

**Neohumility / Humility and Business Leadership: Do they belong together?**

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### Abstract

This article looks at commonly accepted and newly emerging ideas of effective leadership in the literature. One such quality that has recently emerged in the discourse on leadership is “humility.” Humility has traditionally been associated with weakness and even seen as antithetical to the leader persona. This article suggests a new view of humility, “neohumility,” humility without weakness and transformed to fit the business world. It operationalizes the definition of neohumility and includes characteristics such as self-awareness, valuing others’ opinions, willing to learn and change, sharing power, having the ability to hear the truth and admit mistakes, and working to create a culture of openness where dissent is encouraged in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

## Neohumility and Business Leadership: Do they belong together?

### INTRODUCTION

On the first day of a seminar on leadership, give your students an in-class assignment. Ask them to write about the characteristics that they think are important in an effective leader in American society today. Smart, strong willed, determined, competent, visionary, perhaps even bold are descriptors both our students and society often tie to the idea of an effective leader. Put the pieces together and the picture becomes one of a hero, someone distant and infallible. This person, who is unerring, is looked up to as being above the average person and meant to be a shining example to lead and guide the rest. American society seems fixated on leaders who have celebrity status, who are viewed as heroic, and their enormous compensation packages only add to their glamour. Supposedly these superheroes can single handedly change a mediocre or failing organization into a first-rate establishment, yet lately, many of these leaders are failing those they represent, especially in the business world. Perhaps some significant leadership traits and qualities are missing from the list of what makes someone an effective leader. In my opinion, one essential characteristic that appears to be missing is “humility.” Humility, which is often seen as antithetical to the leadership persona, is vital for effective leadership.

In a recent article in Time magazine, Sherron Watkins, former Vice President of Enron wrote:

*“I still wonder whether we truly recognize and value the appropriate traits in our leaders. We want honest leaders who are decisive, creative, optimistic, and even courageous, but we so easily settle for talk that marks those traits instead of action. Worse we often don’t even look for one of the most critical traits of a leader: humility. A humble leader listens to others. He or she values input from employees and is ready to hear the truth, even if it is bad news. Humility is marked by the ability to admit mistakes.”*

Time Magazine, pg. 35, June 5, 2006

When was the last time one heard that *humility* was a critical trait of a leader, any leader, let alone a business leader? Put humility together with leadership and what comes to mind is the concept of “servant leadership.” While servant leadership may work well in the domain of religion or some nonprofits, it is not a concept that has been widely embraced by the business world.

This paper explores current, widely accepted views on effective leadership traits and qualities along with the newly emerging thoughts related to humility and its connection to effective leadership. The paper asserts that, although scholars and some in the media increasingly acknowledge the desirability of humility in a leader, humility is still not included in the general population’s list of desired characteristics for a leader, perhaps because of what our expectations of a leader are or because of what the term represents in our culture, i.e., the negative connotations associated with this word. We need a new term, “neohumility,” that defines humility more precisely and within the context of leadership. As we educate the next generation of leaders we have an obligation to introduce them to a concept of leadership that is not centered on heroism and infallibility (Sonnenfeld, 2001) but one that is anchored on strength and humility. We must adjust our vision of leadership from heroic leadership to effective leadership.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on the theory of leadership typically looks at this topic with respect to leadership values, qualities, traits, and occasionally at leadership behaviors and styles. This section expounds on those ideas as well as looks at the challenges faced by leaders.

### Leadership Values

Leadership values are the beliefs and standards that drive an individual. A leader who is credible must be aware of his or her values. These values then serve as a guide or moral compass in decision-making, helping leaders decipher right from wrong and between ethical and unethical conduct and actions. (Ciulla, 1998; Hughes, Ginnis and Curphy, 2006; Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Pierce and Newstrom, 2006). It is important to note that values matter only if they are translated into action. Saying you stand for something and doing the contrary only leads to hypocrisy. A commitment to basic values, such as honesty and responsibility, is crucial in building trust since trust is the bedrock of organizational survival and growth over the long term. James MacGregor Burns (1998) in the foreword to the book, "Ethics, The Heart of Leadership," identifies three types of leadership values:

- Ethical values such as kindness, altruism, tolerance, sobriety, and chastity.
- Modal values such as honesty, integrity, accountability, trustworthiness and responsibility.
- End values such as liberty, equality, justice and community often required for transformational leadership.

Burns (1998) states that these 3 types of leadership values cannot exist in harmony in today's fragmented world as these values are often culturally based and may lead to conflict between different cultures. Although, modal values are becoming far more relevant and universal in both modern market societies and in traditional societies that have been impacted by globalization, ethical values and end values are still very culturally diverse (Burns, 1998). It is difficult to make distinctions in the definitions of these three leadership values, especially between the first two.

In the literature that focuses on the American workplace, the following leadership values are commonly mentioned (Hughes, Ginnis and Curphy, 2006; Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Manning and Curtis, 2005): honesty, respect for others, service to others (being considerate), excellence and integrity. Some additional values that are not universally mentioned, but are often referenced in the literature include: responsibility (wanting to make a difference, being accountable), persistence (determination), and a sense of fairness.

Ethical leadership and business ethics, based on some of the values highlighted above, have become popular areas for discussion, particularly in light of the recent business scandals (Ciulla, 1998). Courses and programs related to these issues are now routinely offered at business schools across the nation. While honesty and integrity are firmly linked to ethical leadership, humility is not commonly named as an important leadership value. In fact, nowhere in the literature review is humility mentioned as a sought after leadership value.

The literature on the study of business organizations includes the concept of trust as a fundamental component of any successful organization (Hart et al, 1986; Mayer et al, 1995). Working together in an organization involves interdependence and requires people to rely on

each other to accomplish the goals of the organization. Mayer et al (1995) have identified four primary characteristics in a supervisor that can positively impact the development of trust between the supervisor and the employee, these include, ability, benevolence, integrity and openness. Two of these characteristics, openness and ability (that includes interpersonal competence), suggests some degree of humility in a supervisor/leader, but again the term humility is not directly mentioned.

### Leadership Qualities

While personal values may serve as a moral compass for individuals, it is the actual practice of certain leadership qualities that makes an *effective* leader. Most scholars define the following as core leadership qualities (Astin and Astin, 2000; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991; Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Locke, 2003; Manning and Curtis, 2005; Pierce and Newstrom, 2006; Stogdill, 1948):

- Vision: Leaders must have a vision of what can be. This includes a strong sense of purpose, being able to see the potential of a product or idea, and the ability to envision and shape the future. Vision is probably the most important quality in a leader.
- Ability: Leaders must be competent and able to do their jobs. They must have both intellect and good judgment. Often this quality is underplayed and the attention goes to vision, but vision and ability go hand in hand. Ability is not limited to job knowledge, technical expertise, or management skills but must also include the ability to learn, inductive reasoning skills and deductive thinking which lead to better problem solving.
- Enthusiasm: Leaders must possess genuine enthusiasm and have a positive outlook, which helps in persuading others to take action or risks and keeps them motivated.
- Self-knowledge and stability: leaders must know themselves and their core values so that personal problems do not impede their judgment or stand in the way of vision and ability.
- Empathy: Leaders must have genuine concern for others and the ability to put oneself in another's shoe. This also requires good listening skills.
- Independence and self-confidence: As Locke (2003) puts it, the person on the top stands alone and has final responsibility for the success or failure of the organization. Final responsibility does not preclude soliciting, listening to, and evaluating advice from others. Self-confidence refers to awareness of one's inner strength and does not imply over confidence, which can lead to flawed judgment. Independence and self-confidence both reinforce each other.
- Persistence: This is the drive to attain something and the determination to overcome adversity. It requires one to be conscientious and committed to achieving one's goals. Persistence also requires vitality in an individual so that they are able to fulfill tasks physically.
- Rationality: The leader must be able to take facts seriously without substituting emotion for knowledge, in other words, being realistic.
- Integrity and virtue: These include personal values such as honesty, strength of character, trustworthiness, and the courage of one's convictions. It also implies authenticity, the consistency between beliefs and action.

Some other leadership qualities that have been discussed in the literature include the ability to anticipate challenges, to prioritize, to communicate, to nurture and develop others, the ability to hire skilled professionals, motivate others, delegate responsibilities, make decisions decisively, be committed to the organization and its excellence, be a team player, and a

consensus builder. Some of the other qualities that are mentioned but which may raise some red flags include charisma (a personality that causes others to follow) and egoistic passion for one's work (but not for oneself). Charisma is an emotional response to a leader and not a rational response based on the leader's vision, ability, or other positive qualities. It has the potential for bad outcomes. Egoistic passion for one's work as a positive leadership quality has the potential to be misused as separating one's work from oneself can pose a problem. In addition, it might lead to the mentality that the ends justify the means.

It is again interesting to note that humility does not come up in the discussion of core leadership qualities. The closest that one gets to humility is "empathy," which conveys a message similar to humility, but is not the same.

### Conventional Leadership Traits

Much has been written on leadership traits and if they matter. Recent research has shown that leaders have certain core traits that make a significant contribution to their success in the business world (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). These traits, however, are only preconditions to effective leadership. To translate them into becoming a successful leader, one must not only meet the criterion of leadership values and qualities that have been discussed in the previous section, but *act* on these fundamentals.

Numerous traits that are considered highly desirable in successful leaders have been identified in the literature. Some of these traits have been identified as culturally contingent, depending on the prevailing culture of society. However, as rapid globalization brings the business world together and bridges the gap between cultures, one is more likely to see fewer culturally contingent leadership traits prevail in global society. The tables below present the attributes related to leadership that are viewed either positively or negatively, and those accepted universally versus those that are culturally contingent. The starred traits either suggest some level of humility or arrogance. None of these leadership attributes include humility as a critical trait in a leader although in some cases they come close.

Table 1: Leadership Attributes and Behaviors that are Universally viewed as positive

Trustworthy	Positive	Team builder and player*
Just	Dynamic	Administratively Skilled
Honest *	Motivational	Collaborative*
Foresighted	Instills and Builds confidence in others *	Decisive
Plans ahead	Dependable	Effective Bargainer
Encouraging *	Intelligent	Win-win problem solver
Informed	Excellence Oriented	Communicative

Table 2: Leadership Attributes and Behaviors that are Universally viewed as Negative

Loner	Egocentric *	Non Cooperative *
Asocial	Dictatorial *	Irritable *
Too ambitious *	Non explicit	Ruthless *

Table 3: Leadership Attributes and Behaviors that are Culturally Contingent

Ambitious	Logical	Domineering *
Cautious	Orderly Sincere	Independent
Compassionate *	Worldly	Individualistic *
Sensitive *	Formal	Sincere

Hughes, Ginnet and Curphy, 2006: 153-4, Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of Experience, McGraw Hill Publishers. Originally adapted from House et al., 1999, Cultural Influences on Leadership and Organizations: Project Globe. Advances in Global Leadership, 1: 171-233, JAI Press Inc.

Another approach in lieu of listing all the desirable personality traits, since there are often too many to list, is to categorize these traits into five broad personality dimensions, called the Five Factor Model of personality. The five major dimensions of this model are (Hughes, Ginnet and Curphy, 2006: 162-65):

- Surgency: these include traits related to decisiveness, competitiveness, and ambition.
- Agreeableness: these include traits related to empathy, collegiality, and interpersonal sensitivity.
- Dependability: these include traits related to being well organized, following through on commitments, more predictable.
- Adjustment: these include traits related to self-control, staying calm under stressful situations.
- Openness to experience: these include traits related to being imaginative, strategic, looking at the big picture.

Once again this model does not explicitly mention humility as a core dimension of personality, but does list agreeableness, which includes empathy and sensitivity and, perhaps to a certain extent, traits related to adjustment.

In addition to the right values, qualities, and traits, much has been written on leadership behavior, or on what leaders actually “do.” The two popular dimensions employed to categorize leadership behavior are consideration and initiating structure. Consideration relates to how the leader develops an environment that fosters warmth, friendliness, trust, and support, while, initiating structures, requires the leader to assign tasks, specify procedures and be action oriented. Leadership style, on the other hand, is categorized as either participative or autocratic (Dubrin, 2007; Pierce and Newstrom, 2006). While consideration and participative style requires some elements of humility, the term itself is again not referred to in this literature.

#### Challenges in Leadership: Why do leaders fail?

Often the very qualities that distinguish leaders from the rest of the organization also has the potential to cause damage to the mission and the members of the organization. Qualities such as independence, self-confidence and persistence were identified in the previous section as the core qualities of a leader. Yet these very qualities, when taken to the extreme, or if the leader’s primary motivation is recognition and power, can cause enormous harm. Jay Conger (1990) in his article “The dark side of leadership” identifies three particular skill areas that can lead to negative leadership outcomes.

First is the leader’s strategic vision. The problem arises when personal goals of the leader do not match organizational needs, in other words the vision is not a shared vision but a personal vision of the leader. In addition, basic errors in understanding current and future trends can also

lead to failed vision such as the inability to sense important changes in the market and misread market needs. What often makes things worse is when the leader is in denial regarding their own flawed vision. In such a case, personal goals (and gains) take priority over what may be best fit the organizations.

The second skill that can lead to failure in leadership is the communication and impression management skills of the leader. A leader may make exaggerated claims for their vision by presenting selective information to the members of the organization. They may be adept at fostering an illusion of control when things are really out of control. Such a leader is not in touch with reality and misleads the members of their organization.

The third and final skill identified by Conger that may lead to negative leadership outcome is the overall management practices of a leader. A leader who is a poor manager or one who is autocratic, dictatorial or a perfectionist may alienate both their peers and subordinates and cause morale problems. A leader may become obsessed with their pet project and may hand over day-to-day operations to others, thus losing touch with the core mission of the organization. In addition, sometimes leaders knowingly or unknowingly create groups of insiders and outsiders, causing rivalries within the organization. This detracts from the goals of the organization.

Each of these skill areas as identified by Conger has one common element that is missing, humility. A leader who has humility is unlikely to impose their own personal vision on others and is more likely to admit any flaw in their own vision. A leader with humility is also less likely to mislead others or to work autocratically.

In addition to the above skills and individual characteristics, Hogan (2002) identifies some personality traits that he categorizes as dark-side personality traits of leaders, traits that are counterproductive and lead to undesirable outcomes. While everyone may possess these traits to a degree, their presence becomes more important in a leader because of the leader's influence and responsibilities. The dark side personality traits as identified by Hogan include the following:

- Excitable: These leaders have dramatic mood swings and are prone to emotional outbursts.
- Skeptical: These leaders have unhealthy mistrust of others.
- Cautious: These leaders are overly fearful of making mistakes and wait to make decisions.
- Reserved: These leaders become withdrawn and uncommunicative in stressful times
- Leisurely: These leaders pursue personal agendas only and do not follow through with things they do not deem important.
- Mischievous: While charming these leaders like to break the rules and laws and think they can talk their way out of problems.
- Colorful: These leaders need to be the center of attention and they are more preoccupied with being noticed than with performing their duties.
- Eccentric: These leaders make strange or odd decisions that lead to the members of the organization questioning the leader's judgment.
- Control freak: As perfectionists and micromanagers, these leaders discourage their staff from full participation.
- Spineless: These leaders are people pleasers and will not stand up for their staff if necessary or say no to unreasonable requests.

- **Bold:** These leaders are narcissistic. While they may be accomplished, they feel a sense of entitlement, hogging the limelight of success and shifting any blame for their actions onto others.

The dark personality trait that comes closest as antithetical to humility is boldness, as defined by Hogan. Bold or narcissistic leaders vary in their degree of narcissism, which then differentiates their leadership styles. Kets de Vries and Miller (1985) in their article on “Narcissism and Leadership,” state that while all individuals show some signs of narcissism, the degree of intensity of narcissism differs from the extreme to the mild. Narcissism is often a driving force behind the desire to become a leader. They subdivide narcissism into three types, reactive narcissism, self-deceptive narcissism, and constructive narcissism. Of the three, reactive narcissism is the most destructive form. These individuals are preoccupied with establishing their adequacy, power and superiority. They can be characterized as extremely rigid, narrow (focus on self), lacking empathy, and resistant to criticism. Their ideas of grandiosity, exhibitionism, and boundless success, cause them to undertake risky ventures, which often fail. This type of narcissistic leader is looked upon as fearless and heroic, but really lacks real leadership ability. He/she is focused not on the environment in which they work but on their personal goals, which may be motivated by greed for power, wealth, or prestige. They rely only on those who submit to their leadership as a result they often head into projects not fully informed. He/she is averse to criticisms, reluctant to admit mistakes, and often blames others for failure. In addition, they never see themselves as being responsible for anything that is damaging to the organization.

The second type, the self-deceptive narcissistic leader, is more outward looking and is more concerned with his/her environment, but is still very self-conscious. He/she is relatively more approachable, cares about others and is willing to listen to others, but still lacks the ability to take criticism and hear dissent, again making them poorly informed. The authors identify this type of leadership as one with low self-esteem and a very high fear of failure and risk. The last type is the constructive narcissistic leader who again has a high opinion of themselves and their abilities, but is very opportunistic and goal oriented. They are more aware of their environment and are more willing to hear a wide range of opinions, even dissent. However, they tend to go with their best judgment most of the time. They are also more apt to energize the workplace and have those underneath them respect and be comfortable with them. While each of these three types of narcissistic leaders lacks humility, the first two cases are much worse compared to the latter. It is obvious that narcissism is contrary to humility and a leader that shows such tendencies is less likely to possess this quality.

Michael Roberto (2005) in his book titled, *Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer*, writes about leaders who are often consumed by the question, “what decision should I make?” or are often preoccupied with choosing the right outcome, instead of asking, “how should I go about making the decision (pg. 26)?” Usually leaders focus on the right solution when they should be seeking the right process to reach that solution. Roberto’s focus on how to form the right environment to facilitate good decision-making instead of making the right decision is novel in its approach. Roberto’s approach is that the leader does not need to have all the answers but must be able to design and direct the decision making process. An effective leader should be able to foster open debate and encourage dissent that builds long-term consensus. He argues that under the right conditions dissent encourages corporate ethics and effective corporate governance. Often society exalts leaders who are bold, take charge and are action oriented, once again the picture of a heroic leader emerges, but effective leadership as defined by Robert “actively seeks out dissent in their organizations because if people are

uncomfortable expressing dissent, important assumptions that are made may go untested or creative alternative ideas might not be pursued leading to failure in outcome (pg. 84).” A fundamental quality that is necessary for such leadership in my opinion is humility.

Another trait that is contrary to humility yet often possessed by leaders is hubris. Mark Kroll et al (2000) in their article, “Napoleon’s Tragic March Home from Moscow: Lessons in Hubris” define hubris as exaggerated pride, self-confidence, or arrogance. The authors contend that Napoleon’s failure in his Russian campaign can be blamed on his hubris and his sense of invulnerability. Kroll et al identify the following sources of hubris in current business executives and leaders: narcissism (grandiosity and self-absorption), a series of successes that feeds their narcissism, uncritical acceptance of exaggerated accolades, exemption from rules (no accountability), overbearing confidence in one’s ability that morphs into arrogance, and a failure to face changing realities. Hubris is the converse of humility, therefore, a leader with hubris lacks humility and this leads to ineffective leadership.

If narcissism, focusing solely on making right decisions, and hubris are contrary to humility, the question is raised, what is humility and how do we define it within the context of business leadership?

## HUMILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

To many people, humility seems to oppose individualism. Americans in particular have a deeply rooted sense of individualism and the idea of being self-made is something we hold to steadfastly. As the world’s only remaining superpower and the wealthiest nation in the world, it is difficult for us to be humble as we enjoy such a high level of success. We call ourselves world champions of baseball, football and basketball even though we only play against ourselves. “Celebrate me” appears to have become the mantra of today.

So what is humility? At the most basic level, the condition of humility is not arrogant or prideful; it is down to earth, patient, compassionate, concerned and authentic in its sincerity. Leaders with humility act with modesty and restraint. Moreover, a humble person is someone who is interested in what others have to say and is in touch with reality, including the reality of who they are and what their strengths and limitations are (Comte-Sponville, 2001). Humility also includes willingness to hear the truth, however unpleasant it might be and having the courage to admit one’s mistakes or, in other words, implies that a person is willing to learn and change. It is neither a sign of personal weakness nor a term of condescension. It does not mean shy, meek, diffident, insecure, lacking confidence, self-deprecating, reserved, reticent, or timid, even though people often associate humility with such characteristics. It also does not mean having a low estimate of oneself, shying away from the center of attention or lacking the ability to inspire others. It simply involves taking an “objective” look at oneself, recognizing one’s limitations and valuing others, particularly dissenters, and being able to admit one’s mistakes. Despite these positive connotations, humility is still generally not associated with the other, more widely accepted essential qualities of the “leader as a hero.”

Humility also shares the potential to be misunderstood with servant leadership, a concept first introduced by Greenleaf in 1970. Servant leadership is the principle that a caring leader *serves* the people so that they can reach and perform at their highest potential (Greenleaf, 1997). Servant leadership is a special type of leadership practice with the goal of providing service to others and influencing culture and outcomes positively (De Pree, 1997; Sendjaya and Sarros,

2002). The focus here is on “serve” and not “lead.” This type of leadership seems extremely compatible with the concept of humility. The term “servant,” however, has led to some confusion; serving the people one leads has been misunderstood as being akin to being a slave. How can one possibly be an effective leader if one is a servant/slave to one’s employees? How can you fire people who under perform or cut the workforce if conditions demand it (McCrimmon, 2005)? Clearly servant leadership does not involve being indentured to your employees but it does involve valuing them highly as one makes decisions. Then how does this idea of the servant leader speak to the meaning of being a leader when servitude and humility seems contrary to the contemporary paradigm of business leadership?

In the past few years, scholars in the field of leadership have started to address humility within the context of leadership. Recent articles in *The Economist*, *USA Today*, and *Chief Executive* attribute part of the success of a CEO to their personal humility (Griffith, 2002; Morris et al, 2005: 1327). Why is humility in a business leader an important issue? Some excellent work on this topic includes Collins (2001a and 2001b), Morris et al (2005), Schramm (2002) and Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004).

Jim Collins in his article Level 5 Leadership: The triumph of humility and fierce resolve (2001b), talks about the essential elements for a transformational leader, “a level 5 leader who is an executive in whom extreme personal humility blends paradoxically with intense professional will (pg.70).” Put another way, there is a balance between strength and humility. One does not have to sacrifice competence, vision, and effectiveness to get humility in a leader. Humility is admitting one does not have all the answers and that one may need help in developing a vision for the future and in meeting common challenges. Humility does not mean ignoring the problem or admitting defeat, instead it demonstrates understanding of ones limitations and reveals one’s resolve to do something about the problem by enlisting the help of others (Baldoni, 2005). Both Baldoni and Collins conclude that the combination of humility, vision and ability makes one a more effective leader, one who has people skills and leadership skills. Humility in leadership influences leaders to operate in such a way that they enhance others, not just themselves, leading to strong organizational performance through its influence on organizational learning and resilience (Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). The leadership qualities that were discussed in the previous section: vision (preferably a shared vision), self-knowledge, empathy, independence and self-confidence, rationality, integrity or virtue, communication, nurturing and developing others, ability to hire skilled professionals, motivating others, delegating responsibilities, being a team player and a consensus builder all require some degree of humility in a leader which includes the recognition of ones strengths and limitations, courage to admit one’s mistakes, and to value others in the organization.

Morris et al (2005) in their article titled, “Bringing humility to leadership” provide a superb analysis of the meaning of humility and an excellent study of humility and leadership. They define authentic humility as neither self-abasement nor as overly positive self-regard. Their definition of humility has three distinct dimensions, though it does not require a leader to be uniformly strong on all three dimensions. Other related characteristics that expand on their definition include:

- Self-awareness: The ability to understand ones strength and weakness, getting real and staying real, not believing your own hype, and the ability to recognize and admit one’s mistakes.
- Openness: Recognizing ones limitations, being open to new ideas and knowledge and willingness to listen and learn from others, and having the ability to change. Being open

means to encourage dissent and value truth over cover-ups, being willing to ask for and utilize the help of others.

- Transcendence: The acceptance of something greater than the self. This leads one away from self-aggrandizement and self-benefiting behavior towards valuing and appreciating others and their opinions and ideas in the organization.

Morris et al (2005) also identify traits that are good predictors of lack of humility, which corresponds to ineffective leadership. These predictors include, narcissism, machiavellianism (where one believes that the end justifies the means), low self-esteem and defensively high self-esteem.

Some of the more recent literature links Emotional Intelligence, the importance of non-cognitive capabilities and skills in one's ability to handle environmental demands and pressures, to effective leadership (George, 2000, Zhou and George, 2003). These skills are acquired and can be improved through training. While IQ and technical capability remain important qualities in a leader, emotional intelligence is essential to being an effective leader (Goleman et al, 2002). The use of Emotional Intelligence in relation to effective leadership has come under some criticism, however, as it encompasses a myriad of characteristics and includes skills such as introspection and sensitivity, which are not considered dominant characteristics of business leaders. (Locke, 2003: 37). However, Morris et al. (2005) identify high Emotional Intelligence as a predictor of humility and thus effective leadership.

BarOn EQ-i is the premier measure of Emotional Intelligence and helps in predicting one's potential for success in professional pursuits (Bachrach, 2004). The five primary components of the BarOn EQ-i measure are: Intrapersonal scales, interpersonal scales, adaptability scales, stress management scales, and general mood scales. The interpersonal scales are composed of empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships, which include several aspects of humility. Thus leaders who have humility are more likely to have higher emotional intelligence and be more effective leaders. Since these skills can be acquired and improved via training one can learn to improve their level of humility. The increased attention that is being given to emotional intelligence, which addresses the importance of humility in effective leadership, is good for scholars and students of leadership. However, the concept of emotional intelligence has been criticized in the leadership literature as being very difficult to measure and operationalize, and charged with being too broad and inclusive (Roberts et al, 2001; Matthews et al, 2002). Humility as a leadership quality is important in and of itself, and leadership theory needs to address this issue in the literature and operationalize its definition.

So, does humility have a place in business leadership in America? Do we value humility in a culture that demands results and victory often without considering the costs? If we want heroic leadership and reward it we will get heroes, some will win but many will fail. As suggested by Barbara Kellerman (2004), we must ask ourselves what we want from our leaders. Members of individual organizations need to take responsibility for defining good leadership. Notice, I have not used the term followers or subordinates throughout this paper as the literature often does, because good and effective organizations don't have followers or subordinates, but members who are empowered to perform at their optimum; members who feel that their opinions and contributions are valued. This does not suggest that we break down the hierarchy in organizations. Hierarchy is often necessary as someone has to make the decisions, but this does imply that organizations not be compartmentalized as office staff, techies, or senior management with respect to their opinions and suggestions, and thus discounted, when it comes to moving the organization ahead. So we must ask ourselves, do we want heroic leadership or do we value

effective leadership that exhibits humility? Not “conventional humility,” that has all the negative connotations and is often seen as a weakness, but authentic humility or what I call neohumility.” This “neohumility” includes self-awareness, openness, valuing others’ opinions, willing to learn, admitting mistakes and turning failures into lessons by using them (not covering them up) to educate oneself and others. It also includes sharing power, compensating for one’s weaknesses, and establishing a culture of openness in which diversity, dissent and truth are encouraged based on mutual trust and respect (Kellerman, 2004). “Neohumility” should bolster one’s confidence as one has the respect and trust of the members of the organization. To have “neohumility” takes tremendous strength, especially for the accomplished leader. “Neohumility” does not include the negatives associated with conventional humility such as insecurity, self-deprecation, and meekness as previously discussed.

The concept of neohumility that is referred to above is similar in idea to the Competing Values Framework developed by Quinn et al (2007). In their framework, any characteristic or organizational function that is taken to the extreme can create problems for the leader or the organization. Thus if a leader focuses excessively on the human relations model, emphasizing flexibility and internal focus (personnel issues), with limited attention paid to the rational goals model that stresses control and external focus (profits), this is likely to create problems. The Competing Values Framework is based on the concept of a transcending paradox, which asserts that leaders need to be both collaborative and competitive and need to find ways to maintain control while being flexible. The concept of humility as it is often perceived in our culture is more like humility taken to the extreme, into the negative zone, as it harbors ideas of self-deprecation, shyness, and meekness. Applying the competing values framework to the concept of neohumility as developed in this paper, leaders must transcend the paradox of being the leader and still be neohumble. Finding a way to come across as open, self aware, willing to learn and change, while still coming across as strong and competent.

If we value “neohumility” we must change our expectations of our leaders and of ourselves. We must stop expecting heroic leadership and the notion that we must be “led,” instead we must each do our share in bringing change and growth to the organization. We must cultivate “neohumility” in ourselves and value and reward it in our leaders. In our current system, the individuals who market themselves the best often get the top jobs, even though they are typically the ones not rich in this quality. If we value “neohumility” as a critical leadership quality, we will get leaders who are Collins’s “Level 5 leaders.”

## CONCLUSIONS

This article examines the literature on leadership with respect to leadership values, qualities and traits. It finds that one critical quality which it defines as “neohumility” has been absent from the literature at large, though recently some scholars have started to address this gap in leadership theory. Part of the problem lies in the traditional definition of humility, which is discussed in the article, and thus a new term, “neohumility,” which is humility defined in the context of leadership is introduced. The other part of the problem lies in how society views the idea of leadership. Leaders are often viewed as heroes with celebrity status who stand at the top of the world. In addition, the competitive environment from which leaders emerge often causes them to hide their mistakes, their agony over difficult decisions and their limitations. Often society does not permit any perceived signs of weakness in a leader. Changing society's view on leadership to

include a quality like “neohumility,” has to be a bottom up effort. Changing widely accepted paradigms rarely happens from the top. If one tries to start with those already in leadership positions it is likely that one may run into stiff opposition based on stubborn steadfastness to tradition built by years of indoctrination. Changing “leaders as heroes” to “Level 5 leaders” and shifting the focus from “I” to “we” has to start with the future generation of leaders, those who are not yet indoctrinated and still hold open minds. Starting at the beginning, like the students who were asked to list desirable characteristics of a leader, that's where the paradigm shift has to start. In the classroom and at the workplace, emphasizing the importance of “neohumility” as a critical leadership quality, rather than glorified heroism, can build a new foundation for leadership. Critics may argue that one cannot identify a set of required traits for effective leadership, as different situations demand a different kind of leader (situational leadership). I would argue that while leaders may need to adjust their modus operandi based on organizational context and the issues at hand, that there are certain core leadership qualities that a leader must possess regardless of situational context, and that one such essential quality is “neohumility.”

In a survey conducted by Peter Hart (1998), he found that Generation X, who are getting ready to assume leadership roles, have started to build a vision of leadership based on sensitivity and cooperation over charisma, individual empowerment over institutional empowerment, and inclusive and bottom up decision making over top down (Headington, 2001). Generation X is living their policies and effecting change by volunteering in grass root level community organizations. Their emphasis is on “we” rather than “I.” Maybe that’s the change we need first and then we can effect positive change in leadership in business organizations.

Kouzes and Posner (2003), in their book, *The Leadership Challenge*, highlight five practices of exemplary leadership. These include: modeling the way by connecting values to one’s actions, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, encouraging the heart, and acknowledging, recognizing, and celebrating the contributions others make to the organization. This is what effective leadership is and this type of leadership is possible only if one has “neohumility.” Inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, encouraging the heart, and valuing others not only require vision and ability but also “neohumility.” This is where we need to start on the first day of the leadership seminar.

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