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Research paper

Leading with Humility: A Strategic Advantage for Employees Performance in Indonesia Chemical Industry Innovation

Bambang Dwi Suseno [1] *, Alamsyah [1], Leistar Adiguna [2], Basrowi [1]

[1] *Post Graduate Master of Management, Universitas Bina Bangsa, Indonesia*
[2] *Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanudin Banten, Indonesia*
**Corresponding author E-mail: bbambangdwi28@gmail.com*

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of humble leadership behavior in enhancing employee performance within Indonesia's downstream chemical manufacturing sector. It addresses discrepancies in prior research on team member diversity and its impact on performance, specifically in Bekasi Regency, West Java. Additionally, it examines team spirit as a predictor variable. Using proportional random sampling, 185 respondents were selected from three companies representing a larger population of nine firms. Constructs were clearly operationalized: team spirit was measured by loyalty, cooperation, and creativity, while diversity was assessed in terms of knowledge, abilities, and expertise. Humble leadership behavior was defined by innovation, communication, motivation, and control, while employee performance was evaluated based on outcome quality, responsibility, and independence. Employing SmartPLS version 3.3.5 for data analysis, the study found that humble leadership significantly mediates the relationship between team member diversity and employee performance but does not mediate the link between team spirit and performance. These insights underscore the importance of diversity and leadership development in improving employee outcomes. The study enhances theoretical understanding by providing empirical evidence on leadership mediation and identifies key areas for further exploration in organizational behavior research.

Keywords: *Leading With Humility; Chemical Industry; Sustainable Growth; Innovation.*

1. Introduction

The chemical industry plays a crucial role in the economy of Indonesia, contributing significantly to the nation's GDP. However, recent data indicate a notable decline in performance, highlighting a gap between targeted and actual production outcomes. This study investigates the impact of leadership behavior, specifically humble leadership, on employee performance in Indonesia's chemical sector. By focusing on humble leadership, which encourages openness, feedback, and a focus on team strengths, this research aims to explore its potential to mitigate the performance gap observed in this sector.

Humble leadership has gained attention in recent years for its positive effects on employee engagement, trust, and innovation. However, its application in industrial and process-driven sectors, particularly in emerging economies like Indonesia, remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how humble leadership can enhance employee performance in the context of team dynamics, diversity, and organizational culture within Indonesia's chemical industry. In doing so, it contributes to the theoretical understanding of leadership in industrial settings and offers practical insights for improving workforce productivity and operational efficiency.

The manuscript builds on existing literature on leadership behavior, team diversity, and performance management, while introducing a novel focus on humble leadership in the chemical industry. The study is significant not only for its empirical rigor but also for its relevance to the interdisciplinary fields of leadership, economics, and organizational behavior. By examining the direct and indirect effects of leadership behavior on team performance and organizational outcomes, this research provides valuable insights into how leadership practices can be leveraged to drive economic performance in an emerging market context.

The comparative figures between targeted and achieved production volumes are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

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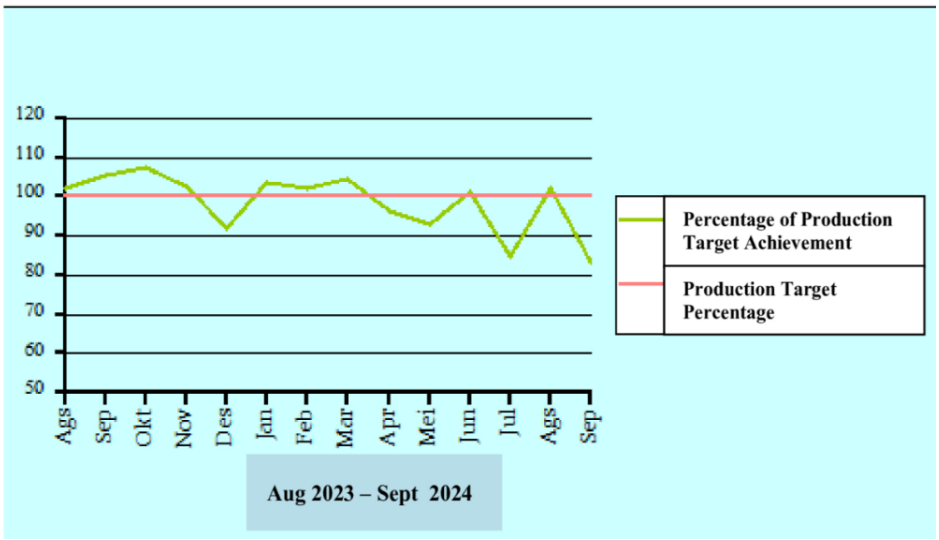


Fig. 1: Production Performance Metrics: August 2023 – September 2024.

Source: Indonesia Ministry of Industry, 2025.

Recent studies increasingly highlight humble leadership as a strategic lever for enhancing employee performance, particularly in volatile and high-risk industries such as chemical manufacturing (Owens et al., 2013; Rego et al., 2017). These leadership traits align well with the demands of dynamic environments, where adaptability and collaboration are critical. Research by Mushtaque (2021) and Khan et al. (2019) further supports the notion that team diversity—in terms of knowledge, skills, and experiences—can enhance team performance. They argue that diverse teams offer broader perspectives and more creative problem-solving capacity. In this context, humble leaders may play a crucial role in harnessing the potential of diverse teams by fostering inclusion and psychological safety. However, the relationship between team diversity and performance is not consistently supported. Al-Ahmad et al. (2017) and Joseph & Selvaraj (2015) found no significant correlation, suggesting the benefits of diversity are context-dependent, particularly in hierarchical settings like Indonesia's chemical industry, where these dynamics remain underexplored. The sector has seen a decline in productivity and performance (BPS, 2020), coinciding with challenges in industries where traditional leadership styles, such as authoritarian models, struggle to maintain morale and performance (Zhang et al., 2021). While humble leadership has been studied in sectors like technology and healthcare (Wang et al., 2022), its effectiveness in process-driven industries like chemicals remains unclear, especially regarding operational efficiency and innovation. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the role of humble leadership in improving performance in Indonesia's chemical industry (Chiu et al., 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1. The role of team spirit in enhancing organizational performance

Team spirit is a cornerstone of sustainable organizational success, transcending mere collaboration to foster unity, camaraderie, and shared goals (Boyt et al., 2017; Phina et al., 2018; Gottlander et al., 2021). This collective drive nurtures loyalty and pride, resulting in long-term employee engagement and mutual respect (Zargham et al., 2020; Teng & Barrows, 2017). When employees operate in a supportive environment, their success becomes intertwined with the team's and organization's, enhancing efficiency and resource optimization (Wulandari et al., 2024). Performance, in this context, extends beyond task completion to reflect accountability, motivation, and quality work, with performance indicators like quality, adaptability, and teamwork being essential benchmarks (Vratskikh et al., 2016; Robbins, 2016).
However, performance cannot thrive without fair compensation systems. As Jufrizen and Kandhita (2021) argue, inadequate remuneration can harm morale and productivity, while proper rewards align employee contributions with organizational goals (Munawir & Suseno, 2024). Thus, team spirit, combined with robust performance measurement and rewarding systems, becomes a strategic asset for long-term success.
H1: The stronger the team spirit, the more humble the leadership behavior.

2.2. Diversity of team members and humble leadership behavior

Team diversity, conceptualized by Ardakani et al. (2016) in internal, external, and organizational dimensions, significantly influences team dynamics and performance (Robbins & Judge, 2015; Emich & Vincent, 2020). While diversity can enhance creativity, adaptability, and learning, it may also hinder collaboration if not managed effectively, leading to misunderstandings and misaligned expectations (Horwitz, 2007).
Humble leadership, which values openness, feedback, and collaboration, is key to managing diverse teams. Such leaders foster psychological safety, trust, and inclusivity, driving innovation and shared decision-making (Pramudianto, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2019). The alignment with servant leadership principles (Greenleaf, 1977) further supports this role, as humble leaders prioritize team growth and collective success. This leadership style helps mitigate the potential conflicts that arise in diverse teams, enabling them to leverage their differences effectively (Suseno et al., 2019; Suseno & Dwiatmadja, 2016).
Thus, humble leadership is central to managing team diversity and enhancing team performance, whether directly or through mediation. Future research should explore this dynamic in various contexts, especially multicultural environments and inter-organizational collaborations. Based on empirical findings and theoretical insights from relevant studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:
H2: Greater diversity in the team positively influences humble leadership behavior in managers.

2.3. The relationship between team spirit and employee performance

Team spirit, defined as camaraderie, loyalty, and collective prioritization, significantly influences employee behavior and performance outcomes. It fosters mutual care, pride, and a culture that values collective goals over personal interests (Boyt et al., 2017; Phina et al., 2018; Gottlander et al., 2021). This environment encourages a team-oriented mindset, boosting cooperation and synergy in achieving organizational objectives (Zargham et al., 2020; Suseno & Mukhlis, 2023).
A supportive, family-like environment reinforces long-term loyalty and collaboration (Teng & Barrows, 2017; Cho et al., 2021), while shared values and mutual respect enhance motivation and performance (Von Bonsdorff et al., 2020). Strong team spirit consolidates organizational resources and builds a purpose-driven culture, contributing to a more connected workforce (Dessler & Rachmawati, 2018).
Employee performance, defined by the ability to complete tasks responsibly and efficiently, depends on factors like knowledge, quality, and collaboration (Vratskikh et al., 2016; Robbins, 2016). Performance is also influenced by extrinsic factors, such as fair compensation, which is essential to prevent dissatisfaction and underperformance (Jufrizen & Kandhita, 2021; Munawir & Suseno, 2024). Thus, fostering team spirit alongside equitable reward systems is crucial for sustaining high performance. The following hypotheses are proposed:
H3: Team spirit has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

2.4. The relationship between team member diversity and employee performance

Team diversity has become central to modern organizational studies, encompassing a range of human differences, from personality traits and internal characteristics to external dimensions and organizational affiliations (Ardakani et al., 2016). These include both innate features like age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as acquired aspects such as education, work experience, and organizational roles (Hellriegel et al., 2004; Phina et al., 2018).
Diversity at the team level offers both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it brings richer knowledge, varied problem-solving approaches, and broader perspectives, contributing to innovation and improved performance (Robbins & Judge, 2015; George et al., 2008; Emich & Vincent, 2020). Diverse teams benefit from a wider skillset, enhancing decision-making and task execution (Kozlowski et al., 2017; Horwitz, 2007). However, if poorly managed, diversity can lead to communication breakdowns, misaligned expectations, and conflicts, reducing cohesion and efficiency (Cook & Glass, 2015; Hellriegel et al., 2004). Successful integration of diversity depends on organizational culture and processes, ensuring collaboration, role clarity, and mutual respect (Belbin, 2017; Horwitz, 2007).
Employee performance, shaped by knowledge application, quality, and adaptability, is also influenced by motivational factors like equitable rewards and supportive structures (Vratskikh et al., 2016; Jufrizen & Kandhita, 2021; Suseno, 2024). Therefore, the impact of diversity on performance is mediated by organizational support, inclusion, and role design.
H4: Team member diversity has a significant effect on employee performance, with effective diversity management acting as a moderating factor.

2.5. The relationship between humble leadership behavior and employee performance

Humble leadership is recognized as a transformative approach that fosters trust, empowerment, and long-term engagement. Humble leaders are self-aware, open to feedback, and focus on elevating others rather than asserting dominance (Pramudianto, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). Rooted in the servant leadership philosophy, this leadership style emphasizes facilitation over authority and promotes psychological safety, collaboration, and mutual respect (Ann Gilley, 2018; Bass & Avolio, 2018; Binny & Wilkie, 2012).
Humble leaders guide change through empathy, example, and openness, becoming catalysts for organizational transformation, particularly in environments where agility and creativity are essential (Zhu et al., 2019). By fostering a sense of belonging and purpose, humble leadership enhances intrinsic motivation, improving key performance indicators such as quality, timeliness, effectiveness, and employee independence (Dessler & Rachmawati, 2018; Vratskikh et al., 2016). Additionally, when supported by fair compensation and recognition, humble leadership reduces turnover, strengthens commitment, and ensures sustained performance (Jufrizen & Kandhita, 2021; Suseno & Barowi, 2023). The following hypotheses are proposed:
H5: Humble leadership behavior has a positive and significant influence on employee performance through the development of trust, empowerment, and motivation.

2.6. The relationship between diversity of team members and team spirit

Team diversity, as conceptualized by Ardakani et al. (2016), includes differences in personality, internal traits (e.g., age, gender), external dimensions (e.g., education, religion), and organizational factors (e.g., role, work location). This broad range of perspectives can significantly enrich a team, offering varied insights and experiences. Hellriegel et al. (2004) distinguish between primary (innate) and secondary (acquired) diversity traits, reinforcing diversity's multidimensional nature.
The impact of diversity on team spirit depends on how well it is managed (Horwitz, 2007; Kozlowski et al., 2017). When managed effectively, diversity can enhance collaboration, empathy, and mutual learning, as team members with different perspectives contribute to stronger team cohesion (Robbins & Judge, 2015; Emich & Vincent, 2020). However, if poorly managed, it can lead to communication barriers, subgroup formation, or misaligned values, undermining team unity (Phina et al., 2018; Suseno et al., 2021).
Team spirit, rooted in shared identity and mutual respect (Boyt et al., 2017; Gottlander et al., 2021), thrives in inclusive environments where individuals feel accepted and valued. Such environments foster positive interdependence, trust, and motivation (Zargham et al., 2020; Suseno, 2019). When diversity is embraced and well-integrated, it enhances team spirit by promoting psychological safety, understanding, and collective motivation, contributing to long-term organizational success (Cizmaş et al., 2020). The following hypotheses are proposed:
H6: Diversity of team members positively influences team spirit by fostering mutual respect, shared purpose, and inclusive collaboration when managed effectively.
Based on an in-depth review of previous studies and the development of relevant hypotheses, the proposed empirical research model is illustrated in Figure 2.

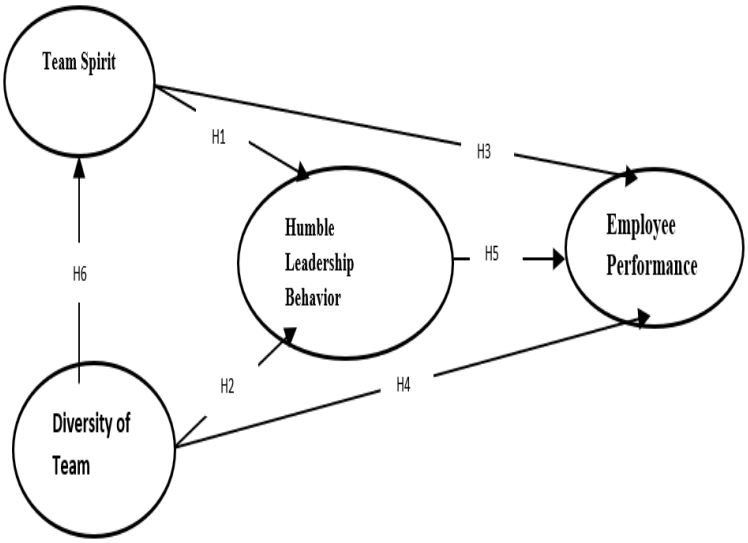


Fig. 2: Empirical Research Mode.

3. Data and Methodology

This research uses a descriptive and verifiable approach to analyze the characteristics of research variables and test hypotheses with field data. The sampling method is proportionate random sampling, with the sample size determined by population size at each research location, following Isaac and Michael's (2000) guidelines. Chemical enterprises in Bekasi Regency, employing more than 350 workers, were selected as samples, including Syno Chemical Rays (430 employees), Inkote Indo (370 employees), and Flint Group Indo (520 employees). Companies with fewer than 350 employees, such as Plastics Industry Technology (328 employees), were excluded.

Table 1: Population and Research Sample

Company	Number of employees	Number of samples
Chemical Syno Rays, Ltd.	520	99
Inkote Indo, Ltd.	370	70
Flint Group Indo, Ltd.	430	81
Total	1,320	250

Calculation A (520/1,320)*250 = 99 and its opponents.

PLS SEM (PartialLeastSquare Structural Equation Model) was employed to analyze the data in this study. PLS SEM must go through at least five stages, each of which has an impact on the next, namely (1) model configuration, (2) algorithmic analysis technique determination, (3) resampling method determination, (4) drawing a path diagram, and (5) model evaluation (Ghozali et al., 2015). In the meantime, the mediation variable will be tested using the Sobel Test (Hair, 2013), and the value z will be obtained using the formula below:

$$Z = \frac{a\ x\ b}{\sqrt{(b^2SE_a^2) + (a^2SE_b^2)}}$$

Fig. 3: Sobel Test Formula (Hair, 2013).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive

Among the 185 respondents, the majority were male (143, 77.3%) due to the physical demands of the chemical industry's 24-hour, rotating shift schedules. The largest age group was 20-35 years (83, 44.9%), followed by 36-50 years (77, 41.6%), and those over 50 years old (25, 13.5%). Most respondents were high school graduates (111, 60%), with fewer holding undergraduate (6, 36.8%) or postgraduate (6, 3.2%) degrees. Regarding work experience, 43% had 5-10 years of service, 47% had less than 5 years, and 23.2% had over 10 years. For the production department, exceptional abilities were not required.

4.2. Model testing

The SmartPLS data analysis, shown in Table 4.57, reveals that all indicators have loading factor values above 0.70, indicating high reliability and strong convergent validity. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed the 0.50 threshold, confirming that each construct explains more than half of its indicators' variance. These results, detailed in Table 2, support the validity of the measurement model, confirming its suitability for further structural model analysis.

Table 2: AVE Values

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Diversity of Team Members	0,751
Employee Performance	0,785
Humble Leadership Behavior	0,764
Team Spirit	0,727

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2024).

If the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value exceeds 0.50, the model is considered to have good discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4.48, all constructs in this study have AVE values greater than 0.50. The lowest AVE value is 0.727, found in the Team Spirit variable (X2), while the highest AVE value is 0.785, associated with the Employee Performance variable (Z). These values indicate that each construct meets the minimum threshold for discriminant validity, as recommended in measurement model evaluation.

Table 3: Reliability Composite Testing

	Composite Reliability
Diversity of Team Members	0,954
Employee Performance	0,971
Humble Leadership Behavior	0,958
Team Spirit	0,919

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2024).

The results of the composite reliability analysis indicate that all latent variables in the research model have composite reliability values exceeding both 0.70 and 0.90, which signifies a high level of internal consistency. These values confirm that the indicators associated with each latent variable consistently and reliably measure their respective constructs.
The Cronbach's Alpha values, as presented in Table 4, further support the reliability of the measurement model. The SmartPLS output demonstrates that each construct meets the recommended threshold, reinforcing the robustness of the instrument used in this study.

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha Testing

	Cronbach's Alpha
Diversity of Team Members	0,942
Employee Performance	0,966
Humble Leadership Behavior	0,947
Team Spirit	0,882

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2024).

The value of the analysis of alpha Cronbach's is reinforced by the dependability of each latent variable, where the results of each alpha cronbachs obtained are larger than 0.60, indicating that each indicator of latent variables has consistent consistency.
Bootstrap calculations are performed on SmartPLS to provide the required results in the inner model analysis, resulting in the following research models as presented in Figure 3:

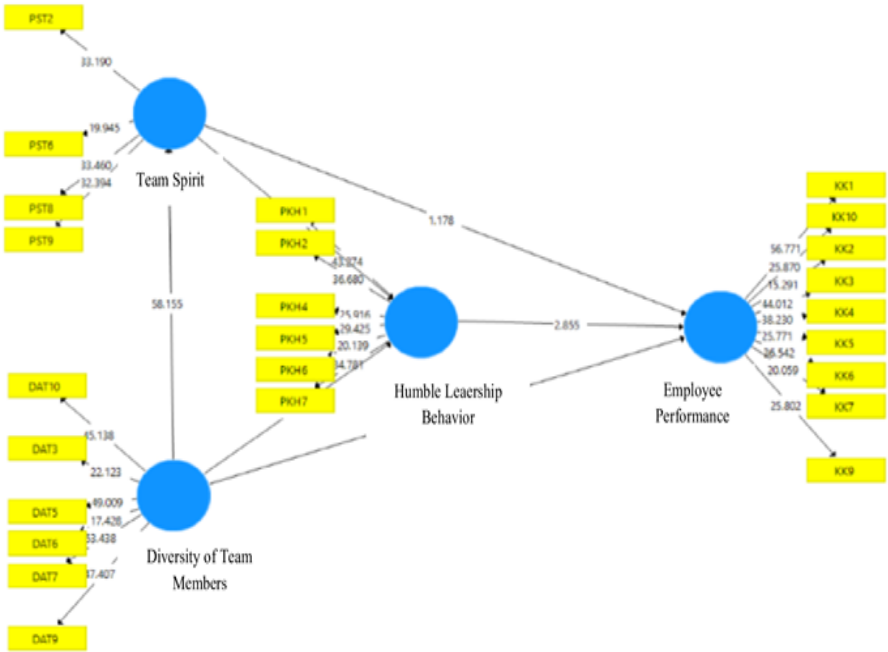


Fig. 3: Bootstrapping PLS Results.

4.3. Hypothesis testing

The path coefficient values for each hypothesized relationship were obtained through bootstrapping analysis using SmartPLS. Among the relationships tested, the strongest path coefficient was observed between team members' diversity and the team spirit predictor, with a value of 0.937, indicating a very strong positive influence. In contrast, the weakest path coefficient was found between team spirit and employee performance, with a value of 0.145, suggesting a relatively modest effect. The detailed results of the path coefficient analysis are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Mean Results, STDEV, T-Values, and P-Values

	Original Sample (O)
Diversity of Team Members -> Employee Performance	0,242
Diversity of Team Members -> Humble Leadership Behavior	0,779
Diversity of Team Members -> Team Spirit	0,937
Humble Leadership Behavior - > Employee Performance	0,513
Team Spirit -> Employee Performance	0,145
Team Spirit -> Humble Leadership Behavior	0,180

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2024).

A higher R^2 value indicates a stronger level of explanatory power. The R^2 value obtained in this study is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: R-Square Values (R^2)

	R Square
Employee Performance	0,779
Humble Leadership Behavior	0,902
Team Spirit	0,878

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2024).

Based on the findings, an R-square value of 0.779 was obtained for employee performance factors, indicating a good model fit and a strong influence, as it exceeds the threshold of 0.67. Similarly, the R-square value for the team spirit predictor variable is 0.878, reflecting a high level of model quality and substantial explanatory power. The humble leadership style variable shows an even higher R-square value of 0.907, further confirming the robustness and predictive strength of the model. The Q^2 value, which assesses the model's predictive relevance, is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Diversity of Team Members	1110,000	1110,000	
Employee Performance	1665,000	653,099	0,608
Humble Leadership Behavior	1110,000	325,944	0,706
Team Spirit	740,000	261,912	0,646

Source: Smart Pls 3(2024).

The results indicate that the model possesses predictive relevance, as all Q^2 values are greater than zero. Specifically, the Q^2 value is 0.608 for employee performance, 0.708 for leadership behavior, and 0.646 for team spirit, confirming that the predictor variables have strong predictive relevance for their respective endogenous variables. To assess the model's Goodness of Fit (GoF), the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and R-square values are used as index parameters. These values are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: AVE & R Square

	AVE	R Square
Diversity of Team Members	0,778	
Employee Performance	0,791	0,779
Humble Leadership Behavior	0,792	0,902
Team Spirit	0,741	0,878
Average - Average	0.776	0.853

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2024).

$$\text{GoF index} = \sqrt[2]{\overline{\text{AVE}} * \overline{\text{RSquare}}}$$
$$= \sqrt[2]{0{,}776 * 0{,}853}$$
$$= 0{,}81$$

A GoF value greater than 0.36 is considered high, indicating that the structural model demonstrates a strong level of validity.
The model presented above is a path analysis model, in which Humble Leadership Behavior serves as a mediating variable, based on the results of the first and second regression analyses. The Sobel test's z-value cannot be directly obtained from the regression output; instead, it must be manually calculated using the Sobel formula Z:

$$Z = \frac{0.180 \text{ x } 0.513}{\sqrt{(0.513^2 \text{x } 0.168^2)+(0.180^2 \text{x } 0.180^2)}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.092}{0.090} = 1.022$$

Since the obtained z-value of 1.022 is less than the critical value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, it indicates that Humble Leadership Behavior does not significantly mediate the relationship between Team Spirit and Employee Performance.

5. Discussion

The analysis shows that humble leadership behavior has a T-statistic of 1.069, below the critical Z-score of 1.96, suggesting no significant impact on team spirit. This contrasts with Effendi (2018), who found shared leadership positively affected team morale. Humble leadership, emphasizing self-awareness, openness, and empowerment, is critical in fostering employee trust, innovation, and performance (Ali, 2020; Cho, 2021). However, Qin (2020) notes that its effectiveness depends on organizational norms and subordinate characteristics. Properly aligned with team dynamics, humble leadership enhances creative performance and cohesion (Ye, 2020; Ding, 2020).
Regarding team diversity, the T-statistic of 68.412 strongly supports the hypothesis that diversity influences humble leadership behavior, showing that diverse perspectives enhance a leader's adaptability (Kim, 2017). In today's organizational settings, managing diverse teams

effectively fosters innovation and collaboration (Ashikali, 2021; Roberson, 2022), with humble leadership being crucial in creating an inclusive, high-performing team (Wali, 2022; Ma, 2020). Team diversity thus serves as a resource for improving employee performance by promoting inclusion and leveraging individual strengths (Garro-Abarca, 2021; Suseno et al., 2024).

The regression analysis on team spirit and employee performance yields a T-statistic of 1.371, below the critical threshold, suggesting a minimal impact of team spirit in this context (Carnevale, 2020). This contrasts with previous studies, such as Wuysang and Tawas (2016), which found that strong collaboration enhances employee performance. Team diversity, however, significantly affects performance, with a T-statistic of 29.582, confirming its impact on organizational outcomes (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2019).

This research highlights that team diversity and humble leadership are vital for improving team dynamics and performance. Effective leadership and strategic team formation are necessary to leverage diversity's potential (Kutsenko, 2021; Shi, 2021). Future studies should explore moderating factors like leadership style and organizational culture to refine these findings further.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of team member diversity, team spirit, and humble leadership on employee performance. The results indicate that team diversity significantly enhances both performance and team spirit, fostering collaboration, innovation, and adaptability. However, the direct impact of team spirit on performance was found to be statistically insignificant, suggesting that other factors, such as leadership, mediate this relationship.

Humble leadership, characterized by openness, recognition, and a willingness to learn, demonstrated a significant positive effect on employee performance. This leadership style was more effective than transformational leadership in certain contexts, emphasizing inclusivity and interpersonal sensitivity. Although diversity strengthens humble leadership, neither humble leadership nor team spirit alone directly predicted employee performance in this study.

These findings emphasize the importance of integrating diversity and inclusive leadership to create resilient, productive teams. Future research should explore the role of contextual moderators such as organizational culture, leadership alignment, and psychological safety in further understanding these dynamics. Additionally, investigating the mediating role of humble leadership in the team spirit-performance relationship, with a larger and more diverse sample, is a promising avenue for future studies.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A and BDS; Methodology, A; Software, A; Validation, BDS; Formal analysis, A; Investigation, BDS; Resources, BDS; Data curation, A; Writing—original draft preparation, A; Writing—review and editing, BDS; Visualization, A; Supervision, BDS; Project administration, BSW; Funding acquisition, BSW. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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