

When Does Leadership Humility Nurture Career Success: A Moderated Mediation Model of Career Adaptability and Proactive Personality

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - Post-pandemic circumstances and rapid globalization demand organizations to restructure jobs and working environments that increase the unpredictability of career development and increase the responsibility of individuals for career success. Therefore, this study is designed to understand how distinct aspects, i.e., leadership and personal, encourage career success. For that purpose, this study investigates the impact of leadership humility on career success with the intervening mechanism of career adaptability. Moreover, this study also examines the moderating role of a proactive personality.

Design/methodology/approach - We evaluated the proposed hypotheses of this study, using a sample of 293 participants from manufacturing and service sector organizations through simple random sampling and with a time-lag approach.

Findings - Results of this study show that leadership humility is highly related to career success, and career adaptability mediates the relationship between leadership humility and career success. We also found that highly proactive individuals are more confident in coping with the unpredictability of career success with higher leadership humility. Our moderated mediation results indicate that a proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of leadership humility on career success via career adaptability.

Practical Implications - The findings of this study contribute to the career management and social cognitive career theory by explaining leadership humility and proactive personality within a comprehensive resource framework for career success. These results emphasize the meaning of leadership humility to support career adaptability, which leads to higher career success.

Originality/value - This study explains the mechanism of leadership humility and career success by examining the mediating role of career adaptability; moreover, this study also explains the role of personal characteristics/traits (proactivity personality) for career adaptability and career success.

Keywords: Leadership Humility, Proactive Personality, Career Adaptability, Career Success, Career Construction Theory

JEL Classification: M1, M12, M54

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, the concept of career success got the attention of researchers and practitioners to determine the antecedents of their workforce's career success, which further helps organizations attain their strategic goals' success ([Al-Ghazali, 2020](#)). For that purpose, the leadership's role is imperative for achieving career success, as

achievement of career success is linked with employees' professionalism, quality of functionality, and higher job performance ([Dyess, Prestia, & Smith, 2015](#)). According to Arthur et al. ([2005](#)), the career success of individuals is concerned with "the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time" ([p. 179](#)).

Earlier research identified different factors which influence career success as antecedents, i.e., psychological empowerment ([Joo & Lim, 2013](#)) and organizational socialization ([Wei & Taormina, 2014](#)), human, social, and psychological capital ([Järleström, Brandt, & Rajala, 2020](#)) and political skills ([Chen, Jiang, & Wu, 2022](#)). However, a humble leadership style also helps employees to achieve career success. Leadership is an essential resource for workforces to acquire work information and understand work features, and prior research widely affirms that leadership encourages efficient functionality in employees ([Lan & Chen, 2020](#)). Humble leaders hold the mindset of learning from others; therefore, they encourage their subordinates to personal development through continuous learning and through the acquisition of new knowledge ([Caldwell, Ichiho, & Anderson, 2017](#); [Chen et al., 2018](#)), which are essential components of career success.

In addition, numerous organizations nowadays encourage individuals to take responsibility for their careers rather than guaranteeing organizational paths ([Al-Ghazali, 2020](#)). Career adaptability is beneficial for organizations to reduce turnover intentions and sustain their talent ([Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015](#); [Merino-Tejedor, Hontangas, & Boada-Grau, 2016](#)). Using career adaptability as a coping source, individuals enable themselves to meet the expectations of uncertain circumstances for their career development and success ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#)). By using this personal source, individuals can attain higher career performance, satisfaction, and well-being; also, it is beneficial to individuals for the reduction of career stress ([Chan et al., 2016](#); [Fiori, Bollmann, & Rossier, 2015](#); [Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2017](#); [Zacher, 2014](#)). Moreover, organizations can engage their workforce by developing career adaptability behaviors, which further produce positive organizational outcomes, i.e., innovations, higher success in implementing strategic planning, and agility.

Speedy changes in the organizational setting also influence the career objectives of the individuals, due to which they also face challenges in the form of changes in their career paths. Persons with the proactive personality trait tend to accept challenges and take the initiative in rapidly changing workplace situations ([Bateman & Crant, 1993](#)) and attain positive outcomes in the form of personal and organizational success ([Philip, 2023](#)). Proactive individuals take the initiative by displaying persistence to shape the environment and showing their willingness to accept challenges and chances of growth and development, especially from the perspective of career development and success ([Din et al., 2023](#)). Earlier studies suggested that proactive personalities predict several career experiences and emotionally respond to their career success ([Yu et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, proactive personalities take more career initiatives to cope with the challenges of their career tasks through self-adjustment and by improving their adaptive skills and abilities, which may result in higher career adaptability and career development ([Cai et al., 2015](#); [Guan et al., 2017](#); [Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#); [Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001](#); [Yu et al., 2023](#)). Proactive people are more probable to adapt well to career changes and transitions and their proactive problem-solving abilities, confidence, and adaptability help them deal with uncertainty and take benefit of emerging opportunities ([Ullah, Hameed, & Mahmood, 2023](#)); this is in line with the control factor of career adaptability because proactive people believe they have the power to shape and contribute to their career outcomes. Proactive individuals hold the quality to control the changing situations, manage the challenges and improve their existing

state of affairs, and adapt to the workplace environment ([Li et al., 2014](#); [Wang et al., 2017](#); [Yang & Chau, 2016](#)); therefore, we argue that they are more capable of career adaptability which requires the willingness of accepting the career change positively which leads to career success.

The present study contributes to the career construction theory by assessing the relationship between leadership humility, career adaptability, and career success. The present study adds to career success and leadership by emphasizing the value of leadership humility for attaining career success. Further, this study examines the moderating role of a proactive personality for career adaptability in the presence of leadership humility. Specifically, the present study proposed that a proactive personality will moderate the indirect effect of leadership humility on career success via career adaptability. Moreover, this study addresses the call for future research of Haenggli and Hirschi ([2020](#)) by selecting multiple working circumstances and environments for career success with a time-lag approach ([Presti et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, we use a proactive personality as a moderator and formulate a moderated mediation model to address the call for research gap of Kauffeld and Spurk ([2022](#)), Van der Heijden et al. ([2022](#)), and Al-Ghazali ([2020](#)). Moreover, we draw from the theoretical lens of career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)), which asserts that contextual factor may influence and shape the behavior of individuals, which in return enable them to demonstrate different career-related outcomes, i.e., career success; therefore, we examine leadership humility as an antecedent of career success and career adaptability.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)) emphasizes how people develop their personality characteristics, motivations, and experiences by using the information-processing capabilities of organizing, managing, and creating. Moreover, Savickas ([2005](#)) said that growth in individuals relied on continuous adaptation to their social environment to integrate individuals with their surroundings. These features also influence individuals to learn new skills and adapt to new things during career development ([Savickas, 2020](#)). Adaptability plays a vital role in the career success of individuals, as it relates to the personality, preference cognition, and values of the individual through which they demonstrate adaptive behaviors while fulfilling their occupational roles ([Xie et al., 2016](#)). The theoretical lens of career construction theory further explains that individuals demonstrate adaptability behaviors to cope with the challenging situations they face during the rapidly changing circumstances in their careers, and the behaviors activated in individuals due to different factors, i.e., person, workplace interaction and environment ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#)).

Moreover, career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005](#)) explains that “an individual’s career adaptability continues to develop over the lifespan “through interactions between the inner and outer worlds of the person” ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 663](#)). This notion explains that the development of career adaptability in individuals is influenced by psychological and environmental factors in a mutually interactive manner ([Xu & Yu, 2019](#)). Based on this notion, we argue that leadership as an environmental, organizational factor, and proactive personality as a psychological factor may influence individuals' career adaptability. Earlier studies stressed that leaders, through encouragement, attempt to retain the adaptable workforce, as they are the main contributor to the improvement of organizational processes, attainment of strategic goals, and sustainability of organizational success ([Safavi & Bouzari, 2019](#)).

Furthermore, the career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)) lens assumes that individuals who are willing to support change demonstrate their adaptation behaviors during their career ([Yu et al., 2023](#)); they achieve several adaptive outcomes, i.e., career success, well-being, and career satisfaction ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#); [Savickas et al., 2018](#)). In the process framework for adaptation, a proactive personality indicates adaptive preparedness, whereas career success indicates adaptation consequences ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#)). In their career development, individuals need to achieve adaptive achievements and career success ([Yu et al., 2023](#)). Individuals with a proactive personality are more likely to succeed because they look for opportunities, initiate action, and make important improvements ([Yu et al., 2023](#)). By following these arguments about the proactive personality and considering the lens of career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)), we argue that proactive personality works as a personality characteristic and personal source of motivation that enables individuals to career adaptability, which leads to career success. We further argue that career adaptability can also be enhanced with the support of environmental and organizational factors, i.e., leadership humility.

2.2 | Leadership Humility, Career Adaptability, and Career Success.

The role of leadership is imperative for achieving organizational goals ([Chughtai et al., 2023](#)); also, it helps individuals achieve career success ([Al-Ghazali, 2020](#)). Likewise, the career development of individuals is also based on their characteristics, social contexts, interactions with others, and workplace environments. Humility has an advanced background in philosophy, and this concept is an appealing theme in various disciplines, i.e., international business, human resource management, organizational behavior, leadership, and strategic management ([Chandler et al., 2022](#); [Tangney, 2002](#)). Further, leadership humility is defined as “an interpersonal characteristic that emerges in social contexts that connote (a) a manifested willingness to view oneself accurately, (b) a displayed appreciation of others’ strengths and contributions, and (c) teachability, or openness to new ideas and feedback” ([Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 1518](#)). Numerous studies, especially from the last decades considered leadership humility from different perspectives, i.e., a leadership style ([Chandler et al., 2022](#); [Zhou & Wu, 2018](#); [Zhu, Zhang, & Shen, 2019](#)), a steady interpersonal and trait ([Chandler et al., 2022](#); [Ou et al., 2014](#)), a personality characteristic ([LaBouff et al., 2012](#); [Petrenko et al., 2019](#)), and an orientation ([Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005](#); [Owens et al., 2013](#)). It has been observed that leadership humility influences the subordinates, which results in different positive outcomes, i.e., higher performance ([Yang, Shen, & Ma, 2022](#)), innovations ([Jiang, Liu, & Jia, 2019](#); [Yang et al., 2019](#)) well-being ([Zhang & Song, 2020](#)) and resilience ([Zhu et al., 2019](#)) and decrease the turnover intentions ([Owens et al., 2013](#)), burnout ([Afshan et al., 2021](#)). Moreover, it has been observed that humble leaders become the cause of higher satisfaction of subordinates ([Krumrei-Mancuso & Newman, 2021](#)), based on this notion, we argue that leadership influences the career adaptability of the individuals because leadership might encourage the subordinates to perform efficiently, especially during the changing workplace environment ([Delle & Searle, 2022](#)).

Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that “denotes an individual’s resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas in their occupational roles that, to some degree large or small, alter their social integration” ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662](#)). Career adaptability looks at how social norms and career preferences fit together, as well as a person’s abilities and competencies, perceived and real possibilities, and how well an employment position is liked by colleagues ([Hancock & Hums, 2016](#)). An individual’s career

adaptability depends heavily on the competencies to cope with workplace changes, such as career changes, job requirements, competencies, expertise, and capabilities ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#)). The literature emphasizes that career adaptability is derived as a form of human capital and work as a personal source which got development with time as employees, during their career, attain new knowledge, skills, and abilities through their experience ([Brown et al., 2012](#)), which become beneficial for their career success. So, if employees got a higher level of career adaptability, then they can employ more determination for the achievement of their career goals and objective ([Al-Ghazali, 2020](#)) in the form of career success; also, it helps the organization for the sustainability of their competitive advantage ([Lan & Chen, 2020](#)).

Career success is defined as individuals' positive psychological state of mind about their occupation-related achievements, which they got through their professional experience ([Judge et al., 1995](#)). The career success of individuals depends upon different factors; leadership is one of them. Leaders must increase followers' self-reliance, encourage them to contemplate issues autonomously and anticipate responsibilities for their future growth ([Liden et al., 2014](#)). Humble leaders motivate and inspire their subordinates by giving awareness and caring to them about their future growth and development in the form of career success. Similarly, numerous studies suggested that subordinates perceived humble leaders as charismatic and influential personalities that motivate them the demonstration of emotional, ethical, and extra-role behaviors ([Chandler et al., 2022](#); [Naseer et al., 2020](#); [Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010](#); [Qin et al., 2020](#)). As career adaptability is concerned with the individuals' copying growth strategies (e.g., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) which they use during the change in their developmental occupational tasks ([Yu et al., 2023](#)), and leadership behaviors help the individuals for the enhancement of career adaptability by focusing on personal growth and development, by encouraging and supporting them through clarity of occupational expectations and goals ([Al-Ghazali, 2020](#); [Bardoel et al., 2014](#)). Based on the above debate of leadership humility, career adaptability, and career success, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: *Leadership Humility has a positive effect on Career Success.*

H2: *Leadership Humility has a positive impact on Career Adaptability.*

H3: *Career Adaptability has a positive link with Career Success.*

H4: *Career Adaptability mediates the relationship between Leadership Humility and Career Success.*

2.3 | Moderating Role of Proactive Personality

Proactive behaviors of individuals are concerned with “taking the initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones” ([Crant, 2000, p. 436](#)). At the same time, a proactive personality is an individual's tendency to engage in proactive behaviors to change the workplace environment ([Trifiletti et al., 2009](#)). Moreover, proactivity, in broad terms, encompasses attitudinal or intellectual traits that emphasize individuals' initiative and preparatory activities to anticipate and adjust themselves or their surrounding circumstances in an appropriate approach ([Grant & Ashford, 2008](#); [Seibert et al., 2001](#)). From the career development perspective, proactive individuals are willing to take opportunities for learning and new challenges as they are self-starters and are more motivated to achieve their personal and professional goals. Proactive individuals tend to gravitate towards recognizing and settling challenges, are receptive to new potential, are passionate about action, and are tenacious in their endeavors ([Platania et al., 2023](#)). To meet their necessities and achieve their objectives, proactive

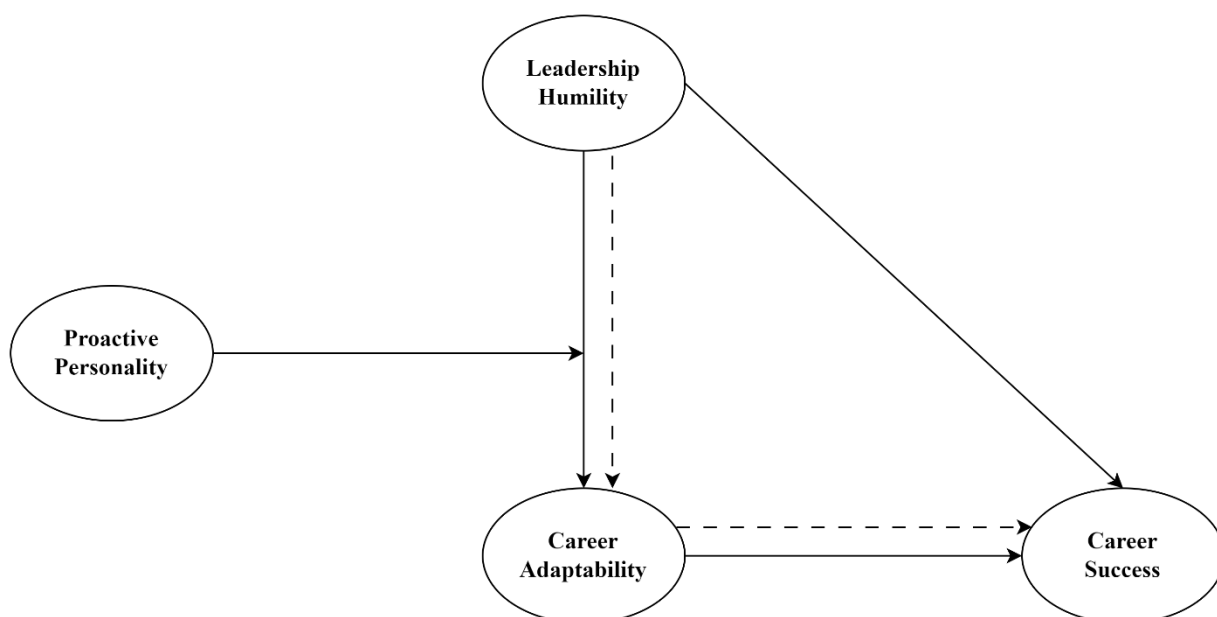
individuals can manage their learning activities in an increasingly self-anticipatory, self-initiated, and proactive approach ([Wang, Ren, & Liu, 2023](#)). Numerous studies show that proactive personalities produce several positive outcomes, i.e., higher performance ([Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009](#); [Li et al., 2017](#); [Platania et al., 2023](#)), career success, and satisfaction ([Jawahar & Liu, 2017](#); [Yang & Chau, 2016](#)), creativity ([Alikaj, Ning, & Wu, 2021](#)), well-being ([Huang et al., 2020](#)), and work engagement ([Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012](#); [Philip, 2023](#)). As they are more attuned to environmental signals and keep challenging the present status quo until they feel satisfied with the current circumstances, proactive individuals can achieve the optimum level of task challenges ([Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2017](#)). Moreover, “highly proactive persons identifying opportunities and taking action on them, showing initiative and preserving until they succeed, tend to be keen on harnessing all resources available to achieve their goals and objectives” ([Wang et al., 2023, p. 167](#)). Also, these individuals tend to adapt to the changing and challenging situations in their career which may lead to their higher career adaptability. Based on this perception, we argue that proactive personalities in their career paths are more confident to take the initiative for their self-improvement through learning which leads to growth and development of their career. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H5: *Proactive Personality moderates the relationship between Leadership Humility and Career Adaptability in such a sense that a higher/lower Proactive Personality level will strengthen/weaken this relationship.*

H6: *Proactive Personality moderates the indirect effect of Leadership Humility on Career Success via Career Adaptability in such a sense that a higher/lower Proactive Personality level will strengthen/weaken this relationship.*

Figure 1

Conceptual Model (Dotted lines representing mediation relationship)



3 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

3.1 | Participants and Procedure

The present study data was gathered from the full-time employees working in different professional fields (administration/HR, finance/accounts and audit, sales/marketing, operations/production, and information technology) of Pakistan's manufacturing and service sector organization. The reason behind the selection of both sectors (i.e., manufacturing and service) is that both are major contributors to the economy of every country; also, we selected these sectors for the generalizability of the study. We administered data using a time lag approach (with one-month temporal separation) by following the suggestion of Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Cooper et al. (2020) to minimize the chances of common method bias. We use a simple random sampling technique; according to scholars, this technique benefits the researchers due to less time consumption and cost (Acharya et al., 2013; Meng, 2013). The sample size for the present study was calculated by following the method of Sekaran and Bougie (2010); they suggested the thumb rule of sample size calculation (number of items x 10), there were 29 items of the scales used, and by multiply with 10, the calculated sample size was 290. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed in the first phase of data collection to collect the opinions of individuals about leadership humility (predictor variable) and career adaptability (mediating variable) through the HR/administration departments of the randomly selected organizations. 405 questionnaires return, after the interval of one-month questionnaires were distributed to those individuals who participated in first phase to collect their opinions about proactive personality (moderating variable) and career success (criterion variable), and 313 were received back at the end of this phase. During the process of paring (first and second phase) of questionnaires using special identification codes, twenty questionnaires were discarded, and finally, 293 questionnaires were found accurate for further statistical analysis, so the response rate was 58.6%.

3.2 | Measurement Scale.

All measurement scales used in this study were adopted from previously published studies, and the participants' opinions were obtained using the seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7). Opinions of the individuals about leadership humility were assessed using nine items scale of Owens et al. (2013). A six-item scale was adopted, which was developed by Rottinghaus et al. (2005) to measure the career adaptability level of the employees. To measure the proactive personality level of the employees, a ten items scale was adopted, which was developed by Bateman and Crant (1993). The individuals' career success was assessed using the five items scale developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990).

4 | RESULTS and ANALYSIS

4.1 | Demographic Details

From the final sample size of 293, the male participants were 165 (56.3%), and females were 128 (43.7%). Likewise, education-wise, 57 (19.45%) participants held intermediate education, 104 (35.49%) had graduation, 89 (30.38%) owned master's degrees, 29 (9.9%) held M. Phil and 14 (4.78) were from Ph.D. 108 (36.86%), 97 (33.11), and 88 (30.03%) represent the entry, middle, and senior management level, respectively. Moreover, 49 (16.72%) participants fell in the experience category of '1-5 years', 107 (36.5) fell in the '6-10 years' category,

74 (25.26%) fell in '11-15 years' category, 51 (17.41%) fall in '16-20 years' and only 12 (4.1%) were fall in the experience category of 'more than 20 years'.

4.2 | Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Before the start of the test of the proposed hypotheses of this study, validation of the instruments was measured using different statistical techniques as shown in Table 1, i.e., factor loadings, and found that loadings of all items are above .700, as suggested by Hair et al. (2019); further multicollinearity of the data was assessed using variance inflation factors of all items. It was found that values meet the threshold limit (less than 3), which was recommended by Hair et al. (2019); further cross-loadings of all items were also found following the threshold.

Table 1

Variance Inflation Factors and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Items	Factor Loadings	VIFs	Cross-Loadings			
			LH	PP	CA	CS
LH01	0.811	2.604	0.811	0.701	0.667	0.695
LH02	0.810	2.448	0.810	0.712	0.647	0.717
LH03	0.821	2.722	0.821	0.670	0.648	0.697
LH04	0.822	2.592	0.822	0.671	0.660	0.705
LH05	0.806	2.340	0.806	0.680	0.705	0.675
LH06	0.770	2.212	0.770	0.589	0.622	0.631
LH07	0.806	2.469	0.806	0.642	0.678	0.655
LH08	0.782	2.308	0.782	0.708	0.649	0.706
LH09	0.820	2.555	0.820	0.668	0.676	0.711
PP1	0.830	2.786	0.761	0.830	0.740	0.734
PP2	0.788	2.389	0.746	0.824	0.720	0.719
PP3	0.824	2.786	0.764	0.839	0.718	0.684
PP4	0.839	2.019	0.742	0.855	0.735	0.698
PP5	0.855	2.218	0.718	0.816	0.708	0.669
PP6	0.816	2.749	0.735	0.807	0.715	0.703
PP7	0.807	2.868	0.688	0.785	0.649	0.697
PP8	0.785	2.399	0.740	0.795	0.691	0.681
PP9	0.795	2.604	0.736	0.826	0.688	0.665
PP10	0.826	2.215	0.701	0.788	0.612	0.618
CA01	0.814	2.285	0.700	0.647	0.814	0.717
CA02	0.817	2.406	0.700	0.642	0.817	0.723
CA03	0.820	2.402	0.666	0.675	0.820	0.740
CA04	0.839	2.827	0.674	0.668	0.839	0.764
CA05	0.822	2.584	0.686	0.657	0.822	0.767
CA06	0.808	2.324	0.679	0.646	0.808	0.703
CS01	0.838	2.206	0.655	0.704	0.723	0.838
CS02	0.862	2.761	0.695	0.710	0.682	0.862
CS03	0.839	2.563	0.658	0.703	0.668	0.839
CS04	0.850	2.419	0.676	0.711	0.696	0.850
CS05	0.789	1.960	0.660	0.688	0.663	0.789

Note: LH; leadership humility, PP; proactive personality, CA; career adaptability, CS; career success, VIFs; variance inflation factors

4.3 | Reliability and Validity

In the next step, numerous statistical methods also measured the variables' reliability, discriminant, and convergent validity. Table 2 shows the alpha values of all items above .700, as suggested by Hair et al. (2019), whereas the values of composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (Presti et al.) were also found following threshold limits above .700 and .500, respectively, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). We further tested the heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of the study variables, Hair et al. (2019) suggested that if the HTMT values are less than .85, there is no discriminant validity issue, and our values meet the threshold limit. Moreover, we follow the Fornell-Larcker criterion method to test the validity of the constructs; according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) if the diagonal values are higher than the other, then there is no issue of validity and our values as shown in Table 2 meets this threshold.

Table 1

Reliability and Validity Analysis

	Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
LH	.923	.924	.937	.651
PP	.945	.945	.952	.667
CA	.902	.903	.925	.672
CS	.892	.892	.921	.699
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)				
Variables	LH	PP	CA	CS
LH				
PP	.292			
CA	.109	.100		
CS	.110	.120	.186	
Fornell–Larcker criterion				
Variables	LH	PP	CA	CS
LH	.298			
PP	.120	.141		
CA	.200	.122	.255	
CS	.109	.115	.101	.253

Note: LH; leadership humility, PP; proactive personality, CA; career adaptability, CS; career success, CR; composite reliability, AVE; average variance extracted

4.4 | Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Before the start of further analysis of descriptive statistics and correlations, we perform data normality test using skewness and kurtosis technique. According to Garson (2012), if skewness and kurtosis values are less than ± 2 , the data is normally distributed, and our obtained values were in accordance with threshold limit. Furthermore, Table 3 shows all constructs' descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), and correlations where all study variables positively correlated at a significant level of less than .01.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables		Descriptive Statistics		Correlations			
		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	LH	4.27	1.3059		.355**	.234**	.10**
2	PP	4.34	1.3309			.198**	.214**
3	CA	4.36	1.3489				.100**
4	CS	4.29	1.3487				

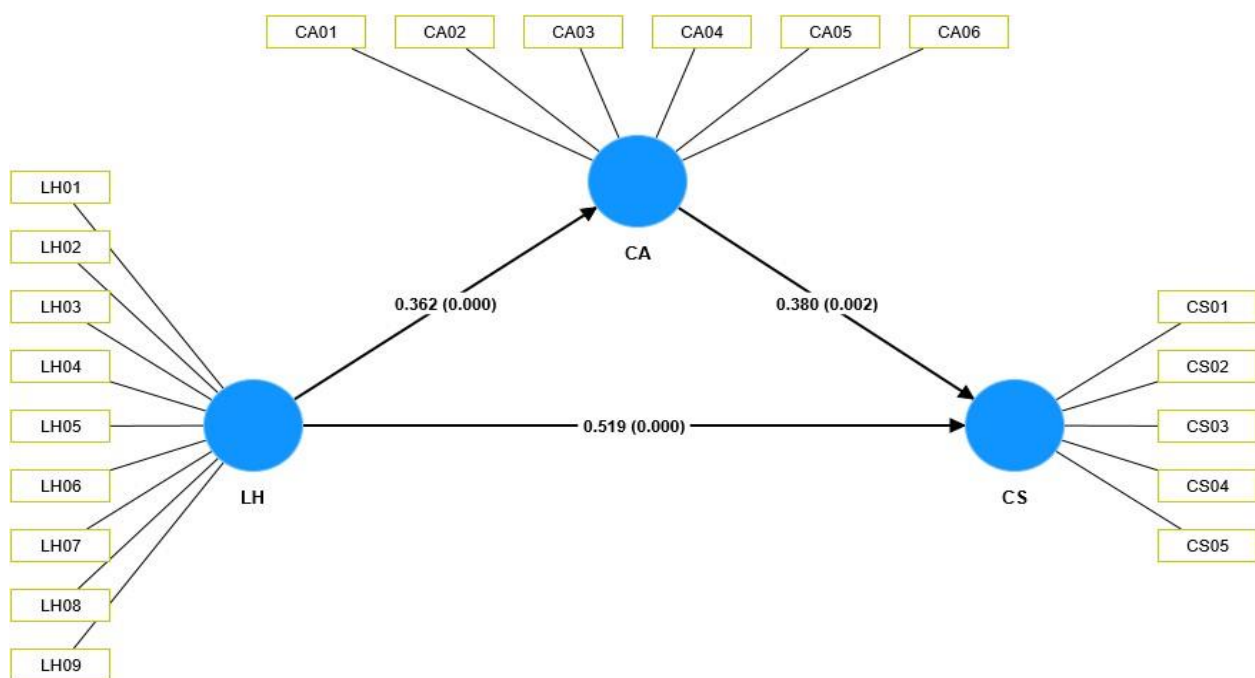
*Note: LH; leadership humility, PP; proactive personality, CA; career adaptability, CS; career success, **p<.01*

4.5 | Hypotheses Testing

We used the Smart-PLS version 4 to evaluate the proposed hypotheses of this study. For this purpose, a 5000 bootstrapping sample size was employed, as suggested by Hayes (2018). Table 4 and Figure 2 show the values of direct and indirect effects, where we found that leadership humility positively and significantly affects career adaptability ($b=.362^{***}$, $t\text{-value}=8.157$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.369/.752$) and career success ($b=.519^{***}$, $t\text{-value}=4.341$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.276/.745$) and career adaptability also have a positive and significant effect on career success ($b=.380^{**}$, $t\text{-value}=3.123$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.159/.630$); thus, these results support H1, H2, and H3 of this study. We further evaluate the indirect effect of career adaptability, and results shown in Table 2 indicate that career adaptability partially mediates the leadership humility – career success relationship ($b=.328^{**}$, $t\text{-value}=3.086$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.136/.551$); thus, these results also support H4 of this study.

Figure 2

Direct and Indirect Effects Analysis



We further conducted a moderation test, and results shown in Table 4 and Figure 3 indicate that leadership humility ($b=.428^{**}$, $t\text{-value}=2.902$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.124/.695$) and proactive personality ($b=.236^{***}$, $t\text{-value}=8.565$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.128/.645$) have a positive significant effect on career adaptability. Likewise, the interaction of leadership humility and proactive personality also positively impacts career adaptability ($b=.033^{**}$, $t\text{-value}=2.582$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.009/.074$); thus, these results prove H5 of this study. Finally, we conducted moderated mediation test, and values shown in Table 4 show that conditional indirect effects were significant above than mean ($b=.078^{**}$, $t\text{-value}=2.894$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.016/.176$) at mean ($b=.095^{*}$, $t\text{-value}=1.985$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.022/.206$) and below than mean ($b=.112^{*}$, $t\text{-value}=1.960$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.025/.244$). Moreover, the moderated mediation index values, as shown in Table 4 and Figure 4, were also found significant ($b=.013^{**}$, $t\text{-value}=3.218$, $LL/UL\text{-}CIs=.002/.038$); thus, these results support the H6 of this study.

Table 3*Direct, Indirect, Interaction, and Moderated Mediation Analysis*

Direct and Mediation Analysis					
Relationships	Std Beta	SE	t-values	p-values	LL/UL-CIs
LH → CA	.362***	.047	8.157	.000	.369/.752
LH → CS	.519***	.120	4.341	.000	.276/.745
CA → CS	.380**	.122	3.123	.002	.159/.630
LH → CA → CS	.328**	.106	3.086	.002	.136/.551
Interaction Effects					
Relationships	Std Beta	SE	t-values	p-values	LL/UL-CIs
LH → CA	.428**	.147	2.902	.004	.124/.695
PP → CA	.236***	.098	8.565	.000	.128/.645
LH x PP → CA	.033**	.021	2.582	.004	.009/.074
Conditional Indirect Effects					
LH → CA → CS on PP (-1 SD)	.112*	.057	1.960	.050	.025/.244
LH → CA → CS on PP (at mean)	.095*	.048	1.985	.047	.022/.206
LH → CA → CS on PP (+1 SD)	.078**	.041	2.894	.008	.016/.176
Moderated Mediation Index					
LH x PP → CA → CS	.013**	.010	3.218	.003	.002/.038

*Note: LH; leadership humility, PP; proactive personality, CA; career adaptability, CS; career success, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, LL/UL-CIs; lower- and upper-class intervals*

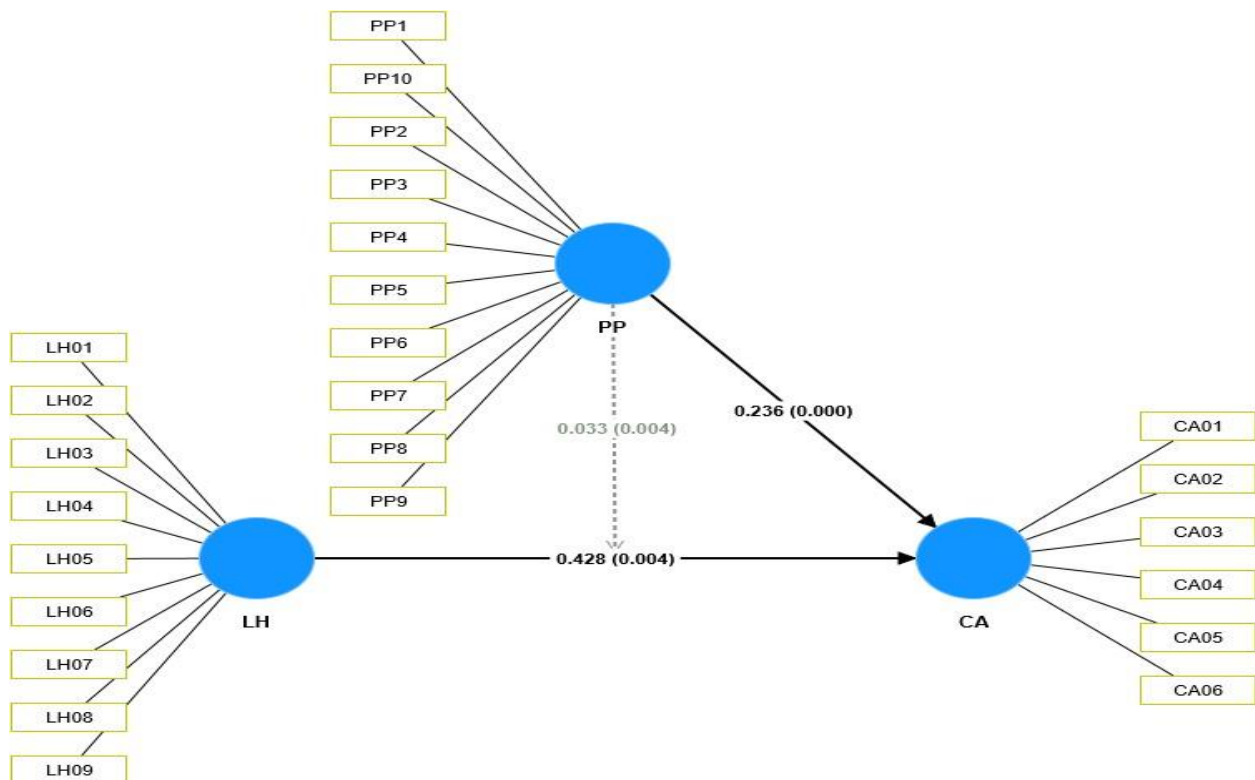
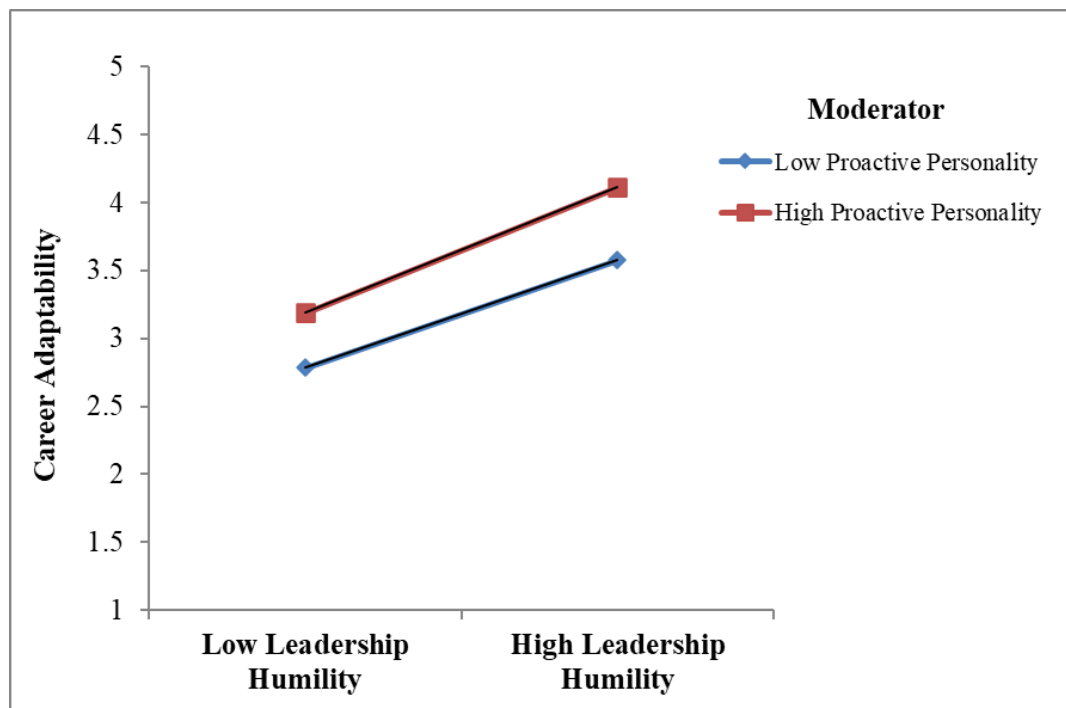
Figure 3*Moderation Analysis*

Figure 4*Moderation Analysis*

We further develop a moderation slope as shown in Figure 4, which further clarifies that when there was a higher support of leadership humility and individuals were at their higher proactive level it leads to higher career adaptability.

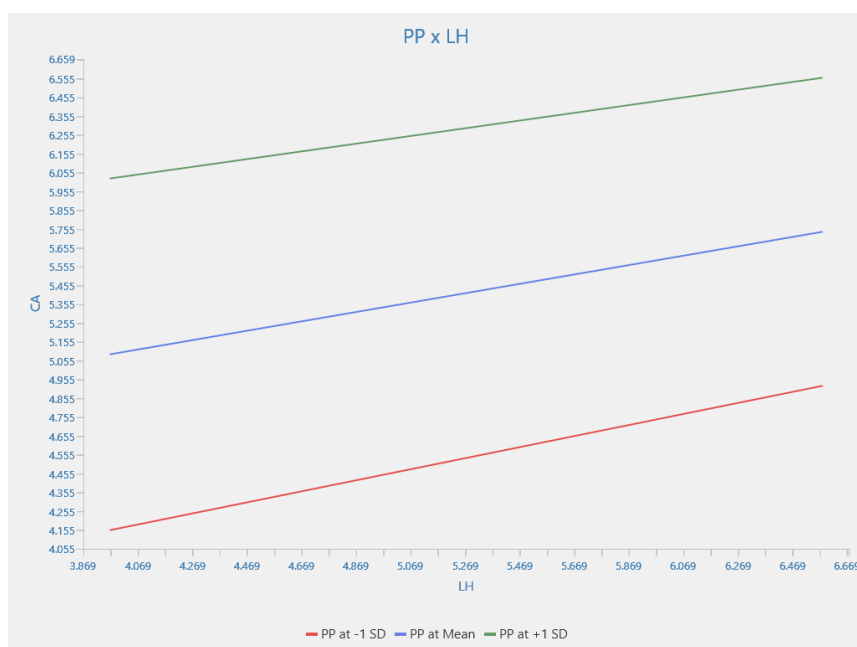
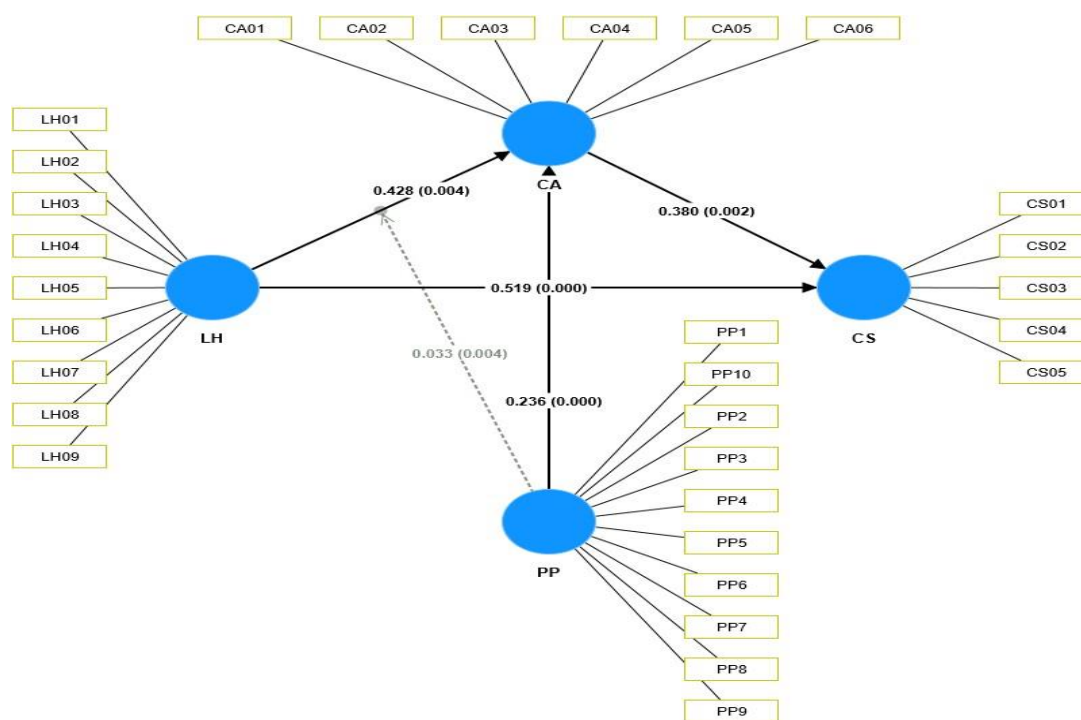
Figure 5*Moderation Slope*

Figure 6*Moderated Mediation Analysis***5 | DISCUSSION**

The main objective of the present study was to investigate how leadership humility encourages individuals to achieve career success, examining the mediating role of career adaptability between the relationship of leadership humility and career success. Also, this study explores the moderating role of proactive personality between leadership humility and career adaptability, and we assessed the moderated mediation model. The finding of this study, which derived from the data of 293 employees working in different professions, indicates that leadership humility positively influences career success via career adaptability. Furthermore, a proactive personality triggers career adaptability and career success with higher support of leadership humility. Collectively, we argue that the current findings support our approach to career construction theory to the relationship of leadership humility and career adaptability, and career success with the moderator of proactive personality.

First, our study proposed that leadership humility positively influences career adaptability and career success. Also, the findings of this study further explain that humble leaders encourage their subordinates through pride and create the circumstances through which they become to tackle uncertain situations ([Hadmar et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, our findings explain the positive effect of leadership humility on career success, as these leaders increase the self-confidence level of their subordinates through empowerment and appreciation of their contributions at the workplace ([Qin et al., 2020](#)), which helps the individuals for their career growth, development, and success. Individuals develop their motivation by taking inspiration from humble leaders through appreciation and learning new skills and abilities which help them with their career success. Moreover, through encouragement and inspiration, these leaders increase their subordinates' psychological resources, enabling them to cope with the uncertain and complex circumstances that individuals face during their careers. Our study's findings also align

with previous studies ([Li et al., 2022](#); [Lin et al., 2017](#); [Qin et al., 2020](#); [Qiuyun et al., 2020](#)), which denoted the positive influence of leadership humility for several positive outcomes.

Secondly, our study proposed that individuals who are adaptive in their careers are more successful than others, and the findings of this study also support this claim. These findings also add to the career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)) that individuals who are strong by their inner shape their surroundings and are more willing to adapt to new things during their career change. Adaptability increases the individual's confidence level to accept the challenges using their cognitive skills to convert these circumstances into learning opportunities ([Savickas & Porfeli, 2012](#); [Xie et al., 2016](#)). Earlier studies' findings also support this study's results ([Al-Ghazali, 2020](#); [Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020](#); [Rudolph et al., 2017](#)), as this study is conducted in the Asian and developing country context.

Thirdly our study proposed that career adaptability mediates the relationship between leadership humility and career success. The findings of this study contribute to the career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)), as career adaptability works as a personal source of cognition through which individuals cope with challenges. It can be developed over time as the findings of this study claim that leadership humility, through inspirational and encouraging behaviors, increases this psychological source which enhances optimization, meaning, satisfaction, development, and success about careers ([Chui, Li, & Ngo, 2022](#); [Gori et al., 2022](#); [Li et al., 2015](#)). Our findings are also in line with the findings of some recent and earlier studies ([Gong et al., 2023](#); [Zeng et al., 2022](#)) by explaining the intervening mechanism of career adaptability, as leadership humility as an organizational and environmental source increases the cognition and motivation level of individuals which enforce them for the demonstration of willingness to face the uncertainty and complexity in the careers due to which they become able to attain the career success.

Finally, our study proposed a moderated mediation model and moderation of proactive personality between leadership humility and career adaptability. Our study findings uncovered and explained that proactive personality, a personal characteristic of individuals, enables them to demonstrate career adaptability when individuals get higher support from leadership humility in their careers. These findings further explain that individuals with high proactivity are more adaptive in careers while getting support from humble leadership and enjoy higher career success ([Wang et al., 2023](#)). Our findings align with the previous studies, which defined that proactive personality increases positive behaviors and attitudes and decreases negative outcomes ([Nielsen, Firth, & Crawford, 2023](#)). Furthermore, these findings also extend to the proactive personality literature ([Crant, 1995, 2000](#); [Parker & Bindl, 2017](#); [Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010](#)) by presenting how a proactive personality is important for career adaptability and career success, as these individuals proactively change the workplace environment and like to accept the challenges ([Elsaied, 2019](#); [Parker, Wang, & Liao, 2019](#)). Findings of our moderated mediation model also explain that a higher proactive behavior of individuals with the higher encouragement and motivation of humble leaders plays a vital role in the career success of employees via career adaptability.

5.1 | Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present study contributes to the career construction theory ([Savickas, 2005, 2020](#)) by explaining the intervening mechanism of career adaptability, which is a cognitive motivation-oriented personality characteristic that increases career success through the motivational support of humble leadership. Furthermore, this study also

extends the moderating role of proactive personality by explaining that individuals with higher proactivity characteristics lead to higher career adaptability and career success with the high support of leadership humility.

This present research has some practical implications; first, the findings of this study show that organizations must focus on the training of their leaders to be humbler, which leads to the career success of the individuals, alternatively, which decreases the turnover of the organization. Secondly, our study suggests that organizations promote a culture of proactivity at the workplace, which also helps individuals for adaptability of their career. Finally, we suggest that to reduce the cost of turnover and the enhancement of career adaptability and career success, the leadership of every organization remains humble, which also increases the proactive characteristics of the individuals.

5.2 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study has numerous limitations; first, the data collected for all study variables using a self-reporting mechanism may be subject to common method variance; it would be better if future researchers use multiple-level data collection sources, i.e., for career adaptability from the leader or peers. In the present study, we test the impact of positive leadership style (leadership humility) on career success; it is suggested that future researchers use negative leadership styles, i.e., despotic leadership, narcissist leadership, abusive leadership, and toxic leadership. Further, in the present study, we use career adaptability as a mediator; future researchers may use other mediators with leadership styles, i.e., career optimism, crafting, and engagement. Finally, proactive personality was used as a moderator in this study with leadership style for higher career success; it would be better if future researchers used other moderators, i.e., social comparison, career shocks, and psychosocial safety climate.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined the intervening mechanism of career adaptability between the relationship between leadership humility and career success. Furthermore, a proactive personality increases career adaptability with a higher level of leadership humility. Also, this study provides information that the career success of individuals can be increased with the higher support of humble leaders of those individuals who are much more proactive via career adaptability.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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