A humble path to the top: How humility helps leaders succeed in their career

By

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Abstract

Humble leaders have been found to bring about positive outcomes for their subordinates, teams, and organizations, but researchers have suspected that humility is detrimental for the leaders’ own career, particularly in modern competitive work contexts. In this project, the authors use an ecosystem perspective to examine how humble leaders can achieve career success. They propose that humble leaders are more likely to occupy central positions in their subordinates’ voice networks, which improve leaders’ ability to perform their responsibilities well and in turn enable them to gain favorable career referral and experience career satisfaction. We also argue that humble leaders are especially effective in competitive work contexts where voice from subordinates might be otherwise inhibited. These hypotheses were supported in a time-lagged survey of 185 students, a scenario-based experiment with 233 working adults, and a multisource field study with 114 supervisor-level leaders, 461 subordinates, and 34 shop managers.

Dr Amy Y. Ou is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Management and Organization at NUS business school. She received her doctorate in management from Arizona State University. Her research interest includes strategic leadership, organizational culture, and cross-cultural management. Her papers have been published in top-tier management journals such as Administrative Science Quarterly, Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Management, and the Leadership Quarterly. Her research won the 2008 Academy of Management Best Paper Award, the 2012 Journal of Management Best Paper Award, the 2013 Alvah H. Chapman Jr. Outstanding Dissertation Award, and 2016 Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management Best Paper Award. Her research on CEO humility has been featured in Forbes China, USA Today, and The Business Times.

All interested are welcome.