THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORKPLACE HAPPINESS IN THE EFFECT OF HUMBLE LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE[1]

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the relationships between humble leadership, employee performance and workplace happiness. 156 employees were surveyed to collect data, which was subsequently analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 and Amos software programs in line with the study's objectives. The analysis findings showed that humble leadership positively affects both employee performance and workplace happiness. The findings also revealed that workplace happiness has a partial mediating role in humble leadership's effect on employee performance. According to the findings, humble leaders who take it as a mission to be open to criticism and feedback, to appreciate their followers and to learn from mistakes not only contribute to happiness and positive emotions in the organization, but also increase the performance levels of employees.

Keywords: *Humble leadership, employee performance, workplace happiness*
JEL Codes: *M0, M10, M19*

Scope: *Business administration*
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[1] It has been declared that the relevant study complies with the ethical rules.

MÜTEVAZI LİDERLİĞİN ÇALIŞAN PERFORMANSINA ETKİSİNDE İŞ YERİ MUTLULUĞUNUN ARACI ROLÜ

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ÖZ| Bu çalışmanın amacı mütevazı liderlik, çalışan performansı ve iş yeri mutluluğu arasındaki ilişkileri araştırmaktır. Araştırma amacına uygun olarak 156 çalışana anket yöntemi aracılığıyla sorular yöneltilmiş ve elde edilen veriler SPSS 22.0 ve Amos programları aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sonucunda elde edilen bulgular mütevazı liderliğin hem çalışan performansını hem de iş yeri mutluluğunu olumlu yönde etkilediğini göstermiştir. Ayrıca mütevazı liderliğin çalışan performansı üzerindeki etkisinde iş yeri mutluluğunun kısmi bir aracı role sahip olduğu da tespit edilmiştir. Buna göre eleştirilere ve geri bildirimlere açık olmayı, takipçilerini takdir etmeyi ve hatalardan öğrenmeyi kendine misyon edinen mütevazı liderler yalnızca örgütteki mutluluk ve olumlu duygulara katkı sunmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda çalışanların performans düzeylerini de artırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Mütevazı liderlik, çalışan performansı, iş yeri mutluluğu*
JEL Kodları: *M0,M10,M19*

Alan: *İşletme*
Türü: *Araştırma*

1. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the business environment lead organizations to search for new ways to function, not only in their ways of doing business, but also in their management styles. Research has started on many new leadership styles. Humble leadership is also one of these new types of leadership. In this type of leadership, the leader evaluates their followers objectively, appreciating their contributions and skills. Humble leadership, which involves recognizing personal mistakes, flaws, and boundaries, also includes highlighting the contributions and strengths of followers (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Another variable discussed within the scope of the study is workplace happiness. In general, happiness is related to how people experience and evaluate their lives as a whole. Considering that people spend a large part of their time working, individuals having positive moods during their time in the organization is quite important in terms of their performance levels. Today, organizations are expected to play an active role in supporting employee happiness. Studies have also suggested that this role has become an important competitive advantage for many organizations in the employment market (Martin et al., 2005). On the other hand, employee performance, which is defined as the way employees reflect their training on their behaviors, refers to the outcomes of the mental and psychological capacities of these individuals (Faiza & Nazir, 2015). Employee performance, which affects the improvement of organizational processes in terms of productivity and efficiency, can not only provide an advantage to the organization in a fierce competitive environment, but also contribute to long-term well-being (Abualoush et al., 2018). In addition, financial and non-financial outputs that are closely related to the success of the organization are also reflected in employee performance (Anitha, 2014).

Since employee performance is vital for both the individual and the organization, this concept has become popular among business administration scholars. The present era is experiencing numerous swift advancements and consequent transformations as a result of the information explosion and communication revolution. Organizations face many challenges in coping with and adapting to these changes and developments. This situation forces organizations that want to improve their employee performance levels to look for new ways, leaving traditional methods behind. In this regard, it is highly intriguing to explore the impact of a novel form of leadership, such as humble leadership, on performance. In this context, studies on leadership behaviors indicate that such behaviors may have a direct association with both employee performance levels and workplace happiness.

The happy/productive employee argument has long attracted the attention of organizational researchers and practitioners. Therefore, this study aimed to

address the following inquiries: "What motivates managers to prioritize workplace happiness and performance?", "Does humble leadership have a positive effect on employee performance?", and "Can happiness enhance productivity levels?" The study has two primary objectives in this regard. The first objective is to determine the direct effect of humble leadership on employee performance, while the second one is to investigate the potential mediating role of workplace happiness in the relationship between humble leadership and employee performance.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Humble Leadership

The origins of the word "humble" lie in the Latin "humus", which means land, and "humi", which means on the ground. Therefore, the term humble leadership can literally be defined as "leading from the ground up" or "leading from the bottom up." Although humility was previously erroneously linked to negative traits, such as low self-esteem, shyness, and lack of ambition, it has gained renewed attention for its positive attributes, particularly with the rise of positive psychology. In this regard, humility is regarded as a desirable trait in interpersonal relationships, as it enables individuals to acknowledge their own boundaries, accept their flaws, and curb their arrogance and self-gratification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Since humility usually requires the recognition and appreciation of knowledge and guidance beyond the self, it is a fundamental virtue in all religions around the world, including Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam (Kerse et al., 2020). Moreover, philosophers have defined humility as the basis of other virtues such as forgiveness, courage, wisdom and compassion (Grenberg, 2005). Humble individuals evaluate others from a versatile and impartial perspective, giving importance to appreciating the positive values, strengths, and contributions of others (Owens et al., 2013). People with this trait do not see themselves to be in hierarchical relationships with others and are likely to use their power unselfishly. In this respect, it can be said that humble individuals tend to form bilateral relationships that do not focus too much on personal gain (Nielsen et al., 2010). Furthermore, the high self-awareness of humble individuals allows them to be open-minded and actively receive feedback from others, making it possible for them to change themselves and use opportunities to their advantage (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In the organizational sense, humility is defined as one of the basic organizational virtues put forward to provide the basis for moral behaviors in the workplace and to support positive extraordinary behaviors (extraordinary performance, altruistic/pro-social behavior) (Cameron & Caza, 2004). Humility's contribution to successfully managing organizations can be examined from two

perspectives. First, humility in leadership promotes a supportive, humble climate within teams and throughout the organization. In this direction, humble leaders show their willingness to share their power by appreciating the strengths of employees and creating an autonomous and empowering climate, involving them in decision-making processes. Secondly, humility in leadership promotes the psychological well-being of employees and beneficial organizational behaviors (Ou et al., 2014). This makes it possible for employees to be more motivated to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization.

Humble leadership represents a bottom-up leadership style and refers to exhibiting a range of behaviors such as being open to learning from others, appreciating the contributions of others, and being aware of one's own shortcomings and mistakes to increase leadership effectiveness and manage one's followers (Nielsen et al., 2010). Within the context of this definition, humble leadership can be said to consist of three dimensions. These are (a) willingness to see one's own shortcomings and mistakes accurately, (b) appreciating followers' strengths and contributions, and (c) teachability (Owens et al., 2013). The "being aware of one's own shortcomings and mistakes" dimension refers to the leader evaluating themselves objectively and accurately, as well as being self-aware about their personal strengths and limits (Yang et al., 2019). In this sense, humble leaders not only acknowledge their mistakes and limitations, but also recognize that making mistakes and learning from them is a natural and beneficial process (Owens & Hekman, 2012). The "appreciating followers' strengths and contributions" dimension of humble leadership refers to the leader having a positive view of their followers and being willing to appreciate their strengths and contributions rather than threatening them (Yang et al., 2019). Thus, a humble leader values the contributions of employees to the organization and fosters an environment that encourages such contributions. Lastly, the "teachability" aspect of humble leadership pertains to the leader's willingness to accept new ideas and feedback, as well as their receptiveness to learning from others (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Accordingly, humble leaders are open-minded and have a positive attitudes towards new ideas or feedback.

Empirical studies on humble leadership have revealed that humility in leadership increases job engagement, job satisfaction, job retention, and employee learning orientation (Owens et al., 2013). Owens also states that this type of leadership leads to positive follower outcomes by reducing the negative effects of narcissistic leadership (Owens et al., 2015). Within this context, it can be stated that humble leadership significantly affects employee performance, job satisfaction and willingness to contribute to the organization, and that it also has a significant effect on positive employee behaviors (Nielsen et al., 2010).

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2.2. The Relationship Between Humble Leadership and Workplace Happiness

Happiness (Diener, 2000) is a concept that has gained increasing significance in recent years and encompasses individuals' cognitive and emotional assessments of their lives, including overall life satisfaction as well as various aspects such as work life. The usage of this concept in the organizational context is characterized by various terms such as "happiness at work," "organizational happiness," "employee happiness," and "workplace happiness" (Erer, 2021). The present study examined the concept as "workplace happiness". The concept refers to enjoying work relationships and career development, as well as being satisfied with feeling well treated and valued (Edmunds & Pryce-Jones, 2008). Nevertheless, workplace happiness is not merely limited to experiencing positive emotions, feelings of pleasure, and positive effect. It also entails having a sense of purpose and fulfillment in one's work life, as well as overall life satisfaction that has an impact on the general evaluation of one's life and the quality of one's experiences and performance at work (Grant et al., 2007). The antecedents of workplace happiness include organizational and business characteristics. These antecedents include participation, cooperation, friendliness, social rewards, cognitive growth, innovation, autonomy and rewards, which include interpersonal communication and social relationships, and these variables ultimately result in employee happiness (Carr et al. 2003). Additional factors that play a role in promoting workplace happiness encompass having friendly and supportive colleagues, a competent manager, a comfortable work environment, an appropriate work-life balance, feeling that one's work is valuable and makes a difference, a sense of belonging to a successful team, recognition of achievements, a competitive salary, the attitude of the manager or leader, the culture of the organization, and the attributes of the job itself (Williams et al., 2017; Catherine, 2015). Studies have suggested that leadership behaviors are among the precursors of workplace happiness (Tanner et al., 2010; Judge et al., 2004). Ethical leadership behaviors have been suggested to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, emotional commitment, and work commitment (Tanner et al., 2010). Supportive leadership behaviors have been found to have a positive effect on job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2004), and it has been stated that transformational leadership behaviors positively affect the levels of optimism, happiness, and excitement of employees (Rowold et al., 2014). It has been revealed that an authoritarian management style causes a state of mental unhappiness such as depression in the workplace and causes employees to experience stress, uneasiness and tension (Seltzer & Numerof, 1988). On the other hand, it has been shown that manager behaviors that improve the morale of

employees, ensure their participation and energize them increase happiness (Tafwelin et al., 2011). In this context, it can be said that the humble type of leadership, which is defined by various positive behaviors such as honesty, trust, and humility, has a positive relationship with employees' immediate feelings, subjective well-being, organizational performance, and workplace happiness (Wijewardena et al., 2014), and that leader humility encourages employees' psychological well-being, workplace happiness, and beneficial organizational behaviors (Ou et al., 2014). From this point of view, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H1: Perception of humble leadership positively and significantly affects workplace happiness.

2.3. The Relationship Between Humble Leadership and Employee Performance

Employee performance is defined as the result of the efforts and abilities of individuals in the form of quality and quantity within the context of the duties and responsibilities given over time (Usman et al., 2022) and consists of the sum of the efforts and abilities of employees regarding the increase in productivity that leads to the achievement of the goals of the organization (Sangperm & Jermsittiparsert, 2019). Borman & Motowidlo (1993) distinguish between two facets of performance, namely task performance and contextual performance. Task performance, encompassing primary activities of an organization such as production, marketing, and purchasing, pertains to the straightforward technical aspects of a job. Conversely, contextual performance pertains to psychosocial aspects of job performance, such as engagement, motivation, and voluntary actions that are not necessarily part of the direct duties but are linked to job conditions (Kaya & Başkaya, 2016). Employee performance is associated with the effective and efficient execution of tasks and activities, and serves as a determinant of the level of contribution made by employees to the organization (Abualoush et al., 2018). As job performance of employees plays a crucial role in realizing organizational objectives, organizations demonstrate a keen interest in identifying the factors that enhance employees' work abilities in a positive manner. Merely offering a monetary contract as an incentive is insufficient to optimize labor productivity within an organization. For this reason, psychological and social support is needed to improve employee performance (Bartlett et al., 2012). In this direction, quality relationships between leaders and employees play a vital role in increasing labor performance and shaping high working standards (Khan et al., 2022). Conversely, in the context of the humble leadership model,

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which fosters effectiveness in both leaders and employees, it is possible to promote a culture of heightened work efficiency and awareness towards accomplishing organizational objectives (Usman et al., 2022). The humble leadership approach, which motivates employees to demonstrate positive organizational behaviors, may also enhance employee performance in terms of achieving organizational goals and objectives (Ou et al., 2014). Within this context, it can be stated that humble leadership significantly affects employee performance and has a significant effect on positive employee behaviors (Nielsen et al., 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed with the assumption that humble leadership behaviors can positively affect employee performance:

H2: Perception of humble leadership positively and significantly affects employee performance.

2.4. The Relationship Between Workplace Happiness and Employee Performance

Since individuals spend a significant part of their lives at work, being in a good mood during their time there will significantly increase their quality of life. Researchers have stated that workplace happiness not only improves employees' quality of life, but also has positive effects on their performance levels (Erer, 2021). A review of the literature reveals that numerous studies have suggested a positive relationship between workplace happiness and employee performance (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012; Akın & Aktar, 2019). It is also suggested that happy employees tend to be more productive and make more efforts to fulfill their job roles (Zelensky et al. 2008). Within this context, the majority of human resources policies and practices focus on employee happiness with the assumption that there is a positive causality relationship between happiness and productivity (Howard & Gould, 2000). Employee happiness, seen as the source of positive attitudes and behaviors in organizations, is a strong precursor of employee performance, which has a crucial role in achieving organizational goals (Cartwright & Cooper 2008). Likewise, it is stated that positive affect, which is a fundamental constituent of happiness, is a significant predictor of employee performance (Cropprano & Wright, 2001). Beohm & Lyubomorski (2008) also suggest that people who mostly experience positive emotions at work produce more positive outcomes. The following hypothesis was developed based on these studies:

H3: Workplace happiness positively and significantly affects employee performance.

2.5. The Role of Workplace Happiness in Humble Leadership's Effect on Employee Performance

Researchers have stated that there is a positive relationship between humble leadership and employees' immediate feelings, subjective well-being, organizational performance, and workplace happiness (Wijewardena et al., 2014), while on the other hand, others have stated that there is a positive relationship between employee happiness and job performance (Howard & Gould, 2000; Diener et al., 2003). Within this context, it can be stated that workplace happiness shapes the outputs of the job market, productivity, and employee performance (Field & Buitendach, 2011). Many studies have suggested that humble leadership, which includes many positive behaviors such as being open to learning from others, appreciating the contributions of employees, and being aware of one's own shortcomings and mistakes, has positive effects on both performance outputs and workplace happiness (Ou et al., 2014;Wijewardena et al., 2014). Based on this, the following hypothesis was developed:

H4: Workplace happiness has a mediating role in humble leadership's effect on employee performance.

The research model in Figure 1 was developed in line with the above hypotheses.
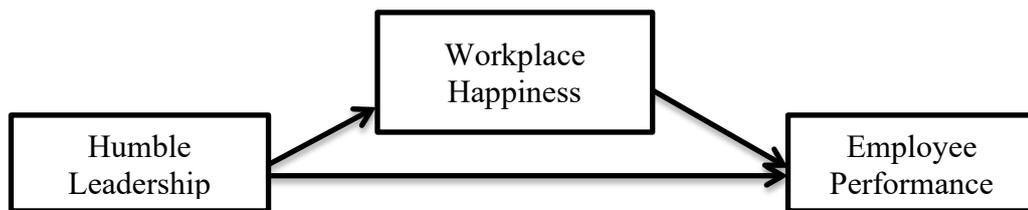

Figure 1: Research Model

3. METHOD

3.1. Generating the Data

Name of the board conducting the ethical review = Siirt University Research and Publication Ethics Committee

Date of ethics review decision = 10.04.2023

Ethics assessment document issue number = E.4633

3.2. Purpose, Importance and Sample

The present study aims to identify the relationship between humble leadership and employee performance and determine whether workplace happiness plays a mediating role in this relationship. By analyzing the findings, the study aims to reveal how humble leadership, which is one of the new types of

leadership, has an effect on employee performance, which has a critical role in achieving organizational goals and objectives. The primary sample for this research comprises public sector employees in the province of Siirt. To this end, 180 public sector employees were selected using a convenience sampling method, and the hypotheses were tested based on 156 surveys. An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the participants revealed that a majority of the 156 respondents were male (68.6%), married (68.6%) and under the age of 35 (61.1%). The majority of the employees held undergraduate or graduate degrees (93.6%). In terms of work experience, most participants had a seniority of nine years or more (37.8%) and five to eight years (33.3%). The study received ethical approval, including the date and permission number, from the Ethics Committee of Siirt University.

3.3. Scale Used in the Study

Data were collected using the survey method. Special care was taken to ensure that the selected scales used in the survey form had established reliability and validity in prior studies. Employee performance was measured using the scale developed by Kirkman & Rosen (1999) and utilized in a previous Turkish study conducted by Çöl (2008). Perception of humble leadership was measured using the scale developed by Owens et al. (2013) and adapted into Turkish by Kerse et al., (2020). Finally, workplace was happiness was measured using a 5-item scale developed by the "World Health Organization Psychiatric Research Unit" and used by Özmen & Apalı (2018) in a Turkish study.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Factor Analyses of the Scales

A reliability analysis was performed and the Cronbach's alpha values were calculated to ensure the reliability of the scales utilized in the study. After conducting the analysis, the Cronbach's alpha value for the humble leadership scale was determined to be 0.894, while the Cronbach's alpha value for the workplace happiness scale was calculated to be 0.824. Lastly, the Cronbach's alpha value for the employee performance scale was found to be 0.832. These values indicate that the scales used in the research are reliable. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the construct validity of the three main variables: humble leadership, workplace happiness, and employee performance. The analysis was performed using the AMOS 22 statistics software. The confirmatory factor analysis findings for the scales are presented in Table 1. The index values of this scale were above the reference values, ensuring model fit.

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Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Findings Regarding Scales

Index	Reference Value	Humble Leadership	Workplace Happiness	Employee Performance
CMIN/DF	$0<X^{2/SD}\leq5$	1,604	0,878	1,126
RMR	$\leq,10$	0,038	0,026	0,008
CFI	$\geq,90$	0,979	1,000	0,999
IFI	$\geq,90$	0,979	1,000	0,999
TLI	$\geq,90$	0,969	1,000	0,997
RMSEA	$\leq,08$	0,062	0,000	0,028

4.2. Testing the Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using the Process Macro (for SPSS) statistics software. A correlation analysis was conducted beforehand to unveil the relationships between the variables. The correlation analysis findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Findings of Correlation Analysis

Variables	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	1	2	3
Humble Leadership			1		
Employee Performance	4,09	0,57	,333**	1	
Workplace Happiness	3,39	0,79	,446**	,411**	1

The results of the correlation analysis revealed that there are moderate positive relationships between humble leadership and employee performance (r= 0.333 and p<0.01), as well as between employee performance and workplace happiness (r= 0.411 and p<0.01). It was also determined that there is a moderate positive (r= 0.411 and p<0.01) relationship between humble leadership and workplace happiness.

Once the relationships among the variables were established, analyses were conducted with reference to simple mediation in order to examine the hypotheses. The results of the analysis utilizing model 4 to evaluate the mediating role of workplace happiness in the relationship between humble leadership and employee performance are presented in Figure 2. The figure includes the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable (*B)*, the standard error (SH)

values, the *p* values showing the significance of the *B* values, and the values regarding the confidence intervals.

| R₂= ,1992 |

Workplace Happiness

a=,480; p< ,01

b= ,237; p< ,01

R₂= ,1971

c= ,259; p< ,05

Humble Leadership

Employee Performance

Direct effect (c') = ,146; p< ,05
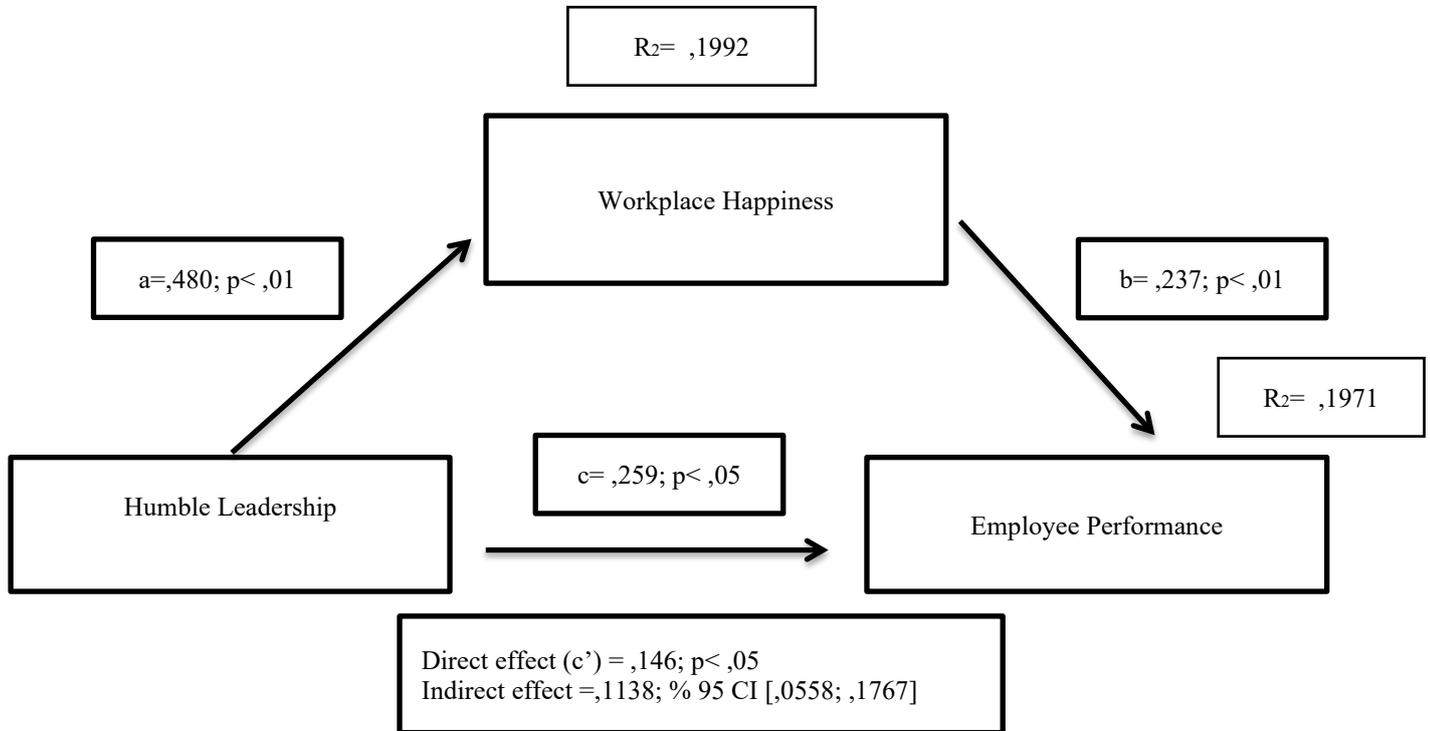Indirect effect =,1138; % 95 CI [,0558; ,1767]

Figure 2: The Research Model Result

Examining Figure 2 reveals that humble leadership positively affects both workplace happiness (a= 0.480; p< 0.01; CI [0.3268; 0.6333]) and employee performance (c= 0.146; p< 0.01; CI [0.0213; 0.2703]). H1 and H2 are therefore supported. Workplace happiness was also found to have a positive effect on employee performance (b= 0.237; p< 0.01; CI [0.1123; 0.3528]). H3 is therefore accepted. Examining the mediating effect revealed that workplace happiness plays a partial mediating role (b= 0,1138; 95%, CI [0.0558; 0.1767]) in the relationship between humble leadership and employee performance, thereby providing support for H4. Thus, it was concluded that humble leadership increases employee performance both directly and through workplace happiness.

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5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study discussed the concept of humble leadership, which is one of the leadership styles that have recently gained attention in Türkiye, and investigated its effect on employee performance. The study also examined the mediating role of workplace happiness in the relationship between humble leadership and employee performance.

Data were collected from employees working in the public sector to investigate the impact of humble leadership on employee performance and the potential mediating role of workplace happiness in this relationship. Data were analyzed using the SPSS package and AMOS software programs. The data analyses revealed that humble leadership has a positive and significant effect on both workplace happiness and employee performance. This finding is similar to others in the literature (Usman et al., 2022; Ou et al., 2014; Nielsen et al., 2010; Wijewardena et al., 2014; Ou et al., 2014). Thus, it can be stated that humble leadership behaviors increase employee performance levels. Another notable finding derived from the analysis was that workplace happiness has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This finding was found to be consistent with others on the subject (Cartwright & Cooper 2008; Cropranzano and Wright, 2001; Beohm & Lyubomorski (2008). The mediation analysis results revealed that workplace happiness has a partial mediating role in the relationship between humble leadership and employee performance. Thus, the study has established that humble leadership directly and positively affects employee performance while also affecting it indirectly through workplace happiness. It wasn't found any studies in the literature that investigated both the concepts examined simultaneously in our research. Therefore, the present study can make a significant contribution to the literature in this respect.

Taken together, the overall findings suggest that humble leadership behaviors are associated with increased employee performance and positive emotional moods. Thus, organization managers can exhibit humble behaviors to increase employee happiness levels by creating a positive working environment. Employees who experience high levels of workplace happiness may be more motivated and engaged in their work, leading to increased performance levels. The sustainability of an organization's success largely hinges on the performance of its employees, underscoring the significance of cultivating leadership behaviors that increase or improve employee performance. In this regard, the humble leadership approach, which involves acknowledging employees' contributions to organizational objectives and involving them in decision-making processes, can yield positive outcomes in terms of performance. The findings can also be discussed within the scope of social exchange theory. Based on the

principles of social exchange theory, it could be said that employees who receive positive feedback from their managers, are given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, and are recognized for their contributions (humble leadership) may exhibit a positive attitude towards achieving high performance. From this perspective, it can be argued that embracing a humble leadership style that values input from employees, acknowledges its own limitations and errors, and prioritizes a bottom-up management approach can enhance employee performance, a crucial factor for achieving organizational success and growth.

Notwithstanding the positive contributions of our study to literature, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Primarily, the restricted sample size of public employees from a single province has impeded the generalizability of the findings. In light of this, future studies may yield more robust results for comparative purposes by selecting a sample of private sector employees from diverse provinces. Furthermore, it may be advisable for researchers to explore the potential negative outcomes of humble leadership, in addition to its positive effects on employee performance and workplace well-being.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

7. FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

8. ETHICS COMMITTEE STATEMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY COPYRIGHTS
Ethics committee principles were followed in the study. There has been no situation requiring permission within the framework of intellectual property and copyrights.

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