1   **An Implicit Leadership Theory Lens on Leader Humility and Employee Outcomes:**

2   **Examining Individual and Organizational Contingencies**

3

4   **Abstract**

5   An emerging leadership style centered on the moral practice of humility has recently garnered

6   the attention of organizational researchers in the hospitality field. Taken in tandem with the

7   prevailing empirical evidence supporting the various salutary effects of leader humility on

8   employees' job attitudes and moral behaviors, the current set of studies offers an implicit

9   theoretical perspective on leadership that underlines the importance of identifying both

10   individual characteristics and organizational factors that can alter employees' assessments of

11   humble leaders. We propose that employees' assessments of humble leaders' benevolence hinge

12   on the employees' learning goal orientations and their perceptions of informational justice in the

13   workplace. The results of two multi-wave field studies indicate perceptions of humble leaders'

14   benevolence are significantly more favorable among employees who have strong learning goal

15   orientations and high perceptions of informational justice. Employees' perceptions of leader

16   benevolence are, in turn, positively associated with the employees' affective commitment.

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18   **Keywords**: Leadership humility, Learning goal orientation, Informational justice, Affective

19   commitment

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Introduction

Across cultural and religious contexts, humility, which entails humaneness, kindness, and caring for others, is widely regarded as a salient virtue (Stellar et al., 2018). As a socially shaped interpersonal quality, humility is an attitudinal reflection of how one sees oneself in relation to others (Owens et al., 2013). Humility requires a person to engage in meaningful self-reflection and self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Self-reflection and self-assessment put a person on the continuous path toward improvement, referred to as self-transcendence (Tangney, 2002; Owens & Hekman, 2016). Humble individuals tend to shift the focus from themselves to others, and they learn from others by acknowledging others' strengths (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Existing evidence in positive psychology supports the positive effects of humility in the workplace. These effects appear in areas such as moral practice, creativity, work performance, and personal well-being (Wang et al., 2017; Zhong et al., 2019). One resurgent area of research places humility in the leadership context (e.g., Owens et al., 2015). There are two driving factors behind such research. First, humble leaders, especially leaders in high positions, are not commonly seen in real life (e.g., Qin et al., 2020). Leaders are often pictured as strong, decisive, and heroic figures who lead subordinates out of the woods by demonstrating courage and strength (Junker & Van Dick, 2014). Second, in some situations, humility is negatively perceived and linked with a lack of self-confidence, shyness, and passivity (Coulehan, 2010). Third, although humility is often perceived favorably, followers perceive leader effectiveness and favorability separately; namely, a leader perceived as favorable may not be considered effective (Schyns & Schilling, 2011).

Hospitality leaders are less likely to be humble given several characteristics of the hospitality work setting. First, the labor-intensive nature together with relatively low level of

46   education among frontline employees has given leaders an impression that they have no need to

47   humbly ask for advice from followers. Second, facing the fierce market competition and the

48   rapidly changing business environment, leaders feel urged to go through quick decision making

49   process without seeking for opinions. Third, Pellegrini et al. (2010) found that with the increase

50   of the interactions between leaders and subordinates, leaders tend to adopt more authoritarian

51   leading style, emphasizing their authority and control, and require subordinates' obedience. As

52   hospitality setting involves frequent interactions between leaders, followers and customers, it

53   may leave more likelihood for authoritarian leadership rather than leader humility. Nevertheless,

54   leader humility in the hospitality context holds particular importance. Facing both internal (e.g.,

55   less attractive salaries, an older workforce, younger generations' increased expectations for

56   particular perks, high turnover) and external (e.g., digital transformation, escalated competition)

57   challenges, the conventional hierarchical and paternalistic leadership styles seen in the

58   hospitality industry may not reflect the environmental demands (e.g., Tuan, 2018). On the one

59   hand, as the hospitality industry is characterized by "people serving people" (Nassetta, CEO of

60   Hilton, 2018), employees must not only process abundant firsthand information about customers'

61   expectations and their positive and negative experiences but also possess the competence to

62   respond to customers' various demands. Thus, hospitality leaders must be particularly able and

63   willing to acknowledge their own limitations and learn from employees who interact with

64   customers in consistent and direct ways (Ye et al., 2020). On the other hand, with the presence of

65   demanding clientele and ever-changing business environment, hospitality employees are

66   increasingly confronted with various job strains (e.g., high performance pressure, lack of

67   resources, unsupportive or autocratic leaders, fierce competition among colleagues) that can

68   result in job stress, emotional exhaustion, negative emotional experience (e.g., fear, anger), and

69   withdrawal behaviors (e.g., Hu et al., 2018; Kao et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2020). Leader

70   humility, in this regard, provides an emerging leadership practice that helps alleviate employees'

71   job strains particularly related to leader-follower relationship, and supportiveness of the work

72   environment. In addition, the cross-departmental task independence (service production chain,

73   Wang et al., 2021) and high requirement for collaboration among employees make smooth

74   exchange of information indispensable for successful service delivery. Leader humility, in this

75   regard, facilitates an equal circumstance that encourages employees to voice their concerns.

76   Therefore, an investigation of leader humility and its effectiveness in the hospitality work

77   context not only advances the leadership research in the hospitality sector, but also provides

78   unique insight into how hospitality companies can help ensure their continued success in an

79   increasingly competitive industry.

80   Leader humility is "an interpersonal characteristic that emerges in social contexts that

81   connotes (a) a manifested willingness to view oneself accurately, (b) a displayed appreciation of

82   others' strengths and contributions, and (c) teachability, or openness to new ideas and feedback"

83   (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1518). Empirical evidence consistently supports the positive impacts of

84   leader humility on subordinates' attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, including job engagement

85   (Owens et al., 2015), job satisfaction (Ou et al., 2014), voice behavior (Bharanitharan et al.,

86   2019), task performance (Wang et al., 2018), and workplace deviance (Guo et al., 2020).

87   However, as Qin et al. (2020) indicated, a consideration of individual characteristics is necessary

88   to understand leader humility in a more holistic way. Moreover, as De Cremer et al. (2009)

89   argued, leadership research should adopt a more subordinate-centered approach because leaders

90   are ultimately leaders in the eyes of their subordinates. Epitropaki and Martin (2004) described

91   leadership "as a dynamic interplay between explicit leader behaviors, subordinate leadership

92   schemata and leadership outcomes" (p. 308). In this regard, implicit leadership theories (ILTs)

93   recognize the essential role of individual cognition in employees' perceptions of leaders.

94   According to ILTs, individuals are socialized to form their own cognitive schemas that

95   encompass both abstract and representative perceptions of a given leader category, often referred

96   to as prototypes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). These cognitive schemas reveal followers' ideal

97   types of leaders and serve as a reference point that, once activated, contributes to the followers'

98   assessment of their leaders in the real world (Kenney & Smith, 1996).

99   According to the connectionist model of ILTs, the formation and activation processes

100   related to leadership prototypes are functions of both followers' individual characteristics and

101   organizational factors that involve social interactions (bib_Junker_and_Van_Dick_2014Junker &

102   Van Dick, 2014; Lord et al., 2001). Followers' assessments of their actual leaders may change as

103   a result of changes in the point of reference (i.e., leadership prototype; e.g., Lord & Brown,

104   2001). First, systematic differences in followers' leadership prototypes may be based on

105   individual characteristics. Individuals' perceptions of idealized leaders tend to reflect the

106   individuals' own personalities in a display of positive self-illusion (Ehrhart, 2015). The present

107   research proposes that learning goal orientation influences how subordinates view humble

108   leaders. Specifically, individuals differ in their goal preferences for self-development related to

109   work competence, and these preferences comprise individuals' learning goal orientations

110   (Vandewalle, 1997). When an employee has a strong learning goal orientation, they are inclined

111   to learn from their successes and failures and focus on self-development. This strong learning

112   goal orientation allows the employee to better understand and appreciate the behaviors of humble

113   leaders (e.g., recognition of their own shortcomings, ability to learn from others), as these

114   behaviors are in accordance with the employee's values and expectations of an ideal leader.

115　Second, as one's conceptualization of an ideal leader is socially formed and context-contingent

116　(e. g., Lord et al., 2001), one's expectations for an ideal leader are likely to be contingent on

117　organizational factors. Organizational factors provide employees with social resources that

118　influence their ways of thinking and interpreting in the organizational setting (Lord & Brown,

119　2001). Lord et al. (2001) suggested that similar environments initiate similar leadership

120　prototypes. However, organizational factors have long been overlooked in leadership research

121　that aims to elucidate followers' perceptional processes of leadership (Antonakis et al., 2004).

122　The current research identifies informational justice as one organizational factor that influences

123　employees' assessments of leader humility. Informational justice reflects the social aspect of

124　justice and refers to the extent to which the explanations for decisions provided by management

125　are perceived as accurate, timely, and reasonable (Kernan & Hanges, 2002). Compared to other

126　types of justice (e.g., distributive justice, procedural justice), informational justice is perceived

127　on a daily basis in the frequent interactions between organizational representatives and

128　employees, thus constituting a major organizational context (Colquitt, 2001). Moreover, as the

129　agent-system model suggests, informational justice is particularly relevant to followers'

130　perceptions of organizational agents (e.g., leaders); the other types of justice are more likely to

131　influence organization-referenced outcomes (Bies, 1986). Given the ubiquity and high frequency

132　of leader-follower interactions, informational justice is an important aspect of organizational

133　socialization. As such, an examination of whether and if so how informational justice functions

134　as an organizational factor that influences employees' assessments of leader humility is

135　warranted.

136　　　Given this information, the critical research question guiding this set of studies is **how**

137　**individual and perceived organizational factors influence employees' assessments of leader**

138 **humility and the employees' subsequent job attitudes.** This set of studies helps fill an

139 important research gap because both the individual and organizational factors influencing

140 subordinates' perceptions of leader humility are largely neglected in the current literature, which

141 may result in an overly simplistic understanding of leader humility. Adopting the framework of

142 ILTs, the current research examines how employees' assessments of leader benevolence

143 following leader humility depend on learning goal orientation as an individual factor and

144 informational justice as an organizational factor. In addition, this set of studies investigates the

145 effectiveness of leader humility by testing the impacts of leader humility on employees' affective

146 commitment via leader benevolence. Existing literature has revealed that followers' levels of

147 affective commitment are linked to their assessments of their leaders and determine important

148 behavioral outcomes, such as employee deviance, prosocial behavior, and turnover (Wong &

149 Wong, 2017). The Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model.

150   The current research contributes to the literature on leader humility in several ways. First,

151 we introduce learning goal orientation as an individual characteristic that influences followers'

152 perceptions of the benevolence of humble leaders within the framework of ILTs. Although

153 researchers have proposed that individual characteristics influence employees' perceptions of

154 leadership styles, research on leader humility is scant in this regard, and no studies to date have

155 considered learning goal orientation as an individual factor that influences followers'

156 assessments of leader humility. Second, although ILTs illuminate followers' perceptional

157 processes of leadership via organizational socialization, organizational factors have long been

158 overlooked in research on leader humility (Antonakis et al., 2004). The present research

159 identifies followers' perceptions of informational justice as an organizational factor that

160 influences the followers' assessments of the benevolence of humble leaders. Existing literature

161 on informational justice focuses mostly on customers' perceptions of informational justice in

162 service failure and recovery situations (Nikbin et al., 2013); hospitality employees' perceptions

163 of informational justice have received scant attention. A consideration of individual and

164 organizational factors is necessary to understand the follower-centered and context-specific

165 aspects of leadership that have been left out of the leader humility literature (Qin et al., 2020). A

166 better understanding of these contingent factors would help illustrate for whom and under which

167 conditions assessments of and reactions to humble leaders vary. Third, we relate followers'

168 perceptions of leader humility to their levels of affective commitment via the underlying

169 mechanism of perceived leader benevolence, which is found to predict key job behavioral

170 outcomes. Therefore, this research extends the scholarly understanding of followers' attitudinal

171 reactions to leader humility.

172 **Literature review and hypothesis development**

173 *Leader humility*

174   The Oxford English Dictionary defines humility as "the quality of being humble or having a

175 lowly opinion of oneself; meekness, lowliness, humbleness: the opposite

176 of pride or haughtiness." This definition reflects the dual conceptual visions of humility: either

177 an impressive personal quality of accurate self-knowledge or a tendency toward devaluing

178 oneself. Although a few studies have conceptualized humility as a form of self-hatred (e.g.,

179 reduced self-esteem; Knight & Nadel, 1986), most managerial research holds a positive view of

180 humility and conceptualizes humility within different organizational roles (e.g., Oc et al., 2015).

181 Humility is distinct from honesty, narcissism, and modesty and involves three core actions that

182 are intertwined with each other: admitting one's own limits, acknowledging others' strengths,

183 and learning from others (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

184   Unlike top-down leadership styles (e.g., transformational, innovative, and paternalistic

185   leadership), the bottom-up leadership style of leader humility is characterized by low self-

186   interest, an others-orientation, and moral as well as pro-social behavioral tendencies (Owens &

187   Hekman, 2012). The self-awareness, altruism, and empowerment associated with leader humility

188   highlight that leader humility is a subordinate-centered leadership process (Collins, 2006).

189   Subordinates trust humble leaders and consider themselves as participants in leadership (Morris

190   et al., 2005). Given its morality-based nature, leader humility not only helps elevate leader-

191   follower relationships but also promotes employees' pro-social practices (Owens et al., 2015,

192   2019). Previous studies have linked leader humility to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes at the

193   individual, team, and organizational levels. These outcomes include job engagement (Owens et

194   al., 2015), psychological empowerment (Jeung & Yoon, 2016), followers' well-being (Zhong et

195   al., 2019), voice behavior (Bharanitharan et al., 2019), emotional exhaustion (Wang et al., 2018),

196   team collective promotion focus (Owens & Hekman, 2016), team effectiveness (Rego et al.,

197   2017), employee creativity (Wang et al., 2017), and workplace deviance (Qin et al., 2020).

198   While existing findings capture employees' positive reactions to humble leaders (Ou et al.,

199   2014; Owens et al., 2019), researchers have begun to challenge the uniformly positive view of

200   leader humility. For example, when employees attribute leaders' humble behaviors to impression

201   management tactics, leader humility results in perceptions of leader hypocrisy (Bharanitharan et

202   al., 2020). Leader hypocrisy is aligned with the concept *instrumental humility*, or a lack of

203   genuineness in the expression of humility that leads to defensiveness among followers (Owens &

204   Hekman, 2012). In a time of crisis with major threats to organizational survival and

205   competitiveness, employees expect their leaders to be resolute in guiding their organizations

206   through the crisis. Humility may be regarded as a lack of competence under such circumstances

207   (Oc et al., 2015). These findings reveal the necessity of exploring the boundary conditions of

208   leader humility's impacts (e.g., Jeung & Yoon, 2016; Ye et al., 2020). For instance, the

209   relationship between leader humility and followers' creativity is contingent on followers' levels

210   of cognitive reappraisal (Wang et al., 2017) and task dependence (Ye et al., 2020). Jeung and

211   Yoon (2016) revealed that distance-based factors influence the intensity of the effects of leader

212   humility on employees' psychological empowerment. Despite these useful explorations, insight

213   into individual and organizational factors that influence the effects of leader humility on key job

214   attitudes remains limited. Qin et al. (2020) indicated "research on leader humility is still in its

215   infancy, and extant work has only started to document its boundary conditions and underlying

216   mechanisms" (p. 11).

217   *Leader benevolence*

218   As leader-member interactions increase, followers develop perceptions regarding the extent

219   to which their leaders have good intentions toward them that spring from altruistic motives,

220   referred to as leader benevolence (Van Dijke & De Cremer, 2010). Employees' perceptions of

221   leader benevolence reflect their assessments of their leaders' loyalty and the employees' own

222   affective attachment to their leaders (Mayer et al., 1995). In turn, benevolence represents leaders'

223   affective attachment and positive personal orientations toward their followers. In particular,

224   benevolence connotes the affective aspect of trustworthiness (Colquitt et al., 2011). Leaders who

225   are perceived as benevolent are willing to utilize their valuable resources for the benefit of their

226   followers (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009). Well-intentioned and benevolent leaders actively form

227   emotional bonds with their followers by demonstrating considerate attitudes toward their

228   followers and engaging in supportive and altruistic behaviors (e.g., drawing on personal

229   resources). Common practices attributed to benevolent leaders include inspiring thinking,

230   showing respect for followers, demonstrating a good understanding of employees' personal

231   strengths, and encouraging employees (Liu et al., 2010).

232   Benevolence is a prerequisite of trustworthiness, but it is also an independent construct that

233   has unique impacts on followers. Lapidot et al. (2007) indicated that followers rely more often

234   on leader benevolence than they do integrity or ability when determining how much trust to

235   place in their leaders. Although important, integrity and ability are leader-oriented attributes that

236   reflect leaders' competence and behavioral consistency; they do not necessarily reflect followers'

237   interests. In other words, a competent and candid leader may not act for the benefit of

238   employees. Moreover, ability and integrity are considered modest requirements of a qualified

239   leader. Only when followers believe that the decisions made by leaders reflect the followers'

240   own interests are the followers likely to develop affective connections with their leaders and

241   build trust in them. Therefore, leader benevolence is an affective aspect of trustworthiness. It

242   lays a foundation for trust in a leader. Without leader benevolence, leader ability and integrity

243   may not be helpful in trust building. Indeed, Poon (2013) found that leader ability and integrity

244   contribute to leader trustworthiness only when followers' perceptions of leader benevolence are

245   strong. Unlike ability and integrity, which are relatively fixed qualities, leader benevolence

246   indicates a leader's behavioral choice to go "the extra mile" to attend to followers' needs and

247   concerns (Lapidot et al., 2007). The uniqueness of benevolence and its relationships with

248   employees' outcomes has attracted researchers' attention.

249   Altruism and loyalty are critical contributors to benevolence (Butler & Cantrell, 1984).

250   When leaders are perceived as valuing followers' demands and responding to their needs rather

251   than prioritizing organizational goals, perceptions of leader benevolence are likely to be fostered.

252   Perceptions of leader benevolence are also influenced by followers' personal factors, such as the

253   degree of similarity followers perceive between leaders and themselves (Mayer et al., 1995).

254   Leader benevolence is thought to determine supportive behaviors, exert positive influence on

255   followers, and boost employees' work performance (Lin et al., 2016). For example, Chan et al.

256   (2013) found that when leaders are authoritarian, employees' positive assessments of leader

257   benevolence may alleviate their negative reactions to this leader authoritarianism.

258   We propose that leader humility tends to enhance perceived leader benevolence. First,

259   leader benevolence is assessed based on interactions between leaders and subordinates. As such,

260   employees need to have sufficient interactions with leaders in order to be able to evaluate leader

261   benevolence. Compared to leaders who adopt other leadership styles, humble leaders pay special

262   attention to communicating with subordinates occasionally so that they can better learn from

263   them. In this regard, leader humility offers ample opportunities for employees to assess leader

264   benevolence. Second, since humility enables leaders to focus on finding the best in employees

265   and learning from them, followers feel valued and can sense leaders' employee-centered and

266   bottom-up approach. As such, employees feel that leaders are in their shoes and act with the

267   employees' well-being in mind (Chan et al., 2013). In particular, followers' perception of leader

268   humility may be contingent on their perceived power distance. For example, Hu et al. (2018)

269   revealed that only when teams had low power distance value, leader humility had positive

270   impacts on information sharing. Jeung and Yoon (2016) indicated that with followers' higher

271   level of power distance orientation, the impact of leader humility on psychological

272   empowerment was stronger. In addition, the relationship between leader humility and followers'

273   voice behavior was found to be more positive when the power distance was lower (Lin et al.,

274   2019). Third, humble leaders do not occupy a commanding position or distance themselves from

275   subordinates. As such, employees feel emotionally close to their leaders, and this closeness

276   constitutes an affective base for benevolence. Fourth, humbler leaders recognize followers'

277   strengths and encourage them to reach their potential and teach others to develop competence.

278   Followers perceive that their competence is recognized when they are given opportunities to

279   teach organizational members, including leaders, about their areas of expertise. Therefore, the

280   following hypothesis is proposed.

281   **H1**: Leader humility is positively related to followers' perceptions of leader benevolence.

282   *Learning goal orientation*

283   Individual dispositional differences exist in terms of the tendency to pursue goals, referred

284   to as goal orientation (Vandewalle, 1997). An individual's goal orientation can be classified as

285   either one of two types: (1) learning goal orientation, which refers to the tendency to develop

286   one's competence via engaging in challenging tasks and learning new skills; and (2) performance

287   goal orientation, which focuses on seeking validation of one's competence and positive feedback

288   during particular activities (Payne et al., 2007). Goal orientation has been found to exert far-

289   reaching impacts on individuals' choice of tasks and the means of and motivations for

290   performing the chosen tasks. In particular, learning goal orientation is a stable personal trait that

291   enables one to have a solution-oriented mindset, seek learning and development opportunities in

292   challenging situations, and keep spirits up in difficult times (Miron-Spektor et al., 2021).

293   For those with strong learning goal orientations, the motivation for and ultimate goal of

294   carrying out tasks is self-improvement and competence development. As such, these individuals

295   voluntarily work in novel and difficult situations to gain new skills; moreover, they consider

296   errors a natural product of the learning process (Johnson et al., 2011). Learning goal orientation

297   is a beneficial personal quality for both experienced and unseasoned employees and has been

298   found to influence attitudes and behaviors in achievement contexts such as goal setting (Taing et

299   al., 2013), self-regulation (Noordzij et al., 2013), work engagement (Matsuo, 2019), and

300   creativity (Leung et al., 2014). Moreover, learning goal orientation mediates the relationship

301   between different leadership styles (e.g., empowering leadership, authentic leadership) and

302   employee outcomes (e.g., extra-role performance, leader identity; Middleton et al., 2019).

303   Learning goal orientation has also been found to moderate the relationships between

304   transformational leadership and feedback seeking and between transformational leadership and

305   reflection (Runhaar et al., 2010).

306   In light of the ILTs, followers' individual characteristics influence their conceptions of the

307   ideal leadership style and subsequently their assessments of humble leaders. For example, Qin et

308   al. (2020) found that employees' self-serving attributions significantly influenced their

309   perceptions of leader humility and subsequent job behavior. As a personal trait, learning goal

310   orientation predisposes followers to appreciate a work environment in which their expectations

311   for competence development and continuous learning can be met. Considered organizational

312   agents, leaders are major contributors to the organizational environment. Therefore, followers

313   tend to foster stable expectations for ideal leaders to adopt leadership styles that are aligned with

314   their own orientations. Humble leaders do not merely recognize their own limits and others'

315   strengths; they do so in pursuit of new knowledge and skills. Leader humility, then, closely

316   aligns with the leader prototype held by learning-goal-oriented individuals. Therefore, we

317   propose the following hypothesis:

318   **H2:** Followers' learning goal orientations moderate the relationship between leader humility and

319   leader benevolence, such that the leader-follower relationship is stronger when followers' have

320   stronger learning goal orientations.

321   *Informational justice*

322   Informational justice is defined as employees' perceptions of the workplace information or

323   explanations provided as clear, reasonable, and appropriately detailed (Scott et al., 2007).

324   Informational justice is particularly relevant to the hospitality context because successful service

325   production and delivery largely rely on a frequent and intense informational flow among leaders,

326   peers, and subordinates (Chan & Jepsen, 2011). As such, the hospitality context offers followers

327   abundant occasions to assess whether the information provided regarding work procedures is

328   adequate and timely. In other words, informational justice constitutes a stable and pertinent

329   organizational factor in the hospitality work setting. The current literature has categorized

330   organizational justice into distributive (outcome fairness on account of the ratio of input to

331   output), procedural (fairness regarding decision-making process), interpersonal (fair treatment in

332   interpersonal interactions) and informational justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Fassina et al.,

333   2008). Moreover, informational justice involves social exchanges with both the leader and the

334   organization. As such, informational justice represents a salient organizational factor that plays a

335   role in influencing employees' perception of humble leaders (Roch & Shanock, 2006; Karam et

336   al., 2019). Followers' perceptions of informational justice have been found to influence their

337   reactions to organizational leaders, for leaders are organizational agents who often use

338   interactions with subordinates to justify managerial decisions and procedures (Bies, 1986).

339   Informational justice is significantly associated with key attitudinal and behavioral outcomes,

340   such as followers' retaliation in the wake of harmful events, organizational evaluations, and

341   responses to organizational decisions (Colquitt et al., 2011).

342   Organizations serve as salient contexts for socialization in which various informational cues

343   are communicated to organizational members in consistent and stable ways (Woodrow & Guest,

344   2020). Such organizational processes affect how followers are socialized to form their leadership

345   prototypes. There is limited research exploring how organizational factors foster followers'

346   leadership prototypes, which in turn influence the followers' perceptions of leader humility. For

347   example, highly hierarchical organizations may lead employees to expect their leaders to be

348   decisive or even autocratic. In such cases, humility in a leader is not in accordance with implicit

349   leadership styles and thus may be considered less effective (e.g., Chhokar, 2002) than it would in

350   other organizations. Indeed, although the empirical evidence is still limited, micro-organizational

351   or macro-cultural factors can influence the way individuals perceive, value, and respond to

352   leader humility (e.g., Oc et al., 2015). Specific to the organizational justice, we contend that

353   among different types of justice, informational justice tends to create the most typical leadership

354   prototype through informational cues, that corresponds to the characteristics of the leader

355   humility

356   When working in organizations with strong informational justice, employees tend to attach

357   importance to the accuracy and timeliness of explanatory information received from their

358   managers. They expect their leaders to be sincere and honest, admitting their own shortcomings

359   and errors and willingly exchanging opinions with the employees, as is characteristic of humble

360   leaders (Owens et al., 2013). Informational justice also means that the organization and its agents

361   respect and value employees and seek employees' understanding regarding organizational

362   decisions, recognizing the employees deserve real information and timely explanations.

363   Therefore, strong informational justice fosters among employees a leadership prototype that is

364   characterized by truthfulness and openness. When leader humility is complemented by

365   informational justice, leaders not only engage in humility practices (e.g., disclosing personal

366   errors, learning from subordinates), but they also provide sufficient explanations for their

367   behaviors. This combination of leader humility and informational justice enables employees to

368 better appreciate humble leaders, especially given that some leader humility behaviors may be

369 misunderstood by subordinates if not well explained. Therefore, the following hypothesis is

370 proposed:

371 **H3:** Followers' perceptions of informational justice moderate the relationship between leader

372 humility and leader benevolence, such that this relationship is stronger when followers perceive

373 higher levels of informational justice.

374
375 *Affective commitment*

376   Affective commitment denotes "employees' emotional attachment to, identification with,

377 and involvement in the organization" (Meyer et al., 2002, p. 21) and serves as a barometer

378 indicating employees' endorsement of organizational values and goals. Affective commitment is

379 a key attitudinal outcome that has been found to influence employees' willingness to stay with

380 the organization, as well as employees' in-role and extra-role work performance (Garg & Dhar,

381 2016) and creativity (Semedo et al., 2016). Abundant previous literature has identified individual

382 (e.g., personality) and work (e.g., job autonomy, variety, feedback, relationships) characteristics,

383 human resources (HR) practices (e.g., high-involvement HR practices, performance

384 management), organizational culture/climate, and leadership as salient factors affecting

385 employees' affective commitment to the organization (Santos et al., 2016). Each of the

386 leadership styles (e.g., inclusive leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, spiritual

387 leadership) is in its own way significantly associated with followers' affective commitment (e.g.,

388 Awee et al., 2014; Ribeiro et al., 2020). For example, Awee et al. (2014) found positive effects

389 of servant leadership on affective commitment among hotel employees. Ribeiro et al. (2020)

390 found a positive relationship between authentic leadership and employees' affective

391   commitment, which subsequently led to individual creativity. However, how followers' affective

392   commitment is affected by working with humble leaders has not been empirically examined.

393   Humble leaders are not self-centered but instead adopt a bottom-up managerial approach,

394   striving to foster a work environment in which followers' strengths are valued and serve as

395   learning material for leaders. Indeed, the recognition of the strengths of employees, coupled with

396   good-natured attitudes toward followers, is likely to foster employees' perceptions of leader

397   benevolence. Since leaders are considered the agents of the organization (Ford et al., 2018), the

398   well-intentioned treatment that humble leaders provide leads employees to feel obligated to

399   reciprocate leader benevolence by becoming emotionally attached to the organization, as social

400   exchange theory suggests. Employees' aspirations to reciprocity are also enhanced when they

401   perceive leaders to be benevolent (Chiaburu & Lim, 2008). Leader benevolence connotes

402   employees' estimation that their leaders keep followers' interests in mind and care about their

403   career development (Karakas & Sarigollu, 2012). Benevolent leaders willingly engage in

404   practices expedient for employees, including the provision of opportunities to exert strengths,

405   learn, and improve (Wang & Jap, 2017). Benevolence also signifies leaders' emotional

406   investment in followers and aids with the perception of affiliation among followers. In order to

407   ensure that employees are consistently emotionally committed to the organization, leaders need

408   to take the initiative to prove their attachment to followers, such that employees hold a positive

409   assessment of leaders' intentions (Wang & Cheng, 2010). Followers with high perceptions of

410   leader benevolence are inclined to emotionally cling to the organization as a response to the

411   display of leader benevolence. In this regard, the present research suggests that leader humility

412   has a positive effect on employees' affective commitment via enhanced leader benevolence.

413   **H4:** Followers' perceptions of leader humility are positively related to their organizational

414   affective commitment via the mediating role of leader benevolence.

415

416   **Study 1**

417   **Participants and Procedures**

418   Data from full-time hotel employees working in a major hotel group in China were

419   collected at two time points separated by a six-week time interval. A total of 397 participants

420   provided valid responses to the survey at Time 1. Of these participants, 330 employees

421   responded to the survey at Time 2, resulting in a response rate of 83.1%. Fifty-six percent of the

422   participants were female, with an average age of 37.2 years ($SD = 10.2$) and an average tenure of

423   2.8 years in the organization (SD = 1.3). T-test analyses suggested that employees who

424   responded to the survey at both time points did not differ significantly from those who responded

425   at only one-time point regarding their age ($t = 1.97$, *ns*), gender ($t = 0.63$, *ns*), and tenure with the

426   organization ($t = 1.42$, *ns*).

427   **Measures**

428   We used the back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1986) to translate all

429   instructions and survey questionnaires into Chinese. At Time 1, participants reported their

430   perceptions of leader humility and their learning goal orientation. At Time 2, participants were

431   asked to evaluate lead benevolence and rated their affective commitment. Participants responded

432   to items using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly*

433   *Agree*.

434   *Leader Humility* (α = .96; Time 1). To assess employees' perceptions of leader humility,

435   we used nine items from Owen et al.'s (2013) expressed humility scale. Sample items include

436 "My supervisor admits it when they don't know how to do something," and "My supervisor

437 takes notice of others' strengths." Subordinates' ratings have been frequently used to assess

438 leader behaviors and characteristics in leadership research (Yang et al., 2020).

439   *Learning Goal Orientation* (α = .91; Time 1). Participants reported their learning goal

440 orientation on a four-item scale by VandeWalle et al. (2001). Sample items include "I prefer

441 challenging and difficult tasks so that I'll learn a great deal," and "I like tasks that really force

442 me to think hard."

443   *Leader Benevolence* (α = .96; Time 2). To capture employee perceived leader

444 benevolence, five items adapted from the benevolence dimension of the trustworthiness scale by

445 Mayer and Davis (1999) were used. Sample items include "My supervisor will go out of his/her

446 way to help me," and "My supervisor is very concerned about my welfare."

447   *Affective Commitment* (α = .97; Time 2). We used six items from Meyer and Allen (1991)

448 to assess employees' affective commitment. Sample items include "I feel as if my work unit's

449 problems are my own," and "I feel like part of the family at my work unit."

450   *Control Variables.* Employees' age, gender and tenure in the organization were

451 controlled because these demographic variables have been found to relate to affective

452 commitment (Meyer et al., 2002).

Results

Data Analysis

455   Several analyses were conducted in this study. First, we conducted descriptive analyses

456 and reported the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the variables in the study.

457   Next, we conducted reliability analyses, including Cronbach's alpha values, to assess the

458   reliability of the measures and conducted confirmatory factor analyses to examine the

459   measurement model for validating the research constructs. To test the hypotheses, we used path

460   analysis model with Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Path analyses allow us to test the

461   entire hypothesized model and estimate all the parameters for the mediator and outcome variable

462   simultaneously (Zhao et al., 2010), which have advantages of testing complicated models over

463   multiple regression analyses. In addition, we used full information maximum likelihood (FIML;

464   Muthen & Muthen, 2017) to deal with missing data, which provides less biased estimates than a

465   listwise deletion procedure (Schafer & Graham, 2002). Therefore, we included the responses of

466   the employees who participated at Time 1 but not Time 2. All continuous predictors were

467   centered before entering the model. In the first model, we estimated the effects of leader humility

468   on employee affective commitment via perceived leader benevolence to test the mediation

469   hypothesis. In the second model, we included employee learning goal orientation and the

470   interaction of learning goal orientation with the leader humility to test the moderation hypothesis.

471   We also estimated the conditional indirect effects using the bootstrapped percentile confidence

472   interval (CI) recommended by previous research (Biesanz et al., 2010; Preacher et al., 2007).

473   **Measurement Model**

474   Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations and Table A1 presents the

475   distribution of variables. Prior to testing our hypotheses, we performed a series of confirmatory

476   factor analyses to test the measurement model. Table 2 presents the standardized factor loading

477   of scale items. The four-factor model provided adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 798.01$, $df = 246$, $p < .001$; CFI

478   = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .03) and fit the data significantly better based on chi-

479   square tests than the three-factor model combining leader humility and leader benevolence ($\chi^2 =$

480   2267.23, df = 249, p < .001; CFI = .81, TLI = .79, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .12; $\Delta\chi^2$ (3) =

481   1469.22, p < .001), the three-factor model combining leader humility and learning goal

482   orientation (χ^2 = 1854.46, df = 249, p < .001; CFI = .85, TLI = .83, RMSEA = .13, SRMR = .09;

483    $\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 1056.45, p < .001), the three-factor model combining leader humility and affective

484   commitment (χ^2 = 3259.51, df = 249, p < .001; CFI = .71, TLI = .68, RMSEA = .18, SRMR

485   = .17; $\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 2461.50, p < .001), and the three-factor model combining leader benevolence

486   and affective commitment (χ^2 = 2359.03, df = 249, p < .001; CFI = .80, TLI = .78, RMSEA

487   = .15, SRMR = .14; $\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 1561.02, p < .001), These results establish that these constructs are

488   distinct.

489   **Hypothesis Testing**

490   We first tested a path model where learning goal orientation was not included as a

491   moderator to assess the main effects and indirect effects (see Table 3). Consistent with

492   Hypothesis 1, leader humility is significantly associated with follower perceptions of leader

493   benevolence (b = .57, SE = .05, CR = 10.67, p <.001). Perceived leader benevolence is positively

494   related to affective commitment (b = .41, SE = .06, CR = 7.45, p <.001). We estimated 95% CIs

495   for the indirect effects based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. The result indicated that perceived

496   leader benevolence mediated the relationship of leader humility with affective commitment

497   (*unstandardized estimate* = .24, 95% CI [.16, .33]), supporting Hypothesis 4.

498   Next, we ran the moderated mediation model to assess the moderating effect and estimate

499   conditional indirect effects (see Table 4). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, when the interaction

500   term was entered into the analysis, employee learning goal orientation moderated the relationship

501   of leader humility and perceived leader benevolence (b = .13, SE = .04, CR = 3.66, p <.001). We

502   plotted the relationship of leader humility and perceived leader benevolence at ±1 SD of

503   employee learning goal orientation in Figure 2. Supporting Hypothesis 2, leader humility was

504   more strongly related to perceived leader benevolence at high levels of employee learning goal

505   orientation ($b = .76$, $SE = .08$, $CR = 9.71$, $p < .001$) than at low levels of employee learning goal

506   orientation ($b = .43$, $SE = .07$, $CR = 5.97$, $p < .001$). We next estimated the indirect effects at ± 1

507   SD of learning goal orientation with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The result suggested that when

508   learning goal orientation was high, the conditional indirect effect of leader humility, via

509   perceived leader benevolence, on affective commitment was significantly stronger

510   (*unstandardized estimate* = .33, 95% CI [.22, .45]) than the indirect effect when learning goal

511   orientation was low (*unstandardized estimate* = .18, 95% CI [.09, .27]). These findings supported

512   Hypothesis 2.

513   **Study 2**

514   Based on the findings from Study 1, we conducted Study 2 with the purpose of (1)

515   replicating our results in a separate sample of hotel employees and (2) investigating the

516   moderation of organizational justice as an organizational boundary condition. In Study 1, leader

517   benevolence and affective commitment were assessed at the same time. To reduce the possibility

518   of common method variance, in Study 2, we collected data regarding leader benevolence at Time

519   2 and affective commitment at Time 3 (Podsakoff, 2003).

520   **Participants and Procedures**

521   Full-time hotel employees from another hotel chain company in China voluntarily

522   participated in the study at three time points, with six-week time intervals in between. A total of

523   280 participants provided valid responses to the survey at Time 1. Of these participants, 233

524   employees also responded to the survey at Time 2 (response rate: 83.2%), and 209 of the 233

525 employees went on to provide responses to the survey at Time 3 (response rate of 74.6%). Forty-

526 six percent of the participants were female, with an average age of 31.7 years (SD = 10.0) and an

527 average tenure of 2.2 years in the organization (SD = 1.1). T-test analyses suggested that

528 employees who responded to the survey at all three time points did not differ significantly from

529 those who did not regarding their age (t = 1.26, ns), gender (t = -.42, ns), and tenure with the

530 organization (t = 1.66, ns),

531 **Measures**

532 At Time 1, participants reported their perceptions of leader humility, organizational

533 informational justice and their learning goal orientation. At Time 2, participants were asked to

534 evaluate lead benevolence. Participants rated their affective commitment at Time 3. Participants

535 responded to items using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 =

536 *Strongly Agree*.

537 *Leader humility* (α = .97; Time 1), *learning goal orientation* (α = .91; Time 1), *leader*

538 *benevolence* (α = .96; Time 2) and *affective commitment* (α = .95; Time 3) were assessed with the

539 same scale in Study 1. *Informational justice* (α = .97; Time 1) were measured using five items

540 from Colquitt (2001) organizational justice scale. Sample items include "The organization

541 (authority figure) has explained the procedures thoroughly," and "The organization (authority

542 figure) has communicated details in a timely manner." *Control variables* were the same as in

543 Study 1.

544 **Results**

545 **Measurement Model**

546   Table 5 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations and Table A2 presents the

547   distribution of variables. Prior to testing our hypotheses, we performed a series of confirmatory

548   factor analyses to test the measurement model. Table 6 presents the standardized factor loading

549   of scale items. The five-factor model provided adequate fit (χ^2 = 918.32, df = 367, p < .001; CFI

550   = .94, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .04) and fit the data significantly better based on chi-

551   square tests than the four-factor model combining leader humility and leader benevolence (χ^2 =

552   1919.033, df = 371, p < .001; CFI = .84, TLI = .82, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .11; $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) =

553   1000.71, p < .001), the four-factor model combining leader humility and learning goal

554   orientation (χ^2 = 1552.54, df = 371, p < .001; CFI = .88, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .11, SRMR = .07;

555    $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) = 634.22, p < .001), the four-factor model combining leader humility and affective

556   commitment (χ^2 = 2037.62, df = 371, p < .001; CFI = .83, TLI = .81, RMSEA = .13, SRMR

557   = .13; $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) = 1119.30, p < .001), the four-factor model combining leader benevolence and

558   affective commitment (χ^2 = 1556.86, df = 371, p < .001; CFI = .88, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .11,

559   SRMR = .06 , $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) = 638.54, p < .001), and the four-factor model combining informational

560   justice and affective commitment (χ^2 = 2180.78, df = 371 p < .001; CFI = .81, TLI = .79,

561   RMSEA = .13, SRMR = .17 , $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) = 1262.46, p < .001).

562   **Hypothesis Testing**

563   In Study 2, we followed the same steps as in Study 1 to test the hypothesized model. We

564   first tested a path model where learning goal orientation and informational justice was not

565   included as a moderator to assess the main effects and indirect effects (see Table 7). Consistent

566   with Hypothesis 1, leader humility is significantly associated with leader benevolence (b = .56,

567   SE = .06, CR = 10.15, p <.001). Perceived leader benevolence is positively related to affective

568   commitment (b = .56, SE = .06, CR = 9.11, p <.001). We estimated 95% CIs for the indirect

569   effects based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. The result indicated that perceived leader

570   benevolence mediated the relationship of leader humility with affective commitment

571   (*unstandardized estimate* = .31, 95% CI [.20, .45]), supporting Hypothesis 4.

572   Next, we ran the moderated mediation model to assess the moderating effect and estimate

573   conditional indirect effects (see Table 8). Consistent with Hypothesis 2 and 3, when the

574   interaction term was entered into the analysis, employee learning goal orientation and

575   informational justice moderated the relationship of leader humility and perceived leader

576   benevolence (b = .11, SE = .04, CR = 2.80, p = 005; b = .10, SE = .04, CR = 2.28, p =.022,

577   respectively). We plotted the relationship of leader humility and perceived leader benevolence at

578   ±1 SD of employee learning goal orientation and organizational justice in Figure 3 and 4.

579   Supporting Hypothesis 2, leader humility was more strongly related to perceived leader

580   benevolence at high levels of employee learning goal orientation (b = .70, SE = .10, CR = 6.89, p

581   <.001) than at low levels of employee learning goal orientation (b = .41, SE = .10, CR = 4.24, p

582   <.001). Supporting Hypothesis 3, leader humility was more strongly related to perceived leader

583   benevolence at high levels of informational justice (b = .70, SE = .12, CR = 5.70, p <.001) than at

584   low levels of informational justice (b = .41, SE = .09, CR = 4.80, p <.001). We next estimated the

585   indirect effects at ±1 SD of learning goal orientation and informational justice with 10,000

586   bootstrap samples. The result suggested that when learning goal orientation was high, the

587   conditional indirect effect of leader humility, via perceived leader benevolence, on affective

588   commitment was significantly stronger (*unstandardized estimate* = .36, 95% CI [.20, .57]) than

589   the indirect effect when learning goal orientation was low (*unstandardized estimate* = .21, 95%

590   CI [.09, .36]). Furthermore, when information justice was high, the conditional indirect effect of

591   leader humility, via perceived leader benevolence, on affective commitment was significantly

592 stronger (*unstandardized estimate* = .36, 95% CI [.20, .56]) than the indirect effect when

593 informational justice was low (*unstandardized estimate* = .21, 95% CI [.08, .38]). These findings

594 supported Hypothesis 2 and 3.

595 **General Discussion**

596 The empirical evidence regarding the seemingly universal salutary effects of leader humility

597 on employees' job attitudes and behaviors has started to be challenged by organizational

598 managerial scholars. First, with salient religious, moral and cultural implications, humility

599 should be viewed and interpreted within the macro-cultural context (Jankowski et al., 2019).

600 Deeply influenced by Confucianism, humility has long been regarded as a critical virtue that one

601 is expected to possess in the Chinese society. The Analects of Confucius described Confucius as

602 someone "being cordial, upright, courteous, temperate and complaisant", Confucius himself

603 repeatedly stressed the importance and benefits of being humble, including "Do you understand

604 what I have taught you? If you do, say yes; otherwise, just say no. This is wisdom", or "Three

605 people are walking. There must be someone among them who can be my teacher", or "He was

606 intelligent and diligent and did not consider it disgraceful to learn from persons in humble

607 position" (The Analects of Confucius, Ames and Rosemont, 2010). Rooted in this cultural

608 orientation, to what extent a leader is regarded being humble has become a barometer of how

609 favorable followers see their leaders in China (Ye et al., 2020). Existing research from different

610 Chinese samples has widely advocated followers' recognition of leader humility as it can result

611 in positive emotions, prosocial job attitudes and behaviors (Li et al., 2018; Zhang & Liu, 2019).

612 Therefore, from the ILT perspective, it is fair to argue that the Chinese moral/cultural

613 background facilitates people's forming process of leader prototype of leader humility. Namely,

614 Chinese tend to expect ideal leaders to be humble (Hu et al., 2018). Second, humility may be

615   perceived differently by different individuals. For instance, some are not comfortable with

616   positive attention given by others and consider it an emotional as well as a behavioral burden to

617   reciprocate (Qin et al., 2019). As humble leaders pay extra attention to followers by affirming

618   their strengths or taking advice from them (Owens et al., 2013), individual characteristics may

619   influence employees' perceptions of and reactions to leader humility. Third, in addition to

620   attending to individual differences, researchers must consider organizational factors when

621   investigating employees' assessments of leadership. As ILTs elucidate, the work environment

622   shapes followers' perceptions of a leader prototype, and this prototype serves as the point of

623   reference for assessing the actual leaders. Therefore, the current research aims for a more

624   comprehensive understanding of leader humility by exploring both individual and organizational

625   factors that influence employees' perceptions and attitudinal outcomes of leader humility. Across

626   two multi-wave field studies, we found that employee participants with stronger learning goal

627   orientations perceived humble leaders as more benevolent. In addition, when the employee

628   participants perceived higher levels of informational justice in the workplace, leader humility led

629   to stronger leader benevolence. Leader benevolence, in turn, boosted followers' affective

630   commitment. On the one hand, these findings challenge the conceptual claims that humble

631   leaders embody a lack of strength and that leader humility has few effects on employees (Owens,

632   2009). Leader humility has positive impacts on employees' affective commitment and

633   perceptions of leader benevolence to varying degrees, illuminating its prosocial nature. On the

634   other hand, subordinates' perceptions of the benevolence of humble leaders vary with the

635   subordinates' learning goal orientations and perceptions of informational justice in the

636   workplace. No research, to the best of our knowledge, has considered learning goal orientation

637   and informational justice as organizational factors that may influence employees' perceptions of

638   leaders. The results supplement the existing research on leader humility, which uniformly attests

639   to its benefits while largely neglecting contingent individual and organizational factors. Taken

640   together, the current set of studies contributes to the leader humility literature by revealing leader

641   humility's relationship with followers' affective commitment via leader benevolence. The

642   studies also illustrate how leader humility is perceived differently across individuals and work

643   contexts.

644   *Theoretical implications*

645   To advance the emerging literature on leader humility, we adopted the novel approach of

646   ILTs to gain insight into both individual and organizational contingencies on employees' views

647   of humble leaders. Emerging from the subordinate-centered approach to leadership, ILTs

648   indicate that employees hold relatively stable conceptions of an ideal leader in respect to

649   characteristics and competence (Shamir, 2007). Specifically, ILTs characterize leadership as the

650   subjective and individual perception of a follower (Sy, 2010). One assesses actual leaders by

651   resorting to the leadership prototype that represents their conception of the ideal leader; one

652   subsequently forms an attitudinal response based on this assessment (Shondrick & Lord, 2010).

653   Unlike dominant leadership styles such as transformational leadership and transactional

654   leadership, leader humility is considered a bottom-up leadership style characterized by poor self-

655   focus, low teachability, and little willingness to acknowledge others' strengths and contributions

656   (Owens & Hekman, 2012). While ILTs have tended to focus on the leader-centric leadership

657   types (Wilson et al., 2020), the present study explores how leader humility, as an employee-

658   centric leadership type, may affect employees' perceptions of their leaders. Our finding that

659   leader humility contributes to leader benevolence is consistent with the changed nature of the

660   workplace. As organizations have become increasingly group-based, employees tend to hold

661   more positive views of humble leaders as such leaders are better able to relate to their followers

662   and promote teamwork (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

663   Second, drawing upon ILTs, the current study suggests that employee learning goal

664   orientation strengthens the indirect effect of leader humility on followers' affective commitment

665   via leader benevolence, which extends the nomological network of leader humility by exploring

666   its attitudinal outcomes. According to ILTs, individuals develop prototypes regarding what

667   leaders should look like, and individuals' personal characteristics influence their assessments of

668   such leadership prototypes (Lord et al., 1982). For example, Kelly (1999) revealed that an

669   individual's leadership prototype is a function of their Big-Five Personality. An employee's

670   assessment of a leader depends on the extent to which the leader's characteristics and behaviors

671   are consistent with the prototypes. Humble leaders tend to appreciate the utility of learning

672   (Owens & Hekman, 2012), and this value dovetails with that of employees with strong learning

673   goal orientations. These employees tend to appreciate leader humility more than other

674   employees. They thus perceive humble leaders to be especially benevolent and develop stronger

675   emotional attachments. The current research is the first to examine how employee learning goal

676   orientation plays a role in employees' assessments of their humble leaders, thereby extending our

677   understanding of how personal characteristics can affect perception of humble leaders.

678   In addition to considering employee learning goal orientation, the present research explores

679   how informational justice, as an organizational factor, may influence employees' perceptions of

680   their leaders' benevolence. Since employees' leadership prototypes are developed via "exposure

681   to social events, interpersonal interactions, and prior experiences with leaders" (Epitropaki &

682   Martin, 2004, p. 293), organizational contexts activate certain leadership prototypes that further

683   influence followers' perceptions of actual leaders. Integrating ILTs and the social information

684   processing model (Lord et al., 1982, 2020), we argue that employees tend to utilize different

685   organizational cues such as informational justice to understand which kinds of characteristics or

686   behaviors are valued and expected within the organization, which in turn may affect the

687   employees' development of leader prototypes. ILTs not only help employees make sense of

688   leaders as dyad critical social "objects" with whom to interact but also guide their attitudinal and

689   behavioral responses to leaders' behavior (Offermann & Coats, 2018). Therefore, ILTs act as a

690   pertinent theoretical framework to explain both followers' individual differences and the

691   organizational contextual factors that influence how employees assess leader behaviors. In an

692   organization with a strong sense of informational justice, employees tend to expect leaders to be

693   sincere and honest. These employees accordingly tend to appreciate leader humility more. The

694   findings address the research call for understanding how organizational factors may affect

695   employees' expectations of leaders (Lord et al., 2020).

696   Finally, within the framework of ILTs, the present research contributes to the literature on

697   leader humility by examining employee learning goal orientation and organizational

698   informational justice as two boundary conditions that influence followers' assessments of

699   humble leaders. Wang et al. (2018) indicated that "as a fledgling theory, our understanding of

700   leader humility is still limited in several fundamental ways, including … the boundary conditions

701   for the effectiveness of leader humility" (p. 1019). Leader humility has been widely accepted in

702   the literature as a form of positive leadership that contributes to favorable employee behaviors

703   and job attitudes such as job engagement (Owens et al., 2015), psychological empowerment

704   (Jeung & Yoon, 2016), followers' well-being (Zhong et al., 2019), and voice behavior

705   (Bharanitharan et al., 2019). However, the present study shows that the effectiveness of leader

706   humility in promoting employee affective commitment relies on employee learning goal

707   orientation and organization informational justice. When employee learning goal orientation or

708   organization informational justice is low, the effectiveness of leader humility in fostering

709   employees' emotional bonds toward the organization may be largely decreased. This enhances

710   the understanding of leader humility by considering both organizational and individual

711   contingencies.

712   *Practical implications*

713   Innovation competition, the knowledge economy, and swift changes in information

714   technology mean that the hospitality industry environment is becoming increasingly complex

715   and characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). Meanwhile, the

716   rise of emerging customer groups, along with a younger workforce, poses further challenges for

717   effective management and competitiveness. It is increasingly difficult for leaders to face the

718   challenges and changes that may arise at any time on their own, and individual limitations begin

719   to emerge under these circumstances. For these reasons, both practitioners and researchers have

720   sought to elucidate other leadership styles that are distinct from traditional top-down leadership

721   and the "heroic" leader figure (Owens et al., 2013). Leader humility, which emphasizes humbly

722   drawing on followers' knowledge while acknowledging one's own limitations, stands out as one

723   of the original bottom-up leadership styles (Owens et al., 2013). Indeed, Ramana Murthy, the

724   global head of human resources for the Mumbai-based company Indian Hotels, as quoted in

725   Shellenbarger (2018), once said, "Humility is an emotional skill leaders need to have." The

726   company thus considers humility as a selection criterion when screening leaders.

727   The importance of humility for hospitality leaders stems from the characteristics of

728   hospitality work setting (Owens et al., 2015; Rego et al., 2017). First, as part of a people-serving

729   people industry, hospitality employees at all levels work seamlessly across different departments

730   to produce and deliver service (Wang et al., 2020). Employees' regular and frequent interactions

731   with customers and colleagues produce a great deal of firsthand information, and this

732   information provides the basis for managerial decision making. Leader humility, in this regard,

733   facilitates the exchange of information as humble leaders do not consider themselves to always

734   be right but are in fact willing to listen to others and learn, thereby contributing to team

735   cooperation and harmony. Second, the present findings reveal that leader humility encouraged

736   employee participants' affective commitment. This finding has implications for addressing the

737   longstanding issue of high turnover rates in the hospitality industry. High turnover rates have

738   various negative impacts (e.g., financial cost, talent loss, impaired service quality). Affective

739   commitment has been found to be a salient factor that prevents employees from leaving the

740   organization (Wong & Wong, 2017).

741   Humble leaders should consider the following practices that make them distinct from other

742   leaders: (1) admitting errors and limits when they are wrong; (2) taking delight in affirming the

743   strengths of others at work; and (3) willing to take advice from others (Owens et al., 2013). Two

744   clarifications must be made when applying leader humility to the workplace setting, however.

745   First, some people think that humility runs counter to decisiveness and competitiveness. This is a

746   misconception as humble leaders can be ambitious, but they tend to be calm and attribute their

747   success to other people. Second, humility can be disguised by leaders themselves or perceived as

748   false humility by followers (Bharanitharan et al., 2020). Leaders may pretend to be humble in

749   order to make a good impression. Therefore, leaders should not consider humility as a simple

750   impression management tool but instead genuinely practice this distinct leadership style that

751   involves systematic attitudinal and behavioral engagement. Leader humility can be fostered not

752   only by conducting screening tests (Hogan assessments) before hiring or promotion decisions are

753 made, but also by providing mentoring and training programs for existing leaders (Shellenbarger,

754 2018). Likewise, during the hiring process, situational questions can be asked to scrutinize

755 candidate leaders' humility tendencies. For example, a hiring manager might ask a prospective

756 leader to describe in detail failures that they experienced and how they handled them or what

757 they hope to learn most from other employees. If the candidate has difficulties recalling their

758 failures and providing subsequent responses, the person may not be inclined toward humility.

759   The present findings illustrate that followers' perceptions of humble leaders' benevolence

760 are dependent on an individual factor; namely, learning goal orientation. Specifically, followers

761 with strong learning goal orientations attributed greater leader benevolence to humble leaders.

762 Learning goal orientation is a desired adaptive motivational quality, especially among

763 organizations that strive for creativity and learning (Gong et al., 2009). By using a goal

764 orientation instrument, managers can strategically select employees with strong learning goal

765 orientations (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), as a strong learning goal orientation synergizes

766 with leader humility to promote employees' affective commitment. Although considered a stable

767 individual characteristic, a strong learning goal orientation can also be developed in the

768 workplace. Noordzij et al. (2013) proposed providing learning goal orientation training in the job

769 search context. The goal of this training would be to make employees aware of their potential for

770 improved performance via the pursuit of higher goals and constant learning. The training would

771 mainly consist of (1) consciously identifying past learning opportunities, (2) actively setting

772 learning goals, (3) discussing learning progress and seeking feedback, and (4) sharing one's

773 learning experience with others to identify potential learning possibilities. Hospitality managers

774 might consider providing this training to employees to develop their learning goal orientations.

775   Moreover, creating learning climate, and ensuring good relationship between leaders and

776   followers also increases one's learning orientation (Dragoni, 2005).

777   The current research also reveals that assessments of leader humility are influenced by

778   followers' perceptions of informational justice. When employees perceived greater informational

779   justice, they described the benevolence of humble leaders more favorably. Folger and

780   Cropanzano (2001) indicated that informational justice is assessed by employees on a daily basis,

781   and leaders have the discretionary power to advocate for informational justice. Therefore,

782   informational justice is a malleable organizational factor that leaders play decisive roles in

783   fostering. Critical to managers' communication with followers is both the content and means of

784   conveying information. Managers should take the initiative to provide employees with timely

785   and accurate information rather than lie or hide information. Particularly, managers should

786   consider communication with employees as constructive conversations rather than the unilateral

787   handing down of decisions. Adequate explanations regarding the considerations that went into a

788   decision should be provided to foster employees' understanding and reduce the risk of retaliation

789   (e.g., Skarlicki et al., 2008). In addition to considering the content they share with employees,

790   managers should attend to how they talk to employees, as employees' assessments of

791   interpersonal justice are based in part on their perceptions of leaders' sentiments toward them

792   (Scott et al., 2007). Effective communication is sincere, respectful, and indicative of

793   organizational benevolence. In the case of adverse decisions (e.g., layoffs, salary cuts), managers

794   can offer support within their reach (Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003). As such, a humble leader who

795   actively provides employees with accurate and timely information in a caring fashion

796   significantly contributes to employees' positive assessments of the leader and their affective

797   commitment to the organization. Taken together, hospitality leaders should adopt a systematic

798 mindset for managerial practice in that the leader humility needs to be complemented by

799 organizational informational justice as well as employees with high learning goal orientation, so

800 that the positive employee outcomes can be optimally achieved.

801 *Limitations and future research directions*

802 Some methodological advantages and limitations merit addressing in future research. First,

803 although the current set of studies adopted a multi-wave data collection approach to reduce the

804 likelihood of common method bias, future research should consider a cross-lagged panel design

805 to better test for causality among the studied variables. Second, while the use of two independent

806 data sources greatly increased the external validity of these studies, the research findings are

807 based only on the Chinese cultural context. Cultural characteristics may influence the studied

808 variables in different ways. Previous literature has revealed that the effects of leader-follower

809 relationship (e.g., LMX, LMX differentiation, servant leadership, benevolent leadership, leader

810 humility) vary dependent on power distance difference (e.g., Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Lin et

811 al., 2018; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017; Sui et al., 2016). For example, Anand et al. (2018)

812 found that the positive effect of leader-member exchange (LMX) are strengthened when the

813 power distance is low. It is possible that the leader humility tends to be more positively assessed

814 in context of high power distance. Moreover, cultural variation exists in ILTs (Junker & Van

815 Dick, 2014). For example, the individualism cultural dimension was found to influence

816 followers' expectations of ideal leaders, with Chinese employees expecting their leaders to be

817 sincere and care for the collective interest (Ling et al., 2000). Moreover, as Confucian thought

818 emphasizes harmonious and balanced interpersonal relationships, Chinese employees give much

819 weight to fair treatment in terms of the information they are able to access (Yeo et al., 2017).

820 Therefore, the Chinese cultural context, which is characterized by collectivism, high-power

821 distance, and harmony, may influence Chinese employees' perceptions of leader humility, as

822 well as their assessments of informational justice. Future research should attempt to replicate the

823 current research findings in individualistic, low-power distance, and non-Confucian cultural

824 contexts. Third, building on the current findings, future research should continue exploring

825 contingent factors that influence employees' perceptions of leader humility, especially the cause

826 of perceived "false humility" due to a lack of sincerity (e.g., Bharanitharan et al., 2020). Last,

827 while the outcome variables in the current research (i.e., leader benevolence and affective

828 commitment) are pertinent to employees' self-reports, future research might consider collecting

829 other outcome variables such as supervisor-rated performance or actual turnover rates that are

830 derived from other sources.

831 **Conclusion**

832   The current set of studies reveals that leader humility contributes to followers' perceptions

833 of leader benevolence, which in turn are positively associated with affective commitment in the

834 hospitality work setting. The impact of leader humility on followers' perceptions of leader

835 benevolence is influenced by followers' (1) learning goal orientations and (2) perceptions of

836 informational justice. Taken together, these findings indicate that although leader humility is

837 generally an important contributor to followers' perceptions of leader benevolence and levels of

838 affective commitment, both individual and organizational factors help determine the impact of

839 leader humility. Indeed, there are individual variations in how employees respond to leader

840 humility. To gain more comprehensive insight into leader humility, it is necessary to conduct

841 research exploring both individual and organizational boundary conditions across cultural

842 contexts.

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1104 **Tables and Figures**

1105 **Table 1**

1106 Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations in Study 1

	Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	Gender	0.56	0.50							
2	Age	37.24	10.2	-.16**						
3	Tenure	2.83	1.31	.06	.39**					
4	Leader humility	5.67	1.34	-.06	.00	-.06	(.96)			
5	Learning goal orientation	5.79	1.30	-.16**	.06	-.04	.49**	(.91)		
6	Leader benevolence	5.29	1.51	-.16**	.06	-.1	.52**	.27**	(.96)	
7	Affective commitment	5.67	1.53	-.15**	.24**	.03	.32**	.40**	.49**	(.97)

1107 *Note. M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard deviation. Gender was coded as 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*;

1108 Cronbach's αs are presented on the diagonal.

1109 *p < .05; **p < .01.

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1112 **Table 2**

1113 Convergent and Discriminant Validity Test Results in Study 1

Construct	Indicator	Standardized Loading	CR	AVE
Leader Humility	1	.80	.96	.74
	2	.71		
	3	.75		
	4	.91		
	5	.87		
	6	.93		
	7	.94		
	8	.87		
	9	.94		
Learning Goal Orientation	1	.91	.92	.75
	2	.68		
	3	.94		
	4	.91		
Leader Benevolence	1	.91	.96	.82
	2	.83		
	3	.89		
	4	.94		
	5	.94		
Affective Commitment	1	.87	.97	.84
	2	.89		
	3	.93		
	4	.85		
	5	.97		
	6	.97		

1114 *Note.* CR = Composite Reliability. AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

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Table 3

Study 1: Summary of Results of the Mediation Model

Direct Path	Coefficient	*SE*	*CR*
Leader humility →Leader benevolence	.57***	.05	10.67
Gender→Leader benevolence	-.31*	.14	-2.14
Age→Leader benevolence	.01	01	1.55
Tenure →Leader benevolence	-.09	.06	-1.59
Leader humility →Affective commitment	.13*	.06	2.07
Leader benevolence→Affective commitment	.41***	.06	7.45
Gender→Affective commitment	-.16***	.15	-1.12
Age→Affective commitment	.03***	.01	4.12
Tenure→Affective commitment	.02	.06	.27
R²			
Leader benevolence		.29	
Affective commitment		.30	

Indirect Effect	Estimate	95% CI
Leader humility→Leader benevolence→Affective commitment	.24	[.16, .33]

Note. N = 397. Unstandardized estimates are reported. *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SE* = Standard Error; *CR* = Critical Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval. Confidence intervals are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.
*p < .05; ***p < .001.

Table 4
Study 1: Summary of Results of the Moderated Mediation Model

Direct Path	Coefficient	*SE*	*CR*
Leader humility→Leader benevolence	.60***	.06	9.92
Learning goal orientation→Leader benevolence	.06	.07	0.90
Leader humility × Learning goal orientation→Leader benevolence	.13***	.04	3.66
Gender→Leader benevolence	-.28	.14	-1.93
Age→Leader benevolence	.01	.01	1.36
Tenure→Leader benevolence	-.08	.06	-1.43
Leader humility →Affective commitment	-.04	.07	-0.55
Learning goal orientation→Affective commitment	.32***	.07	5.01
Leader humility × Learning goal orientation →Affective commitment	-.04	.04	-1.18
Leader benevolence→Affective commitment	.43***	.05	7.90
Gender→Affective commitment	-.05	.14	-0.35
Age→Affective commitment	.03***	.01	3.94
Tenure→Affective commitment	.03	.06	0.45
R²			
Leader benevolence		.31	
Affective commitment		.37	

Conditional Indirect Effect	Estimate	95% CI
Low Learning goal orientation (-1 *SD*)	.18	[.09, .27]
High Learning goal orientation (+1 *SD*)	.33	[.22, .45]

Note. N = 397. Unstandardized estimates are reported. *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SE* = Standard Error; *CR* = Critical Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval. Confidence intervals are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.
***p < .001.

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1130 **Table 5**

1131 Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations in Study 2

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Gender	.46	.50								
2	Age	31.74	10.03	-.02							
3	Tenure	2.16	1.09	-.12[*]	.45[**]						
4	Leader humility	5.62	1.29	.07	.05	-.01	(.97)				
5	Learning goal orientation	5.52	1.29	.11	.07	.05	.55[**]	(.91)			
6	Informational justice	5.10	1.52	.08	-.06	.03	.64[**]	.39[**]	(.97)		
7	Leader benevolence	5.28	1.32	.14[*]	.05	-.05	.56[**]	.40[**]	.47[**]	(.96)	
8	Affective commitment	5.44	1.28	.06	.17[*]	.12	.50[**]	.45[**]	.37[**]	.68[**]	(.95)

1132 *Note. M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard deviation. Gender was coded as 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*;

1133 Cronbach's αs are presented on the diagonal.

1134 [*]p < .05; [**]p < .01.

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1136 **Table 6**

1137 Convergent and Discriminant Validity Test Results in Study 2

Construct	Indicator	Standardized Loading	CR	AVE
Leader Humility	1	.81	.97	.80
	2	.75		
	3	.81		
	4	.93		
	5	.93		
	6	.94		
	7	.94		
	8	.94		
	9	.95		
Learning Goal Orientation	1	.90	.92	.74
	2	.73		
	3	.93		
	4	.86		
Informational Justice	1	.91	.97	.87
	2	.96		
	3	.98		
	4	.92		
	5	.90		
Leader Benevolence	1	.90	.96	.82
	2	.89		
	3	.92		
	4	.93		
	5	.88		
Affective Commitment	1	.85	.95	.78
	2	.84		
	3	.93		
	4	.80		
	5	.96		
	6	.89		

1138 *Note.* CR = Composite Reliability. AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

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1140 **Table 7**
1141 Study 2: Summary of Results of the Mediation Model

Direct Path	Unstandardized Coefficient	*SE*	*CR*
Leader humility →Leader benevolence	.56***	.06	10.15
Gender→Leader benevolence	.20	.15	1.33
Age→Leader benevolence	.01	01	0.88
Tenure →Leader benevolence	-.03	.07	-0.46
Leader humility →Affective commitment	.17**	.06	2.61
Leader benevolence→Affective commitment	.56***	.06	9.11
Gender→Affective commitment	-.03	.13	-0.23
Age→Affective commitment	.01*	.01	1.99
Tenure→Affective commitment	.08	.07	1.26
R²			
Leader benevolence	.32		
Affective commitment	.49		

Indirect Effect	Estimate	95% CI
Leader humility→Leader benevolence→Affective commitment	.31	[.20, .45]

1142 *Note. N* = 280. Unstandardized estimates are reported. *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SE* = Standard Error; *CR*
1143 = Critical Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval. Confidence intervals are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.
1144 *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
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Table 8
Study 2: Summary of Results of the Moderated Mediation Model

Direct Path	Coefficient	*SE*	*CR*
Leader humility→Leader benevolence	.56***	.08	6.58
Learning goal orientation→Leader benevolence	.11	.06	1.76
Informational justice→Leader benevolence	.10	.06	1.66
Leader humility × Learning goal orientation→Leader benevolence	.11**	.04	2.80
Leader humility × Informational justice→Leader benevolence	.10*	.04	2.28
Gender→Leader benevolence	.13	.14	0.95
Age→Leader benevolence	.01	.01	1.31
Tenure→Leader benevolence	-.06	.07	-0.86
Leader humility →Affective commitment	.12	.10	1.27
Learning goal orientation→Affective commitment	16*	.06	2.50
Informational justice→Affective commitment	-.004	.06	-0.08
Leader humility × Learning goal orientation →Affective commitment	.06	.05	1.28
Leader humility × Informational justice →Affective commitment	-.01	.04	-0.19
Leader benevolence→Affective commitment	.51***	.07	7.85
Gender→Affective commitment	-.03	.13	-0.25
Age→Affective commitment	.01	.01	1.71
Tenure→Affective commitment	.09	.07	1.30
R^2			
Leader benevolence		.43	
Affective commitment		.51	

Conditional Indirect Effect	Estimate	95% CI
Low Learning goal orientation (-1 *SD*)	.21	[.09, .36]
High Learning goal orientation (+1 *SD*)	.36	[.20, .57]
Low Informational justice (-1 *SD*)	.21	[.08, .38]
High Informational justice (+1 *SD*)	.36	[.20, .56]

Note. $N = 280$. Unstandardized estimates are reported. *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SE* = Standard Error; *CR* = Critical Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval. Confidence intervals are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

1147   **Figure 1**

1148   The Conceptual Model

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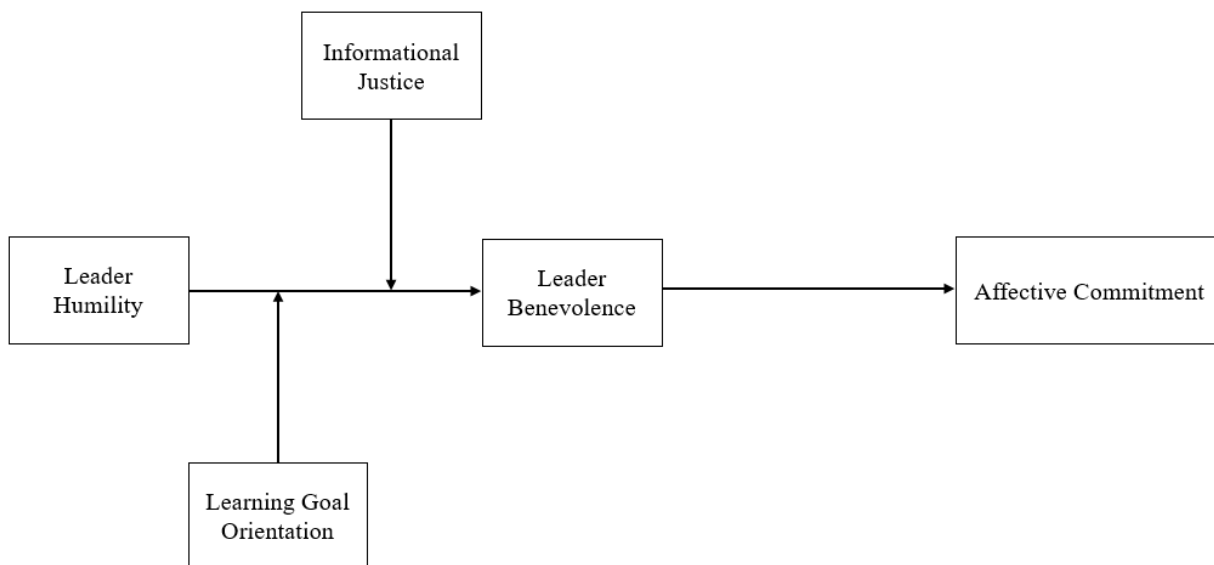
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1151   **Figure 2**

1152   The moderation effect of learning goal orientation on the relationship between leader humility
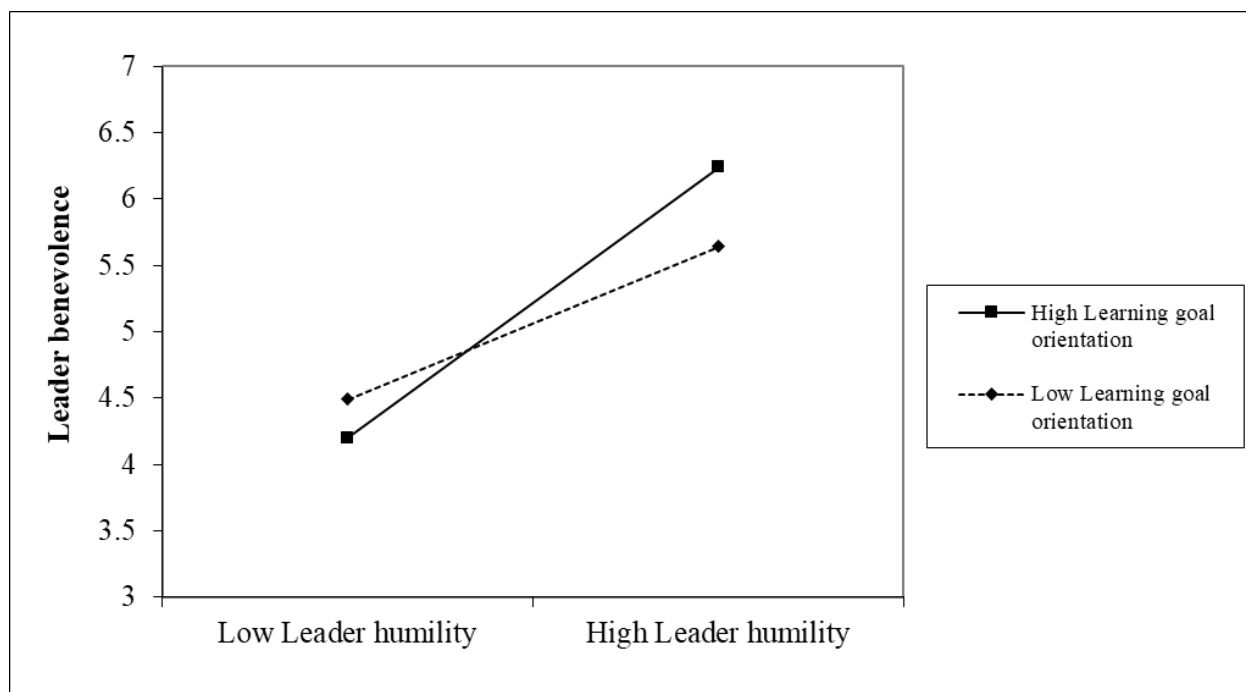1153   and leader benevolence in Study 1
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1157 **Figure 3**
1158 The moderation effect of learning goal orientation on the relationship between leader humility
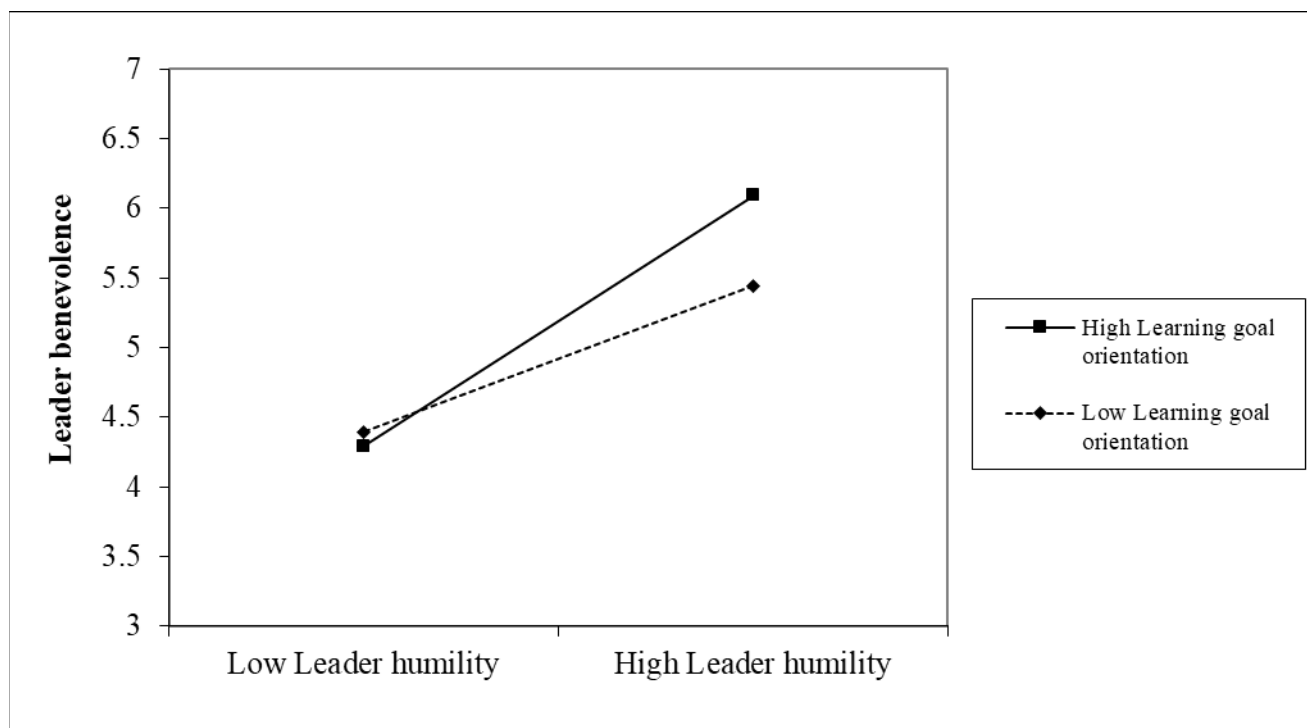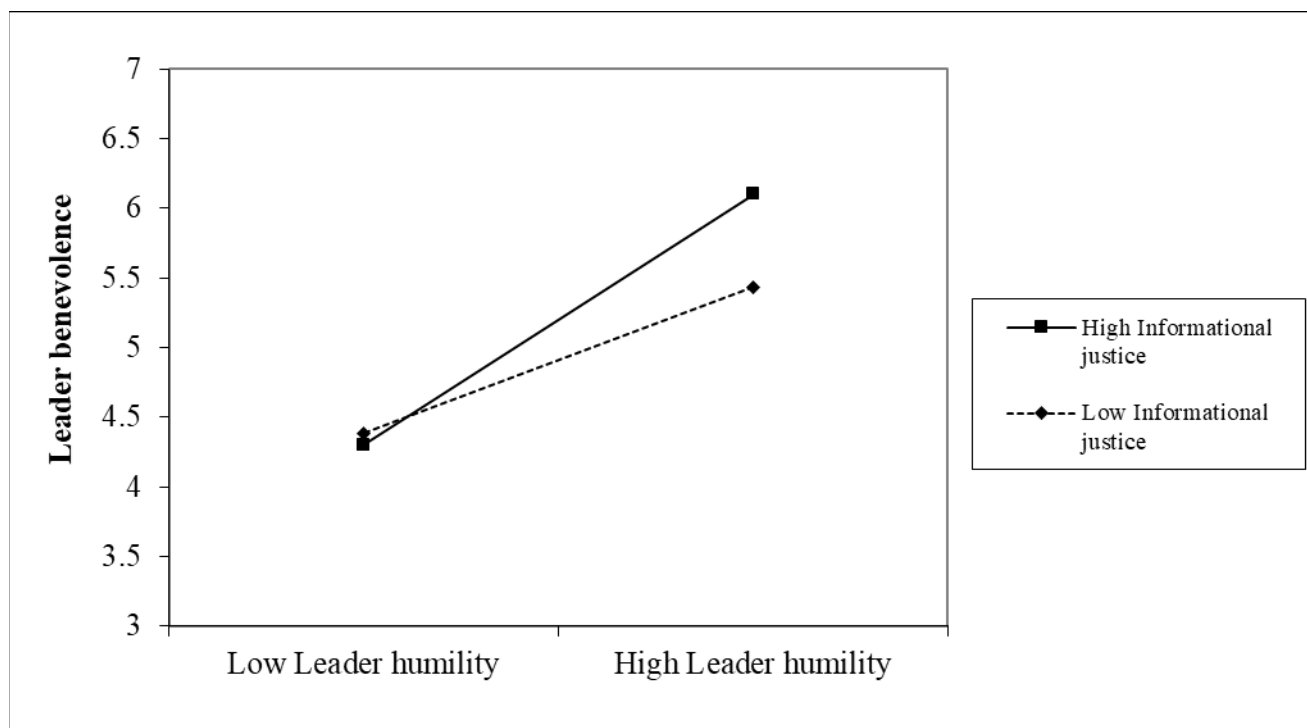1159 and leader benevolence in Study 2
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1165 **Figure 4**
1166 The moderation effect of informational justice on the relationship between leader humility and
1167 leader benevolence in Study 2
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1174 **Appendix**

1175 Table A1

1176 *Descriptive Statistics in Study 1*

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Leader humility	5.67	1.34	-.94	.26
Learning goal orientation	5.79	1.30	-1.04	.90
Leader benevolence	5.29	1.51	-.66	.003
Affective commitment	5.67	1.53	-1.15	.78

Note. SD = Standard deviation.

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1181   Table A2

1182   *Descriptive Statistics in Study 2*

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Leader humility	5.62	1.29	-.74	-.09
Learning goal orientation	5.52	1.29	-.49	-.42
Informational justice	5.10	1.52	-.26	-.91
Leader benevolence	5.28	1.32	-.10	-.82
Affective commitment	5.44	1.28	-.20	-1.14

Note. SD = Standard deviation.

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