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From humble leadership to prosocial voice: The role of creative self-efficacy

Section:
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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between leader humility and prosocial voice by investigating the mediating role of creative self-efficacy. Drawing on social cognitive theory, the research proposes that humble leaders enhance employees' confidence in their creative capabilities, which, in turn, motivates them to engage in prosocial voice—the voluntary expression of ideas or suggestions aimed at benefiting others or the collective. A quantitative research design was employed, using a multi-wave survey method involving 370 participants. The hypothesized relationships were tested using structural equation modeling to assess both direct and indirect effects. The results reveal that leader humility positively affects creative self-efficacy, and creative self-efficacy positively affects prosocial voice. Furthermore, creative self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between leader humility and prosocial voice, indicating that humble leadership influences employee voice entirely through strengthening employees' confidence in their creative abilities.

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji hubungan antara kerendahan hati pemimpin dan suara prososial dengan menyelidiki peran mediasi dari efikasi diri kreatif. Berdasarkan teori kognitif sosial, penelitian ini mengusulkan bahwa pemimpin yang rendah hati meningkatkan kepercayaan diri karyawan dalam kemampuan kreatif mereka, yang pada gilirannya memotivasi mereka untuk terlibat dalam suara prososial—ekspresi sukarela ide atau saran yang bertujuan untuk memberi manfaat bagi orang lain atau kolektif. Desain penelitian kuantitatif digunakan, dengan metode survei multi-gelombang yang melibatkan 382 partisipan. Hubungan yang dihipotesiskan diuji menggunakan pemodelan persamaan struktural untuk menilai efek langsung dan tidak langsung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kerendahan hati pemimpin secara positif memengaruhi efikasi diri kreatif, dan efikasi diri kreatif secara positif memengaruhi suara prososial. Lebih lanjut, efikasi diri kreatif sepenuhnya memediasi hubungan antara kerendahan hati pemimpin dan suara prososial, menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan yang rendah hati memengaruhi suara karyawan sepenuhnya melalui penguatan kepercayaan diri karyawan dalam kemampuan kreatif mereka.

Kata kunci: Kerendahan hati pemimpin, efikasi diri kreatif, suara prososial, teori kognitif sosial, mediasi

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving, highly competitive business environment, organizations increasingly recognize that traditional, top-down leadership approaches are insufficient for fostering employee creativity and proactivity (Tripathi, 2025). Researchers and practitioners have thus turned their attention to more supportive leadership styles that empower employees and recognize their contributions. Among these emerging approaches, leader humility has garnered significant attention as a leadership quality that promotes employee growth, learning, and positive organizational outcomes (Chandler et al., 2023).

Leader humility is characterized by three core dimensions: self-awareness and willingness to admit limitations, appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and teachability or openness to feedback (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Unlike traditional leadership approaches that emphasize leader dominance and control, humble leaders acknowledge their limitations, appreciate followers' strengths, and remain open to feedback and new ideas. This leadership style creates psychological safety and encourages employees to take creative risks without fear of negative consequences (Asghar et al., 2022; Zou & Chen, 2022).

Creative self-efficacy defined as an individual's belief in their ability to produce creative outcomes, has emerged as a critical psychological construct that predicts creative activities, achievements, and overall creative performance (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Farmer & Tierney, 2017; Steele et al., 2018). Drawing on social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs are shaped by four primary sources: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Mao et al., 2019). Within organizational contexts, CSE is influenced by factors such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and contextual factors, including leadership behaviors and organizational environments (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Research has consistently demonstrated that higher levels of CSE are positively associated with better psychological well-being, academic performance, and creative production (Gomez-Baya et al., 2025; Smith, 2022).

Prior studies have confirmed that leader humility plays a significant role in fostering followers' creative self-efficacy and creative behavior. Humble leaders exhibit openness, self-awareness, and a willingness to learn, fostering a supportive environment in which employees can develop self-efficacy and engage in creative processes (Asghar et al., 2022; Yang & Xu, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence confirms a positive relationship between leader humility and follower self-efficacy and creativity (Gomez-Baya et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2020). Several mechanisms explain this relationship, including self-efficacy mediation, team creative efficacy, and psychological safety (Asghar et al., 2022; Mao et al., 2019; Zou & Chen, 2022).

Prosocial voice represents another important employee outcome that may be influenced by leader humility. Prosocial voice is a proactive verbal behavior aimed at promoting positive change

for a group or organization, characterized by constructive intent and a focus on collective interests (Carneiro & Bastos, 2020; G. L. Lee et al., 2014). Motivated by a desire to improve outcomes and advocate for others, prosocial voice is particularly important in organizational settings where it enhances effectiveness and collective well-being (S.-H. Lee et al., 2020; Richmond & Burgess, 2023). Research has demonstrated that leader humility significantly impacts prosocial voice behavior through several mechanisms, including fostering prosocial motivation (Zhou & Chen, 2024), enhancing relational energy (Ma et al., 2020), building trust and self-efficacy (Li et al., 2018), and creating meaningful work (Silard et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of research on leader humility and its positive outcomes, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, while prior research has established that leader humility positively influences both self-efficacy and voice behavior separately, limited studies have examined the specific mediating role of creative self-efficacy—a domain-specific form of self-efficacy related to creative capabilities—in the relationship between leader humility and prosocial voice. Studies have demonstrated that leader humility enhances followers' general self-efficacy (Asghar et al., 2022; Mao et al., 2019) and that self-efficacy promotes prosocial behaviors (Caprara & Steca, 2007; González Moreno & Molero Jurado, 2023), yet the integration of these findings into a coherent mediation model focusing specifically on creative self-efficacy remains unexplored.

Second, the mechanisms through which leader humility influences prosocial voice require further theoretical development and empirical testing. Although studies have identified various mediators, including prosocial motivation (Zhou & Chen, 2024), relational energy (Ma et al., 2020), trust (Li et al., 2018), and work meaningfulness (Silard et al., 2024), the role of creative self-efficacy as a cognitive mechanism has received limited attention. Given that voice behavior inherently involves generating and expressing ideas that challenge the status quo (Tian & Huang, 2013; van Oest et al., 2023), employees' confidence in their creative capabilities may be particularly relevant for understanding when and why employees engage in prosocial voice (Sugiono et al., 2023).

Third, the direct effect of leader humility on prosocial voice requires further examination. While theoretical arguments suggest that humble leaders encourage voice by creating supportive environments, the extent to which this effect operates directly or indirectly, through psychological mechanisms such as creative self-efficacy, remains unclear. Research has shown that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and prosocial behaviors (Choi et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2020), suggesting that similar mediating processes may operate in the context of leader humility (Hendryadi, Suratna, et al., 2019).

The originality of this research lies in several aspects. First, this study integrates social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) with the growing literature on humble leadership to examine creative self-efficacy as the mediating mechanism linking leader humility to prosocial voice. By focusing specifically on creative self-efficacy rather than general self-efficacy, this study provides a more precise understanding of the cognitive mechanism relevant to voice behavior, which requires confidence in generating novel and useful ideas.

Second, this study responds to calls for greater understanding of the psychological processes through which leader humility translates into positive employee outcomes. While prior research has examined various mediators separately, this study offers an integrated framework grounded in social cognitive theory that explains how humble leaders activate the four sources of self-efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological states—to enhance employees' creative confidence and subsequent voice behavior.

Third, this study extends the nomological network of prosocial voice research by identifying creative self-efficacy as a previously unexamined antecedent. Given that voice behavior involves interpersonal risk and requires confidence that one's ideas will be valuable, understanding the role of creative self-efficacy provides both theoretical and practical insights for organizations seeking to encourage employee voice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leader humility and creative self-efficacy

Creative self-efficacy (CSE) refers to an individual's belief in their ability to produce creative outcomes (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Farmer & Tierney, 2017; Steele et al., 2018). It is a critical psychological construct that predicts creative activities, achievements, and overall creative performance (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Farmer & Tierney, 2017; Steele et al., 2018). CSE is considered a key component of creativity, influencing both generative and evaluative aspects of creative processes (Smith, 2022; Steele et al., 2018). Drawing on social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs are shaped by four primary sources: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Mao et al., 2019). Within organizational contexts, CSE is influenced by factors such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and contextual factors, including educational interventions and organizational environments (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Research has consistently demonstrated that higher levels of CSE are positively associated with better psychological well-being, academic performance, and creative production (Gomez-Baya et al., 2025; Smith, 2022).

Prior studies have confirmed that leader humility plays a significant role in fostering followers' creative self-efficacy and creative behavior among employees. Humble leaders exhibit openness, self-awareness, and a willingness to learn, fostering a supportive environment in which employees can develop self-efficacy and engage in creative processes (Asghar et al., 2022; Yang & Xu, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence confirms a positive relationship between leader humility and follower self-efficacy and creativity (Gomez-Baya et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2020). Several mechanisms explain this relationship. First, through self-efficacy mediation, leader humility enhances followers' general self-efficacy, which in turn boosts their creativity. This mediating effect has been observed in both individual and team contexts, suggesting that humble leadership cultivates confidence in creative abilities by providing verbal persuasion and vicarious learning opportunities (Asghar et al., 2022; Mao et al., 2019). Second, in team settings, leader humility promotes team creative efficacy, which serves as a foundation for team creativity. In sum, leader humility fosters psychological safety, enabling employees to feel secure in expressing ideas and taking creative risks. This psychological safety further strengthens self-efficacy and creative engagement by reducing fear of negative evaluation and encouraging experimentation (Asghar et al., 2022; Zou & Chen, 2022).

Hypothesis 1: Leader humility positively affects creative self-efficacy.

Leader humility and prosocial voice

Prosocial voice is a proactive verbal behavior aimed at promoting positive change for a group or organization. It is characterized by constructive intent and a focus on collective interests, in contrast to negative forms such as an acquiescent or defensive voice (Carneiro & Bastos, 2020; G. L. Lee et al., 2014). Motivated by a desire to improve outcomes and advocate for others, prosocial voice is particularly important in healthcare settings, where it enhances patient safety and organizational effectiveness (S.-H. Lee et al., 2020; Richmond & Burgess, 2023). Leader humility significantly impacts prosocial voice behavior through several mechanisms. Firstly, humble leaders foster prosocial motivation by valuing and acknowledging others' strengths, thereby encouraging employees to engage in supportive behaviors (Hadmar et al., 2022; Zhou & Chen, 2024). Secondly, they enhance relational energy among team members, promoting positive communication. This relational energy mediates the link between leader humility and constructive voice behavior, especially when leaders are seen as sincere and authentic (Ma et al., 2020) . Leader humility positively influences followers' trust and self-efficacy, which are essential for engaging in prosocial behaviors like speaking up. When employees trust their leaders and believe in their capabilities, they feel safer taking interpersonal risks. Trust mediates the relationship between leader humility and prosocial voice, alleviating fears of negative consequences. Additionally, humble leaders enhance employees' sense of work meaningfulness by linking individual contributions to broader organizational goals, motivating further prosocial behaviors (Achmadi et al., 2022; Li et al., 2018; Silard et al., 2024). Positive interpersonal dynamics amplify this effect. Furthermore, leader humility

fosters identification with both leaders and the organization, encouraging employees to contribute constructively and invest in organizational success.

Hypothesis 2: Leader humility positively affects prosocial voice.

Creative Self-Efficacy and Prosocial Voice

Creative self-efficacy (CSE), defined as an individual's belief in their ability to produce creative outcomes, plays a significant role in fostering prosocial voice, which refers to the voluntary expression of ideas or suggestions aimed at benefiting others or the collective. This relationship is theoretically grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that self-efficacy beliefs influence behavior through cognitive, motivational, and affective processes. Individuals with strong creative self-efficacy are more confident in their capacity to generate novel and useful ideas, and this confidence motivates them to share those ideas with others for the benefit of the organization.

CSE is positively associated with prosocial behaviors, as it enhances psychological resilience and reduces stress, creating a supportive internal environment for prosocial actions (González Moreno & Molero Jurado, 2023). Employees who believe in their creative capabilities experience less anxiety about potential negative evaluations and are more willing to take interpersonal risks when speaking up. Furthermore, self-efficacy beliefs, including creative self-efficacy, act as mediators in promoting prosocial behaviors by regulating interpersonal relationships and affect (Caprara & Steca, 2007). When employees possess strong efficacy beliefs, they approach social interactions with greater confidence and are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit others.

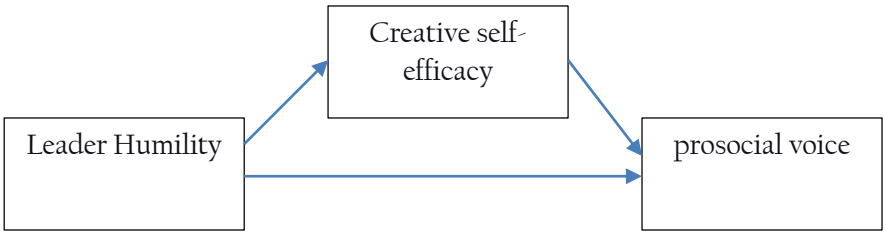

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Specifically, self-efficacy motivates individuals to engage in voice behavior by boosting confidence in expressing ideas and challenging the status quo (Tian & Huang, 2013; van Oest et al., 2023). Voice inherently involves risk, as speaking up may challenge existing practices or authority. Employees with higher self-efficacy are more likely to perceive that their ideas will be valuable and well-received, reducing the perceived risks of voicing them. Research demonstrates that employees with higher self-efficacy are more likely to proactively share suggestions, especially in environments that support creativity and psychological safety (Choi et al., 2021; Xue et al., 2020). Additionally, creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative or prosocial behaviors, suggesting that individuals with higher CSE are more likely to engage in actions that benefit others (Choi et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2020). When employees feel empowered and confident in their creative abilities, they channel this confidence into constructive,

other-oriented actions such as prosocial voice. Thus, creative self-efficacy serves as a crucial psychological mechanism that translates positive work experiences into proactive behaviors that benefit colleagues and the organization.

Hypothesis 3: Creative self-efficacy positively affects prosocial voice.

Hypothesis 4: Creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between leader humility and prosocial voice.

METHODS

Sample and Procedures

The target population for this study was permanent employees working in various organizations in Jakarta. Data were collected through an online survey platform administered in two waves, separated by a one-month interval. At Wave 1, employees reported their perceptions of their immediate supervisor's leader humility and their own power distance orientation. One week later (Wave 2), the same employees reported their creative self-efficacy, and their direct supervisors rated their prosocial voice behavior. Supervisor ratings were employed to provide an objective assessment of voice behavior that is not subject to self-report bias and to substantially reduce concerns about common method variance by using different sources for predictor and outcome variables (Hendryadi, Tricahyadinata, et al., 2019).

After matching employee responses across the two waves with supervisor ratings, the final sample comprised 370 respondents. The respondents were drawn from both the private and public sectors. Private sector employees comprised 48.6% (n = 180) of the sample, while public sector employees accounted for 51.4% (n = 190). Regarding gender composition, female respondents constituted the majority at 60.8% (n = 225), while male respondents represented 39.2% (n = 145) of the sample. In terms of organizational tenure, the largest group of respondents (51.6%, n = 191) had worked for their current organization for 5-10 years. Employees with less than 2 years of tenure accounted for 36.8% (n = 136), followed by those with 2 to 5 years of tenure at 5.9% (n = 22), and employees with more than 10 years of tenure at 5.7% (n = 21). To ensure the sample size was adequate for detecting the hypothesized effects, a power analysis was conducted prior to data collection. Using the guidelines proposed by Westland (2010) for SEM power analysis, with an anticipated medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a desired statistical power of 0.80, and an alpha level of 0.05, the minimum required sample size was estimated at approximately 200 respondents, confirming that the sample is sufficient for the planned analyses (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurements

All items were measured using established scales with proven psychometric properties. Unless otherwise noted, items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Leader Humility was measured using a nine-item scale adapted from Owens et al. (2013). Sample items include "My leader admits it when they do not know how to do something." The scale captures the three core dimensions of leader humility: willingness to admit limitations, appreciation of others' strengths, and teachability. Creative self-efficacy was measured using a five-item scale (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Sample items include "I feel confident in my ability to solve problems creatively" and "I have confidence in my ability to generate novel ideas." Respondents rated their agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Employee voice used five items from the prosocial voice sub-scale (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Minor revisions were made; for example, the item, "I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the organization." Power distance was measured using Hofstede's five-item culture sub-scale (Yoo et al., 2011). Some typical examples included: "People in higher positions should not ask for the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently" and "People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement model evaluation

The goodness-of-fit evaluation examined the proposed structural model using covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The model produced a chi-square (χ^2) value of 243.666 with 132 degrees of freedom, significant at $p < 0.001$. While this indicates a difference between predicted and observed values, the chi-square test is sensitive to sample size and doesn't always imply model rejection. The model shows an excellent fit based on absolute fit indices. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.05, below the 0.08 threshold, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.04 to 0.06. The RMSEA p-value for close fit is 0.64, indicating the model fits well. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is 0.04, well below the maximum of 0.08. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) is 0.98, indicating a high explanatory power. All incremental fit indices exceed recommended thresholds, with the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI), and Relative Noncentrality Index (RNI) all at 0.96, suggesting substantial improvement over the baseline model. The Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) is 0.97, indicating a parsimonious model fit with high efficiency (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Goodness of Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Cut-off Criteria	Fit Level
Absolute Fit Indices			
Chi-Square (χ^2)	243.666	Expected small	-
Degrees of Freedom (df)	132	-	-
Significance Level (p)	<0.001	>0.05	Poor
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.05	≤0.08	Good
90% Confidence Interval RMSEA	0.04 – 0.06	-	-
RMSEA p-value (Close Fit)	0.64	>0.05	Good
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.04	≤0.08	Good
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.98	≥0.90	Good
Incremental Fit Indices			
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.96	≥0.90	Good
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.96	≥0.90	Good
Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI)	0.96	≥0.90	Good
Relative Noncentrality Index (RNI)	0.96	≥0.90	Good
Parsimonious Fit Indices			
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.97	≥0.90	Good

Note: Chi-square is sensitive to large sample sizes; therefore, other fit indices provide more reliable assessment of model fit (Hair et al., 2019)

The measurement model was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the reliability and validity of the underlying constructs. As shown in Table 2, all factor loadings for the three latent variables—Leader Humility, Creative Self-Efficacy, and Prosocial Voice—are statistically significant and surpass the recommended threshold of 0.50, with most exceeding 0.70. Specifically, the loadings for Leader Humility range from 0.70 to 0.77, Creative Self-Efficacy from

0.69 to 0.75, and Prosocial Voice from 0.56 to 0.85. Although the loadings for items PV1 (0.56) and PV4 (0.60) are slightly lower, they still exceed the minimum acceptable level for exploratory research and meaningfully contribute to their respective constructs. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). All constructs showed strong internal consistency, with CA values of 0.91 for Leader Humility, 0.84 for Creative Self-Efficacy, and 0.81 for Prosocial Voice, all of which are above the 0.70 benchmark. Similarly, the composite reliability values are high (0.91, 0.84, and 0.81, respectively), confirming that the items effectively measure the intended constructs. To assess convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE) was used. The AVE values for Leader Humility (0.53), Creative Self-Efficacy (0.51), and Prosocial Voice (0.52) all meet or exceed the recommended minimum of 0.50, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. These findings strongly support the presence of convergent validity.

Table 2. Measurement model evaluation

Latent / Observed	Mean	SD	Factor loading	CA	CR	AVE
Leader Humility						
LH1	2.79	1.13	0.72	0.91	0.91	0.53
LH2	2.89	1.13	0.70			
LH3	2.91	1.15	0.73			
LH4	2.85	1.13	0.70			
LH5	2.91	1.18	0.76			
LH6	2.94	1.17	0.72			
LH7	2.96	1.15	0.70			
LH8	2.88	1.20	0.77			
LH9	2.85	1.24	0.74			
Creative Self-Efficacy						
CR1	3.20	1.19	0.70	0.84	0.84	0.51
CR2	2.94	1.10	0.71			
CR3	2.98	1.15	0.72			
CR4	3.08	1.16	0.75			
CR5	3.14	1.19	0.69			
Prosocial Voice						
PV1	3.11	1.10	0.56	0.81	0.81	0.52
PV2	2.88	1.15	0.83			
PV3	2.97	1.02	0.85			
PV4	3.05	1.07	0.60			

Discriminant validity was assessed with the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 shows that all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.85: Leader Humility with Creative Self-Efficacy (0.405), Leader Humility with Prosocial Voice (0.274), and Creative Self-Efficacy with Prosocial Voice (0.535). These results confirm that each construct is distinct, with the highest correlation (0.535) indicating a relationship between Creative Self-Efficacy and Prosocial Voice. Thus, discriminant validity is established, preserving the integrity of subsequent structural analyses.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio of Correlations

Construct	Leader Humility	Creative Self-Efficacy	Prosocial Voice
Leader Humility	1.00		
Creative Self-Efficacy	0.405	1.00	
Prosocial Voice	0.274	0.535	1.00

Note: HTMT values below 0.85 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural analysis and hyphoteses testing

The findings from the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4. The present study examined the effects of leader humility on creative self-efficacy and prosocial voice, with creative self-efficacy as a mediating variable. Results show that leader humility is significantly positively related to o creative self-efficacy (β = 0.41, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.167) but does not significantly impact prosocial voice (β = 0.08, p = 0.19). However, creative self-efficacy positively affects prosocial voice (β = 0.45, p < 0.001), and together they explain 23.6% of the variation in prosocial voice (R^2 = 0.236). The indirect effect of leader humility on prosocial voice through creative self-efficacy is also significant (β = 0.18, p < 0.001), suggesting full mediation; thus, leader humility enhances prosocial voice by boosting employees' creative self-efficacy. Hence, H1-4 were supported (see Table 4).

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	p	R^2
Lhd ⇒ Creative	0.42	0.06	0.29	0.54	0.41	<.001	0.167
Lhd ⇒ Voice	0.06	0.05	-0.03	0.15	0.08	0.19	0.236
Creative ⇒ Voice	0.33	0.06	0.22	0.45	0.45	<.001	
Indirect effect							
Lhd ⇒ Creative ⇒ Voice	0.14	0.03	0.08	0.20	0.18	<.001	

Discussion

This study examined the relationships between leader humility, creative self-efficacy, and prosocial voice, with a specific focus on the mediating role of creative self-efficacy. The findings provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which humble leadership influences employee voice behavior, consistent with the four hypotheses proposed in this study. The study finds a significant positive effect of leader humility on creative self-efficacy, supporting Hypothesis 1. This reinforces previous research on humble leadership, which has shown that it boosts employees' confidence in their creative abilities (Asghar et al., 2022; Yang & Xu, 2022). Meta-analyses show a positive link between leader humility and follower self-efficacy (Gomez-Baya et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2020), and this study extends this to creative self-efficacy. Grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), self-efficacy beliefs arise from mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Mao et al., 2019). Humble leaders who acknowledge their limitations and appreciate contributions activate these efficacy sources, providing vicarious learning by modeling openness to feedback and demonstrating that growth and learning from mistakes are valuable (Asghar et al., 2022).

Furthermore, humble leaders explicitly appreciate and recognize employees' contributions, providing verbal persuasion that directly enhances employees' confidence. When leaders

acknowledge employees' strengths and ideas, employees internalize this recognition and develop stronger creative self-efficacy beliefs (Zou & Chen, 2022). The finding also supports the proposition that humble leaders foster psychological safety, encouraging experimentation and risk-taking. By admitting their own limitations and remaining open to feedback, leaders signal that imperfection is acceptable and that learning comes through trial and error. This environment enables employees to accumulate mastery experiences as they experiment with creative approaches without fear of punishment for failure, further strengthening their creative self-efficacy (Asghar et al., 2022).
Second, the finding demonstrates that creative self-efficacy has a significant positive effect on prosocial voice, supporting Hypothesis 3. This result aligns with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that individuals who believe in their capabilities are more likely to engage in challenging behaviors. Prosocial voice—speaking up with suggestions to benefit the organization or colleagues (Carneiro & Bastos, 2020; Lee et al., 2014)—requires confidence that one's ideas are valuable and will be taken seriously. Employees with strong creative self-efficacy believe in their ability to generate novel and useful ideas (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Farmer & Tierney, 2017), and this confidence motivates them to express those ideas to others. This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that self-efficacy beliefs promote prosocial behaviors by regulating interpersonal relationships and affect (Caprara & Steca, 2007). When employees possess strong efficacy beliefs, they approach social interactions with greater confidence and are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit others.

The significant positive relationship suggests that creative self-efficacy provides the motivational resources necessary to overcome the risks associated with voice behavior. Speaking up always carries potential social costs, including the possibility of being ignored, criticized, or damaging relationships (Tian & Huang, 2013; van Oest et al., 2023). Employees with strong creative self-efficacy are more likely to perceive their ideas as valuable and worth the risk. In contrast, those with low creative self-efficacy may doubt their ideas and remain silent. This finding extends prior research showing that employees with higher self-efficacy are more likely to proactively share suggestions, especially in environments that support creativity and psychological safety (Choi et al., 2021; Xue et al., 2020).

Third, the present study reveals that creative self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between leader humility and prosocial voice, supporting Hypothesis 4. The direct effect of leader humility on prosocial voice was non-significant, while the indirect effect through creative self-efficacy was significant, indicating full mediation. This finding provides a nuanced answer to the question of how leader humility influences employee voice. The results suggest that humble leadership does not directly encourage employees to speak up; rather, it operates indirectly by strengthening employees' confidence in their creative capabilities. When leaders demonstrate humility, employees develop stronger creative self-efficacy, and this enhanced efficacy subsequently motivates them to engage in prosocial voice. This mediating role of creative self-efficacy is consistent with prior research showing that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between positive leadership and employee outcomes (Asghar et al., 2022; Mao et al., 2019).

This full mediation model is theoretically meaningful. Leader humility creates conditions—psychological safety (Asghar et al., 2022; Zou & Chen, 2022), recognition, and vicarious learning (Mao et al., 2019)—that build employees' creative confidence. However, it is this internalized confidence, rather than the leader's behavior per se, that ultimately drives voice behavior. Employees speak up not simply because their leader is humble, but because they believe in their own ability to generate valuable ideas. This finding extends previous research demonstrating that creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and prosocial behaviors (Choi et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2020).

The non-significant direct effect further reinforces the importance of creative self-efficacy as the primary mechanism. In the absence of enhanced creative confidence, leader humility alone may be insufficient to motivate voice behavior. Employees may appreciate humble leaders and feel psychologically safe, but without the belief that they have something valuable to contribute, they may still choose to remain silent. This highlights the critical role of self-efficacy as the proximal driver of proactive behaviors in organizations, consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Contrary to Hypothesis 2, which predicted a direct positive effect of leader humility on prosocial voice, the findings revealed a non-significant direct relationship. While this result was unexpected, it is theoretically interpretable within the full mediation model. The non-significant

direct effect suggests that leader humility influences prosocial voice entirely through its impact on creative self-efficacy, rather than through a direct pathway. This finding diverges from some prior research suggesting direct effects of leader humility on voice behaviors through mechanisms such as prosocial motivation (Zhou & Chen, 2024), relational energy (Ma et al., 2020), trust (Li et al., 2018), and work meaningfulness (Silard et al., 2024). However, these mechanisms may be mediated by creative self-efficacy, or creative self-efficacy may represent a more proximal predictor of voice. The full mediation model suggests that the various pathways identified in prior research—prosocial motivation, relational energy, trust, and meaningfulness—may ultimately operate by strengthening employees' confidence in their creative capabilities.

Implications

This study contributes to the leadership and organizational behavior literature by exploring the role of creative self-efficacy as a cognitive mechanism linking leader humility to prosocial voice. While previous research has shown direct effects of leader humility on several outcomes, this study highlights the psychological process that translates humble leader behaviors into employee voice. Additionally, it demonstrates that creative self-efficacy fully mediates the impact of humble leadership on prosocial voice, extending existing findings that link leader humility to creativity. Finally, by identifying creative self-efficacy as a unique pathway to voice beyond psychological safety and leader-member exchange, this research addresses the need for deeper exploration of cognitive mechanisms in voice studies.

The findings highlight several key practices for organizations and leaders to enhance employee voice. First, training programs should focus on developing leaders' humility, enabling them to recognize their limitations, appreciate contributions, and be open to feedback (Asghar et al., 2022). Second, leaders must strengthen employees' creative self-efficacy by assigning challenging tasks, offering verbal encouragement, and fostering psychologically safe environments that embrace experimentation and learning from failure (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Third, organizations should integrate creative self-efficacy into their human capital assessments to identify areas needing support for employees with low confidence. Finally, while humility fosters psychological safety (Zou & Chen, 2022), leaders also need to encourage employees explicitly and provide opportunities for them to share and develop their ideas.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that suggest future research directions. First, its cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, so future studies should use longitudinal designs to clarify causal relationships. Second, the sample was drawn from a specific industry and culture, which may affect generalizability. Future research should explore these relationships across industries and cultural contexts, particularly by considering cultural dimensions such as power distance. Third, this study focused on a single mediator—creative self-efficacy. Future research should investigate additional mechanisms, such as psychological safety and leader-member exchange, to further understand how leader humility influences voice. Finally, it is important to examine the boundary conditions of the mediated relationship. Individual differences, such as proactive personality and cultural values, as well as team factors, such as innovation climate, may moderate the effects of leader humility on creative self-efficacy and voice.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a nuanced perspective on how leader humility influences employee prosocial voice. The findings reveal that leader humility boosts creative self-efficacy, which, in turn, motivates voice behavior. Creative self-efficacy fully mediates this relationship, indicating that humble leadership

functions entirely through enhancing employees' confidence in their creative abilities. By uncovering this cognitive mechanism, the study deepens our understanding of the psychological processes through which humble leadership leads to positive employee outcomes. Organizations aiming to promote employee voice should prioritize developing humble leaders who foster environments that enhance employees' creative self-efficacy, as this combination lays the groundwork for employees to share valuable ideas and suggestions.

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