2008). Employee's deviant workplace conduct has an influence not only on project's social and psychological environment, but also on the project team performance (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Employees who engage in workplace deviance see the company as a roadblock to their benefits (Appelbaum et al., 2005).

Deviant workplace behavior of employees has gained much attention in organizations during past few years (Samnani et al., 2013). Study of Kühnel et al. (2016) argued that workplace deviant behavior damage the performance and wellbeing of the firm. Likewise, Raza et al. (2019) stated that workplace deviance not only negatively impacts on organization psychologically and



financially but it is also harmful for all level of organizations. In the similar manner, Deng et al. (2022) suggested that deviance at the workplace can lead to negative repercussions on organizations and its employees. Previously, study of Jugdev and Müller (2005) was of the view that if workplace deviance is spread at organization level then management orders will not be followed, thus it increases the probability project failure. Studies have also explored that deviant workplace behavior of the employees is a major component that contributes to the failure of the project (Ferris et al., 2012). High level of work place deviant behavior leads to less work satisfaction and project may lead to failure (Judge & Bono, 2001). Thus, based on above discussion following hypothesis is formulated.

**H<sub>6</sub>:** There is a significant negative impact of workplace deviance on project success.

### **3.11. Mediation of workplace deviance**

Deviant behavior at workplace, individual as well as organizational deviance, cost an organization too much. Organizations suffer severely because of the deviant work behavior (Marasi et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2022). According to recent studies, it is revealed that there may be a negative side to leadership humility (Darren et al., 2022; Manix, 2022). When followers mistakenly associate a leader's humility for self-serving motives, they develop a sense of psychological entitlement and as a result, engage in more workplace misbehavior such as deviant workplace behavior (Qin et al., 2020). Consequently, humility may not always produce the desired results.

Projects are complicated and the risk associated with them might be unpredictable. In the event of ambiguity, subordinates turn to their superiors for direction and necessary changes (Agle et al., 2006; Waldman et al., 2001). Leaders acknowledge personal constraints, seek input from their followers, and legitimate growth and progress by accepting their own limitations (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Qin et al., 2021). As a consequence, there is a loss of control over the situation. In such situations, adherents are likely to believe that their leaders are unable to aid them that may also lead to workplace deviance and eventually, failure to meet project goals which might have an influence on project's quality and success. Figure 1 shows the research framework of the study.

Based on the above literature, following hypothesis is formulated:

**H<sub>7</sub>:** Workplace deviance mediates the relationship between humble leadership and project success.

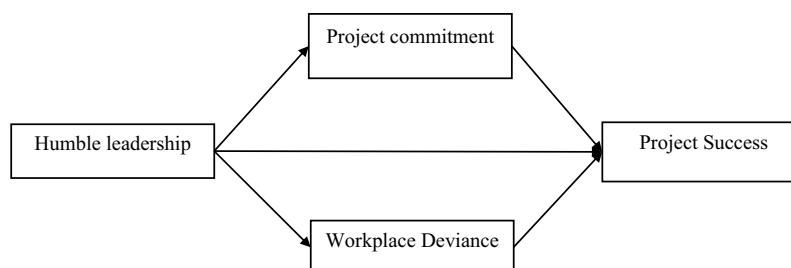
## **4. Research methodology**

### **4.1. Sampling and data collection**

To test the study hypotheses, a survey method was applied to collect data from the employees working in IT sector in the Twin Cities (Rawalpindi & Islamabad) of Pakistan. Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data through non-probability convenience sampling technique. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed out of which 330 responses were received, among which 315 were valid, yielding a response rate of 70%.

Research questionnaire was divided into two parts. First part contained the questions related to the demographics of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire was comprised of the items of all the study variables (humble leadership, project commitment, workplace deviance, and project success). Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used for analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics have been used in order to analyze the demographics of the employees. Furthermore, the relationship between the study variable were determined used using correlation and regression analysis.

**Figure 1. Research Framework.**



The data depicts that most of the respondent were male's 242 out of 315 employees representing a percentage of 76.8%. Similarly, among 315 employees, 177 (56.2%) were of the age "21–30" followed by 79 (25.1%) were of the age group "31–40", 35 (11.1%) employees were of the age "41–50" and 24 employees (7.6%) were of the age "51 and above". As far as education of respondent is concerned most of the employees had Post graduation degree, 182 (57.8%). Likewise, majority of employees 112 employees (35.6%) had an experience of "1–3 years".

#### 4.1.1. Measurement scale

All items of variables of the study were adapted from the previous studies that measured via 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**4.1.1.1. Humble Leadership.** A nine (9) items scale was used to assess humble leadership. The scale was adapted from Owens et al. (2013). A sample item is "My leader is open to the advice of others." **Project Success.** In this study fourteen (14) items scale was used to assess project success. The scale was adapted from Aga et al. (2016). A sample item is "The outcomes of the project have directly benefitted the intended end-users, either through increased efficiency or effectiveness."

**4.1.1.2. Project Commitment.** This study used five (5) items scale adapted from (Hoegl et al., 2004). A sample item is "I feel a strong sense of responsibility to achieve the project goals". **Workplace Deviance.** This study adapted nineteen (19) items scale adapted from the study of Bennett and Robinson (2000). One of the item from the scale is "I have falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than I have spent on business expenses."

### 5. Data analysis and results

For data analysis SPSS 27 version and Smart PLS 4.0 was used. For descriptive statistics SPSS was used while Smart-PLS was used to test the study relationships by using partial least square modeling (PLS-SEM).

#### 5.1. Descriptive statistic and correlation

Descriptive statistics of all study variables including humble leadership, project commitment, workplace deviance, and project success are shown in below Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. Results show that there is a significant and positive correlation between humble leadership and project success ( $r = .461$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Similarly, humble leadership also has a significant and positive correlation with project commitment ( $r = .480$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Likewise, project commitment and project success correlation was also found significant ( $r = .518$ ,  $p = .00$ ). However, humble leadership and workplace deviance was found to be insignificant ( $r = -0.1$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In the same way, correlation between workplace deviance and project success was also significant and negative ( $r = -.233$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

### 6. PLS analysis

Research model of the study was analyzed by using Partial least square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). For this purpose, SmartPLS 4 was used for the estimation and measurement

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations								
Construct	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
HL	3.92	0.76	-0.78	0.802	1			
PC	4.31	0.63	-1.291	2.946	.480**	1		
WPD	1.74	0.82	1.772	2.899	-0.1	-.285**	1	
PS	4.11	0.60	-0.695	1.279	.461**	.518**	-.233**	1

N = 315, \*\*  $p < .01$ , HL: Humble leadership, PC: Project Commitment, WPD: Workplace Deviance, PS: Project success.

of structural model. PLS-SEM approach follows two step approach. In first step measurement model (Outer Model) is assessed which allows the relationship between the observable variables and theoretical concepts to be specified. Whereas, in the second step structural model (inner model) is evaluated to test the proposed relationship between variables of the study (Hair et al., 2017).

### 6.1. Measurement model

To measure the variables of this study, a composite measurement model with first order reflective design approximation was adopted. To access the measurement model individual item reliability, construct reliability, convergent reliability, and discriminant reliability were used. To analyze individual item reliability factor loadings were examined. In reflective measurement model factor loadings are estimated relationships (Hair et al., 2013). According to Hair et al. (2022) suggestions, result shows that most of the factor loading values are above 0.70 except few, which are above 0.55 and are also acceptable (Falk & Miller, 1992). Table 2 below shows the factor loading values of all constructs.

Similarly, to check construct reliability, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values were assessed. Table 2 depicts that all the variables of model were reliable having the CR and CA above 0.70. Likewise, convergent validity was evaluated by average variance explained (AVE). All the construct's AVE values were above 0.50, which means at least 50% of the indicator variance should be accounted for (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Similarly, discriminant validity was evaluated in the measurement model which is perceived as the differentiation between the constructs in the model. Each construct in the model is said to have its own identity that should be different from all other constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity can be evaluated by using three methods which includes Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loadings, and the Heterotrait Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

First of all, Fornell & Larcker criterion method to access discriminant validity was employed. To achieve discriminant validity square root value of AVE for a construct must be greater than the correlation coefficient of the other constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 represents that diagonal values as the square root of AVE while the values below the diagonal are the correlation coefficients between the constructs. Table 3 shows that all the diagonal values are greater than the correlation coefficient of other construct. Therefore, discriminant validity is achieved.

Second, cross loading method was used to access discriminant validity. In this method, outer loading of the related construct must be higher than the other constructs in order for discriminant validity to be established. Table 3 shows that cross-loading value of each construct is greater than other constructs.

Similarly, this study also used the third method of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT ratio) to access discriminant method. The threshold value of HTMT for all the constructs should be below 0.85 (Benitez et al., 2020). Table 5 below shows that all the values are lesser than 0.85 indicating that discriminant validity is established. Table 4 below shows the discriminant validity of study variables.

### 6.2. Structural model

After the psychometric properties of measurement model were met, structural model assessment was accessed. Structural model assessment is based on the significance and magnitude of path coefficient. Bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resample was utilized. Figure 2 shows the structural model of the study.

Table 6 shows the results of the hypotheses testing. Humble leadership was found to have a direct significant impact on Project success ( $\beta = 0.285$ ,  $t = 5.027$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) lending support to H1.

**Table 2. Measurement model: convergent validity and reliability**

Variables	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
	HL1	0.667			
	HL2	0.714			
	HL3	0.728			
	HL4	0.756			
HL	HL5	0.688	0.560	0.919	0.901
	HL6	0.793			
	HL7	0.800			
	HL8	0.764			
	HL9	0.809			
	PC1	0.811			
	PC2	0.825			
PC	PC3	0.815	0.583	0.873	0.817
	PC4	0.572			
	PC5	0.765			
	PS1	0.571			
	PS10	0.800			
	PS11	0.782			
	PS12	0.765			
	PS13	0.795			
	PS14	0.766			
	PS2	0.643			
PS	PS3	0.742	0.527	0.939	0.930
	PS4	0.723			
	PS5	0.692			
	PS6	0.800			
	PS7	0.683			
	PS8	0.737			
	PS9	0.619			
	WPD1	0.726			
	WPD10	0.790			
	WPD11	0.792			
	WPD12	0.722			
	WPD13	0.816			
	WPD14	0.757			
	WPD15	0.745			
	WPD16	0.804			
	WPD17	0.684			
WPD	WPD18	0.760	0.563	0.961	0.957
	WPD19	0.856			
	WPD2	0.682			
	WPD3	0.656			
	WPD4	0.773			
	WPD5	0.716			
	WPD6	0.681			

(Continued)

**Table 2. (Continued)**

Variables	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
	WPD7	0.819			
	WPD8	0.649			
	WPD9	0.791			

**Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell and Larker method)**

Construct	HL	PC	PS	WPD
HL	0.748			
PC	0.502	.764		
PS	0.471	.522	.726	
WPD	−0.114	−.299	−.252	.751

Similarly, humble leadership has a significant and positive impact on project commitment ( $\beta = 0.502$ ,  $t = 9.204$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Thus, it provides support to H2. Likewise, H3 of the study states that project commitment has a positive and significant impact on project success. Based on the results, the findings show support in accordance with the hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $t = 5.481$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Therefore, H3 is supported. Direct relationship hypothesis H5 of the present study was examine the impact of humble leadership on workplace deviance. The results are not consistent with the proposed hypothesis ( $\beta = -.114$ ,  $t = 1.791$ ,  $p = .074$ ). Hence, H5 is not supported. Moreover, findings of H6 is consistent with the proposed hypothesis ( $\beta = -.0116$ ,  $t = 2.341$ ,  $p = .020$ ), indicating that workplace deviance has a significant and negative association with project success.

However, the main emphasis of present research was to examine the mediating effects of project commitment and workplace deviance behavior in the relationship between humble leadership and project success. Results extend support to the H4 of the study ( $\beta = .173$ ,  $t = 4.224$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) that examined the mediating role of project commitment between humble leadership and project success. The results of H7 are inconsistent with proposed hypothesis ( $\beta = .013$ ,  $t = 1.149$ ,  $p = 0.251$ ) indicating that workplace deviance does not significantly mediate the relationship between humble leadership and project success. Hence, H7 is not supported. In addition to this coefficient of determination,  $R^2$  value of model as reflected in Figure 2 is 0.343, which shows humble leadership along with project commitment and workplace deviance brings a 34.4% change in project success.

## 7. Discussion & conclusion

### 7.1. Summary of findings

With the application of conservation of resource theory, the present study empirically investigates the relationship of humble leadership with project success. The findings of the study confirmed some of the hypotheses and showed that each variable of the present study had a substantial impact on project success. The relationship of humble leadership with project success was significant positive. These findings suggests that humility is an important attribute for a project manager to possess to ensure the project's success (Ali et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2018).

From the bright side perspective findings revealed that humble leadership has a significant positive impact on project commitment (Ou et al., 2018). These results are consistent with the past studies that humble leaders appreciate employees, value their efforts and contributions, and prepare to counsel their subordinates on the matters they do not understand to boost employees' feelings of self-worth in the organization and encourage them to contribute more (Zhou et al., 2021).

**Table 4. Discriminant validity (cross Loadings)**

	<b>HL</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>PS</b>	<b>WPD</b>
HL1	0.667	.407	.393	-.115
HL2	0.714	.276	.324	-.027
HL3	0.728	.288	.228	-.043
HL4	0.756	.387	.357	-.084
HL5	0.688	.329	.340	-.048
HL6	0.793	.410	.360	-.084
HL7	0.800	.378	.390	-.055
HL8	0.764	.381	.300	-.090
HL9	0.809	.458	.416	-.175
PC1	0.439	.811	.438	-.240
PC2	0.395	.825	.419	-.259
PC3	0.437	.815	.425	-.261
PC4	0.269	.572	.338	-.100
PC5	0.349	.765	.362	-.259
PS1	0.284	.273	.570	-.077
PS10	0.328	.442	.801	-.251
PS11	0.294	.411	.782	-.164
PS12	0.306	.395	.765	-.227
PS13	0.321	.440	.795	-.264
PS14	0.346	.412	.765	-.146
PS2	0.293	.302	.642	-.072
PS3	0.372	.418	.743	-.242
PS4	0.354	.357	.724	-.223
PS5	0.364	.380	.693	-.221
PS6	0.450	.396	.801	-.219
PS7	0.343	.317	.682	-.084
PS8	0.370	.373	.736	-.174
PS9	0.340	.341	.618	-.101
WPD1	0.000	-.234	-.196	.726
WPD10	-.0183	-.265	-.205	.790
WPD11	-.0083	-.231	-.244	.792
WPD12	-.0039	-.215	-.138	.722
WPD13	-.0142	-.252	-.214	.816
WPD14	-.0127	-.249	-.153	.757
WPD15	-.0110	-.204	-.126	.745
WPD16	-.0060	-.283	-.164	.804
WPD17	-.0025	-.209	-.150	.684
WPD18	-.0091	-.194	-.149	.760
WPD19	-.0066	-.244	-.211	.856
WPD2	-.0058	-.240	-.191	.682
WPD3	-.0124	-.153	-.153	.656
WPD4	-.0028	-.248	-.155	.773
WPD5	-.0125	-.174	-.188	.715
WPD6	-.0077	-.182	-.194	.681
WPD7	-.0064	-.219	-.238	.819

(Continued)



**Table 4. (Continued)**

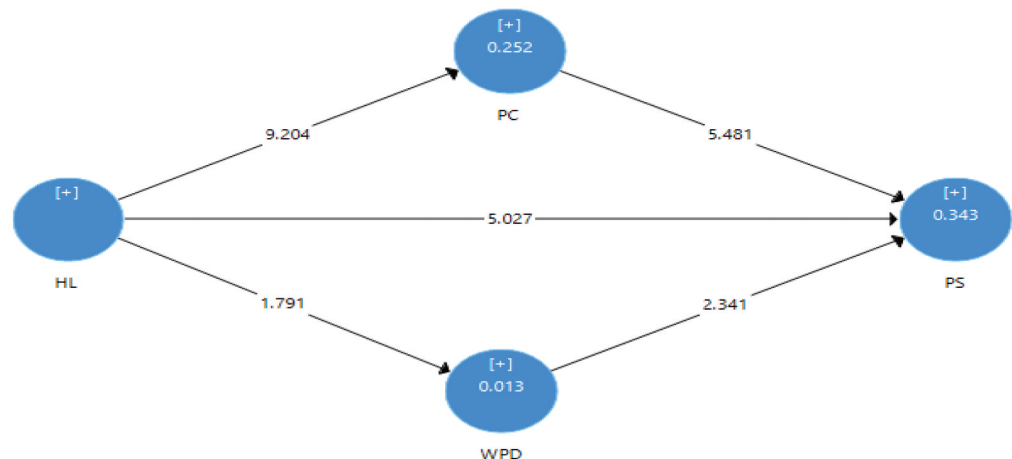
	HL	PC	PS	WPD
WPD8	−0.044	−.180	−.123	.649
WPD9	−0.089	−.269	−.269	.791

HL: Humble leadership, PC: Project Commitment, WPD: Workplace Deviance, PS: Project Success.

**Table 5. Discriminant validity (HTMT)**

	HL	PC	PS	WPD
HL				
PC	0.570			
PS	0.505	.596		
WPD	0.125	.332	.252	

**Figure 2. PLS-SEM bootstrap-ping algorithm.**



Similarly, result of hypothesis 3, confirms that project commitment has a significant positive impact on project success. These findings are in congruence to earlier studies that the extent of an employee's commitment to the project evaluates their effectiveness in completing a successful project (Dwivedula et al., 2016). Likewise, findings of hypothesis 4 suggest that when humble leaders lead their team, the subordinates feel psychologically empowered since they have more autonomy in their job under such supervision (Jeung & Yoon, 2016). As a result, team members feel more empowered, committed, and motivated towards achieving the project's objectives (Ou et al., 2014). Thus, project commitment significantly acts as a mediating link between humble leadership and project success.

However, the dark side of humble leadership was not proved significant. Findings indicate that humble leadership has an insignificant impact on workplace deviance. Possible reason for this relationship is when subordinates find comfortable environment at workplace and know that their opinions and feedback matter for their leader as well as the organization, they strive to perform even better and work with complete dedication instead of showing deviant behavior at workplace. Humble leadership is considered as a positive style of leadership like servant leadership. Servant leaders are those leaders who put their subordinates first and put forward their efforts for their subordinates so the followers can grow to the maximum potential and achieve success (Liden et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2019). Moreover, humble leadership like ethical or servant leadership

**Table 6. Direct and indirect relationships**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	SD	t statistics	P values	Confidence intervals		Decision
					2.50%	97.5%	
HL $\rightarrow$ PS	0.285	0.057	5.027	<b>0.000</b>	0.379	0.605	Supported
HL $\rightarrow$ PC	0.502	0.055	9.204	<b>0.000</b>	0.164	0.392	Supported
PC $\rightarrow$ PS	0.344	0.063	5.481	<b>0.000</b>	0.215	0.47	Supported
HL $\rightarrow$ PC $\rightarrow$ PS	0.173	0.041	4.224	<b>0.000</b>	0.102	0.268	Supported
HL $\rightarrow$ WPD	-0.114	0.064	1.791	<b>0.074</b>	-0.224	0.029	Not supported
WPD $\rightarrow$ PS	-0.116	0.049	2.341	<b>0.020</b>	-0.209	-0.016	Supported
HL $\rightarrow$ WPD $\rightarrow$ PS	0.013	0.011	1.149	<b>0.251</b>	-0.002	0.041	Not supported

influences ethical behavior and ethical behavior is a positive behavior while deviant behavior is a negative behavior (Ruiz et al., 2011; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2013, 2023). Therefore, based on the previous literature on servant leadership and its impact on employees deviant behavior (Iqbal et al., 2021) findings of present study shows the insignificant relationship between humble leadership and employees deviant behavior.

Moreover, data for the current study was collected from the IT sector. Earlier studies showing counterproductive behavior of employees were conducted on a banking sector (Qin et al., 2021). Employees working in the banking sector have to face different issues such as role overload, role conflict (Bashir & Ismail Ramay, 2010), personal issues (Saeed et al., 2013), work life imbalance (Ansari et al., 2015) that have an adverse impact on the performance of employees. In contrast to this, employees working in IT industry have flexible working hours, proper job responsibilities so they are more engaged and committed to the work assigned to them. Such employees have a proper balance between their work life and personal life, which has a positive influence on the attitude of the employees (Kiran & Khurram, 2018).

The findings of hypothesis 6 were in line with the proposed hypothesis. If workplace deviance spreads throughout the organization and management commands are not implemented then chances of project failure increases. Moreover, deviant workplace behavior reduces job satisfaction and increases the risk of project failure (Ferris et al., 2012; Judge & Bono, 2001). This kind of behavior has a negative impact on the organization's goals, performance, customer's satisfaction and objectives of the project cannot be met (Detert & Burris, 2007).

Results of hypothesis 7 reveals that workplace deviance does not significantly mediate the relationship between humble leadership and project success. Employees working in IT sector have flexible work schedules and appropriate job responsibilities, they are more committed to the task that is given to them. Additionally, such workers are perceived as having a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives, which has a favorable impact on the attitudes of the workers (Kiran & Khurram, 2018). IT sector employees' increased performance and productivity are thought to be greatly influenced by culture (Patanjali & Bhatta, 2022). IT employees have comfort of work from home which makes them independent and motivated. Employees working from home can exhibit increased productivity and increased work life balance (Singh et al., 2020) whereas poor work-life balance and stress related to work can result in decreased productivity and might have influence on the performance of the subordinates (Galanti et al., 2021).

## **7.2. Theoretical contributions**

The present research contributes theoretically to the existing body of knowledge in the domain of project management. The current study shows the impact of humble leadership with project success with mediating role of project commitment and workplace deviance. In the domain of project management in Pakistan, there is relatively very little literature that shows the association between independent variable humble leadership and dependent variable project success.

In this study, a new relationship with other variables was hypothesized and tested. In the past studies, project commitment and workplace deviance has not been studied as a mediator between the association of humble leadership and project success. Humble leadership is studied to be more significant with success of project in the context of IT firms in Twin Cities as it helps to motivate the employees to show commitment towards the project resulting in the success of the project. As a result, this study fills a gap in the literature of project management by demonstrating how humble leadership affects the commitment of employees towards the project that are crucial to project success.

Humble leaders inspire their sub-ordinates and acknowledge their feedback, hence the employees show commitment to the project as the response of such supportive behavior of their leader. The results of this study demonstrate that humility would be mandatory for the project manager to successfully complete the project. Additionally, the current findings helped fill the gap that earlier researchers had

found that the leadership role of project managers in project success was not sufficiently emphasized in earlier literature of project management (Podgórska & Pichlak, 2019; Yu et al., 2018).

#### *7.2.1. Practical implications*

The findings of our study has numerous practical implications. First, our data demonstrate the importance humble leadership in project success. Humble leadership is a desirable trait that can be learnt; as a result, project managers should be trained to adopt a such leadership style, specifically through action learning (Cheung et al., 2020), resulting in increased project-based organization's efficiency.

It is extremely important for IT companies to hire managers who maintain a humble attitude at workplace. Project-based organizations should establish specific training programs to encourage humility in their leaders (Wang et al., 2018). Humility is a relationship-oriented interpersonal attribute. As a result, firms should take initiatives to improve social connections between employees in both official and informal ways (Ali et al., 2020).

There are numerous techniques that can be used in order to transform project managers into humble leaders. Project leaders should be trained in such a way that establish a culture in order to appreciate their sub-ordinates. The project manager should support and appreciate the feedback and ideas of his sub-ordinates and should take keen interest in listening to the problems and issues encountered to his sub-ordinates. In addition to this, project managers can share information with their sub-ordinates. Leaders should involve followers in decision-making, serve as mentors, and provide timely and positive feedback to their employees. As a result of such welcoming and positive environment, sub-ordinates think that their opinions and feedback are valued, the followers show commitment to the project which aids in achieving the success of the project. If trainings are conducted to develop humble leadership traits in a leader, it will assist in refining the project's goals which will contribute to a successful project.

#### *7.2.2. Limitation and future recommendations*

Every study has its own set of limitations, and the current study is no exception. This is primarily due to the fact that there was a lack of time and resources. Due to time and budget constraints, the data collection for the current study is cross-sectional in nature. The data was collected over one period and one time only. Future studies can be conducted while collecting the data using longitudinal methods. The data can be collected using different sources and over a span of different periods. The advantage of using longitudinal method is that it minimizes the potential biasness that is associated with cross-sectional studies.

Another limitation of the study is that convenience sampling is used in the present investigation. As the data collection from the entire population is impossible due to time constraints, convenience sampling was used to gather data from the entire population at our convenience, which restricts generalizability of the results. The future research should focus on collecting data using probability sampling technique in order to eliminate biasness. It is suggested that the probability sampling technique can be used because it will provide more insight into the proposed model and generalizability of the results can be claimed.

Another limitation for the present study is that the data for the study was only collected from IT firms in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The current study did not target the other industries and other cities of Pakistan which again restricts the generalizability of results. The future research can target different industries like construction, NGOs, marketing and advertising firm. The data can be collected from different cities of Pakistan and other countries in future.

In the present study, the cultural role as a moderating variable was not investigated. However, we feel that cultural differences can influence project success, and future research should take this into account. Another constraint for the current study is that the data was collected from the employees of project based organization on individual level and not on team level. It is therefore

recommended for future studies that the data can be collected from employees working in project based organizations at team level.

## 8. Conclusion

For project-based firms, a better knowledge of the factors that influence the project performance is extremely important. Our findings have shown that humility of project manager has an influence on effectiveness of projects in IT firms. Moreover, the findings have also investigated that project commitment acts as an important factor that enhances the performance of the project. Thereby, project commitment acts as a mediating link between the association of humble leadership and project success. Project based firms need to foster humility in project manager through programs for leadership development. In addition to this, they need to create a working environment that promotes commitment of employees to the project aiding in the success of the project. According to the present study, humble leaders are effective leaders because their followers gain self-esteem, skills, and motivation as a result of their actions.

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### Disclosure statement

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