(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

The role of job crafting in mediating the influence of humility in leadership on the work engagement of state civil servants

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Abstract

Low levels of work engagement among State Civil Apparatus (ASN) remain a major problem impacting the quality of public services. This study aims to examine the effect of humble leadership on work engagement and examine the role of job crafting as a mediating variable in the public sector. This study employed a quantitative causal-associative approach with a survey of 94 ASN at the Bali Provincial Revenue Agency in Denpasar, Bali. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results showed that humble leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement and job crafting. Work engagement is positively and significantly impacted by job crafting as well. Additionally, it was demonstrated that the association between work engagement and humble leadership is somewhat mediated by job crafting. These findings indicate that humble leadership encourages proactive employee behavior, which ultimately raises work engagement. The results of this study offer theoretical insights and real-world applications for public sector human resource managers looking to promote job crafting in the workplace.

1. Introduction

Increasing demands for effectiveness, transparency, and quality of public services require Civil Servant Assistants (ASN) to have optimal levels of work engagement. Work engagement is a positive psychological state characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption in work [1]. Employees with high levels of work engagement tend to demonstrate better performance, strong organizational commitment, and optimal quality public services. However, several previous studies have shown that levels of work engagement among ASN in Indonesia are still relatively low [2, 3, 4].

Leadership plays a crucial role in influencing work engagement [5]. In relation to public organizations characterized by hierarchical bureaucratic structures and strict formal regulations, leadership style becomes increasingly important. Humble leadership, characterized by the leader's awareness of self-limitations, appreciation of subordinates' contributions, and openness to learning, is seen as relevant to creating a supportive and participatory work environment. Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of humble leadership on employee behaviors such as team learning, cohesion, collective efficacy, team performance [6, 7], creativity, and knowledge sharing [8, 9]. Other studies have shown the opposite effect of humble leadership, which can trigger deviant behavior, thereby reducing work engagement [10, 11]. These studies have shown inconsistent findings regarding the direct influence of humble leadership on work engagement, thus warranting further research, particularly in the public sector.

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Job crafting is seen as an important mechanism that can explain this relationship. Job crafting is a proactive behavior of employees in adjusting tasks, work relationships, and ways of interpreting their work to make it more meaningful and in line with their abilities and psychological needs. Job crafting has a positive impact on work engagement and leader's support significantly influences employees' ability to engage in job crafting [12]. Job crafting has the potential to be a mediating mechanism in the relationship between humility in leadership and employee engagement. Humble leadership support is believed to encourage employees to engage in job crafting, which in turn increases work engagement [13]. However, empirical studies on the role of job crafting as a mediator in the public sector, particularly local governments in Indonesia, are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of job crafting in mediating the influence of humble leadership on the work engagement of civil servants. The results of this study are expected to contribute to enriching academic studies by applying the main grand theory of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) Model in the context of public sector organizations. In addition, this study can also serve as an empirical basis for designing training programs that encourage job crafting practices in the workplace.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains that work relationships are built on the principle of reciprocity [14]. When employees receive positive treatment in the form of support, appreciation, and trust from their leaders, they are encouraged to reciprocate through positive work attitudes and behaviors. In this study, humble leadership is seen as a form of positive social exchange that encourages job crafting and work engagement [15]. Humble leadership impacts increased engagement in public sector employees through relational mechanisms, particularly in collaborative work cultures in public service institutions, confirming the principle of social exchange between leaders and employees [16]. Humble leadership is perceived as positive treatment through support, appreciation, and openness from leaders, which fosters a sense of fairness and a "psychological debt" in employees. In return, employees are encouraged to demonstrate positive and proactive behaviors, one of which is through job crafting to tailor their work to be more meaningful and suited to their needs and abilities. This process further increases work engagement as a form of commitment and active participation in work.

Humble leaders create a psychologically safe, trusting work environment that values employee contributions. Based on the SET perspective, this encourages employees to reciprocate by increasing work engagement characterized by passion, dedication, and full involvement in the work. Previous findings confirmed that humble leadership is correlated favorably with work engagement in all organizational contexts [13, 17, 18].

2.1. Hypothesis 1 (H1): Humility in leadership has a positive effect on work engagement

Humble leadership provides space for employees to take initiative and manage their work independently. Leaders demonstrate awareness of their own limitations, value the contributions of their subordinates, and are open to learning and feedback, creating a psychologically safe and trusting work environment. In such a work environment, employees feel valued and empowered, giving them the space and courage to take initiative in managing their work. This condition encourages proactive efforts by employees to adjust tasks, build more meaningful working relationships, and provide space for employees to take initiative and manage their work independently. Humble leadership can help break down rigid bureaucracy and provide healthy freedom for employees to work more independently and take responsibility for their decisions [19]. An open and supportive work environment encourages employees to engage in job crafting. Based on the empirical findings of [20, 21], it can be rationally assumed that humility positively and significantly affects employee job crafting.

2.2. Hypothesis 2 (H2): Humility in leadership has a positive effect on job crafting

Employees who are active in re-managing their work roles show improvements in the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption, which are key indicators of work engagement [22, 23]. These employees tend to have a better fit between job demands and available resources, thereby increasing their sense of meaning, autonomy, and engagement in their work.

2.3. Hypothesis 3 (H3): Job crafting has a positive effect on work engagement

Humble leadership is expected to influence work engagement not only directly but also indirectly through job crafting, a mechanism for proactive employee behavior. Job crafting has been verified to have a significant influence on work engagement with a full mediation effect [24, 25].

2.4. Hypothesis 4 (H4): Job crafting mediates the effect of humility in leadership on work engagement

2.4.1. Methods

The research was conducted at Bali Provincial Revenue Agency, located in Denpasar, Bali for about two months following research academic schedule. The impacts of humility in leadership as an exogenous variable (X) on work engagement as an endogenous variable (Y) were investigated in this study using a quantitative approach and a causal associative research design, with job crafting (Z) acting as a mediating variable. The population in this study was all civil servants employed at the Bali Provincial Revenue Agency excluding echelon II officials. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale.

Humble leadership was measured through the dimensions of willingness to assess oneself accurately, respect for others, and openness to learning [11, 26]. Job crafting was measured through the dimensions of task adjustment, work relationship adjustment, and work interpretation [27]. Work engagement was measured through the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption [28]. The instruments in this study were then tested for validity and reliability.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) [29], which included evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model).

3. Results

3.1. Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model evaluation's findings revealed that all indicators had met the validity and reliability criteria. The outer loading value for each indicator was above 0.70, while the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value at the dimension level (low level) and variables (high level) were greater than 0.50, indicating the instrument was declared valid. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all indicators also exceed the minimum limit of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. These revealed that the research instrument was valid and reliable.

3.2. Structural Model Evaluation

The results of the structural model test were presented on Table 1. With a path coefficient of 0.653 and a p-value <0.05, the results showed that humility in leadership significantly and positively affected work engagement; as a result, H1 was accepted. Humility in leadership also had a positive and significant effect on job crafting with a path coefficient of 0.836 and a p-value <0.05, thus H2 was accepted. Furthermore, job crafting had a positive and significant effect on work engagement with a path coefficient of 0.263 and a p-value <0.05, thus H3 was accepted.

Table 1 Hypothesis Testing Result

Construct	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O∕STDEV)	P-values	Hypothesis Status	f^2	Remarks
Humility (X) -> Work Engagement (Y)	0.653	4.791	0.000	accepted	0.593	High
Humility (X) -> Job Crafting (Z)	0.836	19.429	0.000	accepted	2.320	High
Job Crafting (Z) -> Work Engagement (Y)	0.261	2.048	0.041	accepted	0.096	Low

(Primary Data, 2025)

Furthermore, with a p-value of 0.219 and a path coefficient of 0.219, this study discovered that job crafting partially mediated the relationship between work engagement and humility in leadership (Table 2). The results of the mediation test demonstrate that this relationship is categorized as complementary partial mediation because the direct and indirect effects are both significant and in the same direction. This finding suggests that humility-based leadership creates a supportive environment that encourages proactive job redesign.

Table 2 Mediating Testing Result (Specific Indirect Effect)

Construct	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P-values	Hypothesis Status
Humility (X) -> Job Crafting (Z) -> Work Engagement (Y)	0.220	0.108	2.039	0.042	accepted

(Primary Data, 2025)

4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that humble leadership plays a significant role in enhancing civil servant (ASN) work engagement. Leaders who acknowledge their own limitations, value the contributions of subordinates, and open to learning, create reciprocal work relationships from employees. This finding reinforces the theoretical foundation of Social Exchange Theory, which emphasizes which states that the quality of interpersonal interactions between leaders and followers is a key driver of employee motivation and engagement in the workplace.

These results align with research by [16], which asserts that humble leadership impacts increased employee engagement in the public sector through strong relational mechanisms and a collaborative work culture. Furthermore, these findings align with the arguments of [30], who stated that a supportive leadership style and warm communication can promote involvement and a sense of belonging. Humility in leadership can foster a collaborative work climate that increases employee engagement [13]. The consistency of these results demonstrates that humility in leadership is a key and stable factor in building work morale within government bureaucracies, strengthening this research's position in the human resource management landscape.

At the Bali Provincial Revenue Agency (BAPENDA), leaders need to maintain and enhance humility-based leadership, particularly in terms of appreciating employee strengths and a willingness to continuously learn, which have lower average scores than self-awareness. This can be achieved by more consistently recognizing employees' unique abilities and being open to ideas and input from subordinates without feeling threatened by authority. Strengthening these two aspects is expected to increase employee engagement, particularly in the relatively low absorption dimension, thus supporting more optimal achievement of regional revenue targets.

The positive impact of humility in leadership on task adjustment implies that humble leaders can foster a psychologically safe, supportive, and trusting work environment. This can encourage employees to proactively adjust their tasks, build meaningful working relationships, and develop new perspectives on their work. This allows employees to feel greater control and meaning over their work, which in turn increases work engagement.

These findings also align with research conducted by [16], which states that a leadership style that respects subordinates is a key driver for employees to dare to make changes to their work methods. Furthermore, these results support the argument of [24], who emphasized that autonomy and a learning culture born from humble leader are crucial in facilitating job crafting behavior. Therefore, this study supports the consistency of previous research and confirms that in a public sector environment such as the Bali Provincial Regional Revenue Agency (BAPENDA), humility in leadership is a factor capable of encouraging proactive behavior among ASN employees (PNS and PPPK) at BAPENDA Bali, thus enabling them to proactively adapt to increasingly complex work demands.

The results of this study also show that job crafting plays a significant role in increasing work engagement, particularly in the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption. This finding aligns with previous research, which found that employees who actively engage in job crafting tend to have higher work energy, stronger dedication, and deeper cognitive engagement with their work [22, 23].

When organizations provide autonomy that allows employees to engage in job crafting, employees perceive this as a valuable form of organizational support. As a form of "reciprocity," or psychological reciprocity, employees contribute back in the form of deeper work engagement. These findings confirm that social exchange at BAPENDA occurs not only through financial compensation but also through providing employees with the space to maximize their potential, which in turn strengthens the emotional connection between employees and their roles within the organization. Despite bureaucracy often perceived as rigid, job crafting practices remain a key motivating factor for Civil Servants (ASN) at BAPENDA Bali, who remain actively engaged and highly dedicated to public service.

The partial mediation of job crafting in the relationship between humble leadership and work engagement indicates that while humility in leadership can directly increase work engagement, the presence of job crafting strengthens this mechanism. In other words, humility in leadership will be more effective in increasing work engagement if accompanied by opportunities and support for employees to actively engage in job crafting. Job crafting has been shown to increase work engagement by increasing work meaning, autonomy, and individual job fitness. This finding explains why the influence of humble leadership on work engagement is stronger when channeled through job crafting. Thus, job crafting acts as a key mechanism bridging the influence of humble leadership on work engagement.

These results support the findings of [24], who stated that job crafting is an important internal mechanism explaining how leadership can influence work effectiveness. Furthermore, these results align with research by [25], which confirmed a full or partial mediation role in the relationship between leadership behavior and employee engagement. This consistency suggests that in a public sector environment like BAPENDA Bali, job crafting is not simply an additional behavior but a crucial bridge connecting supportive leadership styles with high levels of work engagement.

Practically, the results of this study imply that organizations need to encourage the development of humility in leadership style while simultaneously creating flexible work systems that support job crafting. This approach is believed to be able to sustainably increase employee engagement and positively impact organizational performance.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that humility in leadership has a positive and significant effect on civil servants' work engagement at Bali Provincial Revenue Agency in Denpasar, Bali, both directly and indirectly through job crafting. Job crafting acts as a partial mediator, strengthening the relationship between humility in leadership and work engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to empirical study and strengthens the previous study of leadership and work engagement in the public sector by integrating Social Exchange Theory and the concept of job crafting. Practically, government agencies are advised to develop and strengthen a culture of humble leadership through training that emphasizes leadership openness in receiving input and recognizing the strengths of subordinates, while providing measurable autonomy through flexible policies. Organizations need to create a work environment that supports job crafting practices by balancing between workload and consistent appreciation to improve work engagement and the quality of public services.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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