

Humble Leadership and Project Success: The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment and the Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how humble leadership (HL) is associated with project success (PS) in Tunisian private-sector organizations. Drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory, it investigates organizational commitment (OC) as an explanatory mechanism and emotional intelligence (EI) as a boundary condition. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used with data from 250 project managers across construction, ICT, manufacturing, and service industries in Tunisia. The model was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.1.1.8. Direct, indirect, moderation, and moderated-mediation relationships were assessed using 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% confidence intervals. HL was positively associated with PS and OC, while OC was positively associated with PS. The indirect HL–PS relationship through OC was significant. The $EI \times HL$ interaction was positively associated with OC, indicating that the HL–OC relationship was stronger at higher EI. The $EI \times HL \rightarrow OC \rightarrow PS$ moderated-mediation relationship was significant, showing that the indirect HL–PS relationship through OC became stronger as EI increased. The study extends COR theory by integrating relational and personal resources within a project-management framework. It identifies OC as an explanatory pathway and EI as a boundary condition, while providing evidence from an underrepresented Tunisian context.

JEL Classifications: M12, M14, D23

Keywords: humble leadership, organizational commitment, emotional intelligence, project success, conservation of resources theory, Tunisia

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Context and Background

Across increasingly project-driven economies, organizations are required to deliver complex outcomes under uncertainty, time pressure, resource constraints, and growing stakeholder expectations (Cavazotte et al., 2023). Leadership is therefore important because project managers must coordinate interdependent activities, integrate diverse expertise, resolve emerging problems, and maintain effective relationships across organizational boundaries (Müller et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2021). Among contemporary approaches, humble leadership (HL) has received increasing attention as a relational style characterized by an accurate view of oneself, appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and openness to feedback and learning (Owens et al., 2013; Ou et al., 2014; Kelemen et al., 2023). These behaviors are particularly relevant in project environments, where successful execution depends on communication, adaptability, knowledge exchange, and constructive stakeholder interaction.

Conservation of resources (COR) theory provides a useful lens for understanding these relationships because individuals seek to acquire, preserve, and invest valued resources that support effective functioning (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Humble project managers may facilitate relational resources such as trust, voice, recognition, support, and access to others' expertise. By acknowledging limitations, recognizing others' contributions, and remaining receptive to input, they can create interpersonal conditions favorable to collaboration and learning (Owens and Hekman, 2012; Liu et al., 2020). However, the relationship between HL and project success (PS) is unlikely to be explained by leadership behavior alone.

B. Problem Statement

Although previous research has linked HL with favorable relational and performance-related outcomes, the mechanisms connecting HL with PS remain insufficiently specified in project settings. Existing studies have examined empowerment, learning, innovation, and team-related processes (Chen et al., 2018; Zaman et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2021), but less attention has been given to organizational commitment (OC) as an explanatory pathway. OC reflects attachment to and identification with the organization and willingness to invest effort in organizational objectives (Mowday et al., 1979; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Because HL involves recognition, openness, participation, and respect, it may be associated with stronger OC, which may in turn be associated with more favorable project outcomes.

The strength of this process may also depend on the project manager's emotional intelligence (EI). EI refers to the ability to perceive, understand, use, and regulate emotional information (Wong and Law, 2002; Mayer et al., 2016). Project managers operate in settings where interpersonal coordination, stakeholder relationships, conflict management, and communication under pressure are important (Clarke, 2010; Khosravi et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). Higher EI may therefore function as a personal resource that helps project managers use relational resources associated with HL more effectively. Rather than treating EI merely as an additional predictor, this study considers it as a

boundary condition of the HL–OC relationship and of the corresponding indirect HL–PS relationship through OC.

C. Gap in the Literature

Three gaps motivate this study. First, although prior research has established associations between HL and project-related outcomes, the indirect relationship between HL and PS through OC remains underexplored. Second, the role of EI as a boundary condition has received limited attention, particularly whether the HL–OC relationship becomes stronger at higher levels of the project manager's EI and whether this variation extends to the indirect HL–PS relationship through OC. Third, these relationships have rarely been examined together within a single COR-based project-management framework integrating relational resources, organizational attachment, and personal emotional resources.

Accordingly, this study examines HL, OC, EI, and PS among project managers working in Tunisian private-sector organizations. Tunisia provides a relevant empirical setting, and the present sample captures project managers across construction, information and communication technology, manufacturing, and services. Prior work has highlighted the importance of leadership and competence development in Tunisian organizational settings (Hedhili and Boudabbous, 2020), yet research jointly examining HL, OC, EI, and project outcomes remains limited. Examining these relationships in Tunisia therefore extends empirical evidence to a context that remains comparatively underrepresented in project-management research. This setting also offers an opportunity to examine these relationships outside the Western contexts dominating much leadership research.

The contribution of this study does not, however, rest primarily on geography. It lies in identifying OC as an explanatory mechanism linking HL with PS, EI as a personal-resource boundary condition of the HL–OC relationship, and the resulting conditional indirect relationship within a COR-based framework. The study therefore clarifies both how HL is associated with PS through OC and when this indirect relationship becomes stronger through the project manager's EI in contemporary project environments.

D. Plan and Structure of the Paper

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section II develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses based on COR theory, including mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation. Section III presents the research design, sample, measures, data-collection procedure, and PLS-SEM analytical approach. Section IV reports the measurement and structural model results. Section V discusses the findings in relation to COR theory and prior research. Section VI presents the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, future research directions, and conclusion.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Drawing on COR theory, this study examines how HL, OC, and EI are associated with PS. COR theory suggests that individuals seek to acquire, protect, and develop resources

that support effective functioning, including personal, social, and contextual resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Leadership is relevant because leaders can facilitate access to relational and psychological resources that support coordination, adaptation, and performance (Walsh et al., 2014). In this study, HL refers to the project manager's humble leadership behavior, EI to the same project manager's emotional intelligence, OC to the project manager's attachment to the organization, and PS to the project manager's perception of project success. HL is therefore viewed as a source of relational resources, OC as a mechanism through which these resources are sustained and invested, and EI as a personal resource that conditions how effectively HL-related resources are converted into commitment. By integrating OC as a mediator and EI as a boundary condition, the proposed framework explains not only how HL is associated with PS through OC, but also when this indirect relationship becomes stronger through the project manager's EI. The theoretical contribution therefore lies not in the geographical setting alone, but in identifying organizational commitment as an explanatory mechanism and project managers' emotional intelligence as a boundary condition linking humble leadership with project success. PS is modeled as an overall first-order reflective construct encompassing project objectives, efficiency, and stakeholder-oriented outcomes (Müller and Turner, 2010; Ika et al., 2012; Aga et al., 2016).

A. Humble Leadership and Project Success

HL is characterized by an accurate view of oneself, appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and openness to feedback and new ideas (Owens and Hekman, 2012; Owens et al., 2013). In project settings, humble project managers acknowledge their limitations, recognize team members' expertise, and encourage others to contribute to decisions and problem solving (Ou et al., 2014). Such behaviors can foster trust, communication, collaboration, and coordination, which are important for project functioning (Brière et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2020).

Projects require interdependence, information exchange, adaptation, and collaborative problem solving. By reducing hierarchical distance and encouraging participation, humble project managers can facilitate cooperative interaction and the exchange of task-relevant information (Sohmen, 2013; Ou et al., 2014). Prior research also associates humble leadership with team communication, cohesion, conflict resolution, and project effectiveness (Gonçalves and Brandão, 2017; Ou et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2020). Recognition of others' contributions and greater autonomy can further encourage project members to invest effort in achieving project objectives (Aga et al., 2016).

From a COR perspective, these behaviors generate relational resources such as trust, support, information, voice, and access to others' expertise. Such resources can facilitate coordination and help project actors respond to uncertainty while conserving cognitive and relational resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Walsh et al., 2014). Because project success depends on coordinated goal achievement and constructive stakeholder relationships, these resource-generating properties provide a theoretical basis for expecting HL to be positively associated with PS.

H1: Humble leadership is positively associated with project success.

B. Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

OC reflects psychological attachment to, identification with, and willingness to remain in an organization (Mowday et al., 1979; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1990). Individuals with stronger commitment identify more closely with organizational objectives and are more willing to devote effort to achieving them (Mowday et al., 1982). OC has consequently been associated with favorable work behaviors and performance, as well as lower intentions to leave (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Suliman and Iles, 2000; Kim et al., 2017).

HL provides a plausible basis for stronger OC because humble behaviors create relational conditions that communicate respect, support, and valued membership. Recognition of others' contributions, openness to their ideas, participation in decision making, and reduced power distance can strengthen positive perceptions of the leader and organization (Owens and Hekman, 2012; Ou et al., 2014). More broadly, supportive leadership and work conditions have been associated with stronger commitment because individuals are more inclined to invest themselves in organizations where they perceive recognition, involvement, and support (Meyer and Maltin, 2010; Newman et al., 2011; Tohidian and Rahimian, 2019).

COR theory further suggests that access to valued resources encourages individuals to preserve and invest additional resources in their work roles (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2014). HL can provide relational resources through trust, recognition, voice, and learning opportunities, whereas OC reflects continued willingness to invest effort in organizational objectives. Committed individuals are also more likely to go beyond minimum job requirements and sustain constructive work behavior (Loan, 2020).

OC is particularly relevant in project environments, where successful execution requires persistence, cooperation, knowledge sharing, and sustained effort under uncertainty. Individuals with stronger commitment are more willing to pursue organizational goals and engage in behaviors extending beyond formal requirements (Liden et al., 2003). OC has also been associated with knowledge-sharing attitudes and behaviors that facilitate coordination and collective problem solving (Neyestani et al., 2013). Prior research has therefore positioned OC as an intervening mechanism linking organizational or leadership conditions with subsequent attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes (Zopiatis et al., 2014; Ribeiro et al., 2022). In the present framework, HL generates relational resources that strengthen OC, while OC provides a mechanism through which these resources are associated with project-related outcomes.

H2: Humble leadership is positively associated with organizational commitment.

H3: Organizational commitment is positively associated with project success.

H4: Organizational commitment mediates the positive relationship between humble leadership and project success.

C. Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

EI refers to the ability to perceive, understand, use, and regulate emotional information (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Wong and Law, 2002; Mayer et al., 2016). In project settings, EI is particularly relevant because project managers must coordinate interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, interpret stakeholder concerns, and communicate under

uncertainty and pressure (Clarke, 2010; Khosravi et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). Project managers with higher EI are better positioned to recognize emotional cues, regulate their own reactions, and respond constructively to interpersonal challenges (Wong and Law, 2002).

Within COR theory, EI can be conceptualized as a personal resource that facilitates the preservation and effective use of other resources (Côté, 2014; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Higher EI can help project managers regulate emotional responses and adapt more effectively to demanding situations, thereby helping preserve emotional and cognitive resources (Lea et al., 2019; Sanchez-Gomez and Bresó, 2020). This resource is particularly relevant to HL because humble behaviors are intrinsically relational. Admitting limitations, seeking feedback, recognizing others' expertise, and sharing influence require sensitivity to interpersonal reactions.

Emotionally intelligent project managers are better able to understand others' emotional states, regulate their own emotions, maintain constructive relationships, and communicate in ways that preserve trust and cooperation (Mayer et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2018). In project settings, EI also supports relationship coordination, conflict management, and constructive interaction with team members and stakeholders (Khosravi et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). Consequently, project managers with higher EI should be better able to convert the relational resources associated with HL into stronger OC. At lower levels of EI, difficulties in managing emotional exchanges may reduce the extent to which openness, recognition, and participation translate into organizational attachment.

H5: Emotional intelligence positively moderates the relationship between humble leadership and organizational commitment, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of emotional intelligence.

D. Moderated-Mediation Role of Emotional Intelligence

The mediation and moderation arguments jointly imply a conditional indirect relationship. COR theory suggests that personal resources can facilitate the effective use of social and contextual resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001). EI can therefore influence how effectively the relational resources generated through HL are converted into stronger OC. Research in project settings similarly indicates that project managers' EI supports communication, trust building, relationship coordination, and conflict management (Clarke, 2010; Khosravi et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021).

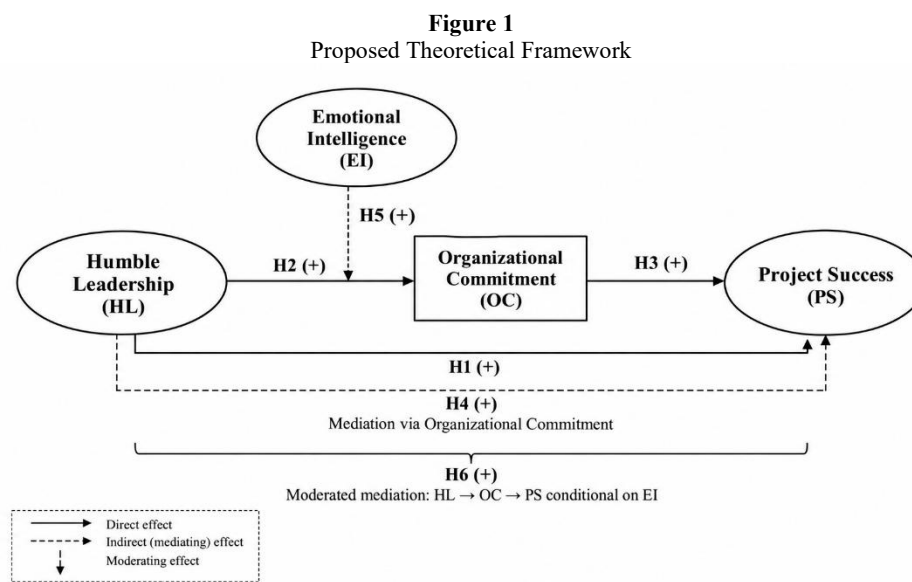
At higher levels of EI, project managers should be better able to recognize emotional cues, regulate responses, and maintain constructive relationships while displaying humility. These capabilities can reinforce the trust and interpersonal support associated with HL and thereby strengthen OC. Because OC constitutes the mediating pathway between HL and PS, variation in the strength of the HL–OC relationship should also produce variation in the indirect HL–PS relationship.

The proposed moderated mediation therefore represents a COR-based resource process in which HL generates relational resources, EI facilitates their effective use, OC reflects organizational attachment and continued resource investment, and this commitment is subsequently associated with PS. This logic is consistent with research showing that EI can operate as a boundary condition in indirect relationships and with

COR arguments emphasizing interactions among personal and contextual resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; Grandey and Melloy, 2017).

H6: Emotional intelligence moderates the positive indirect relationship between humble leadership and project success through organizational commitment, such that the indirect relationship is stronger at higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Figure 1 presents the proposed theoretical framework.



III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopted a positivist paradigm and a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine theoretically derived relationships among HL, EI, OC, and PS. This approach was appropriate because the study relied on standardized measurement instruments and statistical testing of hypothesized associations. Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, the analysis focused on relationships among the constructs rather than establishing temporal or causal effects.

B. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 250 project managers working in private-sector organizations in Tunisia across construction, information and communication technology, manufacturing, and service industries. Purposive sampling was used because eligible respondents were required to have direct responsibility for project planning, execution, coordination, or decision making and at least two years of professional experience in

project-related activities. Participants were identified and contacted through LinkedIn Premium, and the questionnaire was distributed electronically between August and December 2025. After screening the responses for eligibility and completeness, 250 usable questionnaires were retained for the final analysis. Each respondent represented a separate private-sector organization, thereby avoiding multiple responses from the same organization. The sample comprised 217 men (86.8%) and 33 women (13.2%), with an average age of 38 years. Regarding education, 28 respondents (11.2%) held qualifications below a bachelor's degree, 115 (46.0%) held a bachelor's degree, and 107 (42.8%) held a master's or doctoral qualification. Regarding project-management experience, 45 respondents (18.0%) had less than five years, 90 (36.0%) had 5–10 years, 72 (28.8%) had 10–15 years, and 43 (17.2%) had 16 years or more. Before the main survey, the questionnaire was pretested with a small group of Tunisian private-sector project managers to assess wording, clarity, and contextual appropriateness. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed of the study purpose, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

C. Measures

All constructs were measured using established scales on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). HL was initially measured using the nine-item scale developed by Owens et al. (2013) and referred to the project manager's self-reported humble leadership behavior. EI was assessed using the 16-item Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong and Law, 2002) and represented the project manager's own emotional intelligence. OC was measured using the 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire developed by Mowday et al. (1979) and represented the project manager's own organizational commitment. PS was initially assessed using the 14-item scale developed by Aga et al. (2016). Although this scale captures multiple facets of project outcomes, PS was specified as an overall first-order reflective construct representing the project manager's perception of project success. The retained PS items were therefore modeled as reflective indicators of a single latent PS construct; no separate first-order dimensions or higher-order PS component was estimated. For descriptive statistics, construct scores were computed as respondent-level means of the retained indicators using the original 1–5 response metric.

D. Common-Method Considerations

Because all constructs were obtained from the same respondents through a single questionnaire, procedural remedies were adopted to reduce potential common-method bias. Participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and standardized instructions and established measurement instruments were used. Common-method bias was additionally assessed using the full collinearity VIF approach proposed by Kock (2015), with values below 3.3 used as the assessment criterion. The corresponding statistical results are reported in the Results section.

E. Analytical Approach

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1.1.8 (Ringle et al., 2024). Both the measurement and structural models were evaluated within the same PLS-SEM framework, and no separate regression models were employed.

The reflective measurement model was assessed using indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Indicator loadings around 0.708 or higher were considered desirable, reliability coefficients between 0.70 and 0.95 were considered satisfactory, and AVE values of at least 0.50 indicated adequate convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). Under the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE should exceed its correlations with the other constructs, while HTMT values below 0.85 represent a conservative criterion and values below 0.90 are generally considered acceptable (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2022).

The structural model was assessed using inner variance inflation factors (VIF), coefficients of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2_{predict}), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Inner VIF values below 3 were used to assess collinearity, positive Q^2_{predict} values indicated predictive relevance, and SRMR values below 0.08 were considered acceptable (Henseler et al., 2014; Shmueli et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). Direct, indirect, moderation, and conditional indirect relationships were evaluated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples with 95% confidence intervals. Conditional effects were examined at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of EI.

IV. RESULTS

A. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Following measurement-model assessment, the final specification retained 40 indicators: eight for HL, 12 for EI, 10 for OC, and 10 for PS. As summarized in Table 1, retained outer loadings ranged from 0.716 to 0.819, exceeding the recommended level of approximately 0.708 (Hair et al., 2022). Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.901 to 0.933, rho_A from 0.902 to 0.938, and CR from 0.920 to 0.942, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). AVE values ranged from 0.559 to 0.590 and exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, supporting convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The individual outer loading of every retained indicator is reported in Supplementary Table S1, providing complete indicator-level evidence for the final measurement model.

Table 1
Measurement model reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Retained items	Outer loadings	Cronbach's α	rho_A	CR	AVE
HL	8	0.750–0.787	0.901	0.902	0.920	0.590
EI	12	0.721–0.819	0.933	0.938	0.942	0.575
OC	10	0.718–0.807	0.921	0.923	0.934	0.585
PS	10	0.716–0.777	0.912	0.916	0.927	0.559

Note: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

The descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 2. Mean values were 2.724 for HL, 3.794 for EI, 2.384 for OC, and 4.082 for PS, with standard deviations ranging from 0.576 to 0.679. Correlations among the constructs ranged from 0.213 to 0.577, with the strongest association observed between OC and PS. The descriptive statistics were calculated from respondent-level means of the retained indicators using the original 1–5 response scale.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations

Construct	Mean	SD	HL	EI	OC	PS
HL	2.724	0.679	1.000			
EI	3.794	0.630	0.216	1.000		
OC	2.384	0.641	0.492	0.341	1.000	
PS	4.082	0.576	0.560	0.213	0.577	1.000

Note: N = 250; SD = standard deviation.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT. As shown in Table 3, Panel A, the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with the remaining constructs, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 3, Panel B shows that HTMT values ranged from 0.220 to 0.620 and remained below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Thus, both criteria supported discriminant validity.

Table 3
Discriminant validity

Panel A. Fornell–Larcker criterion				
Construct	EI	HL	OC	PS
EI	0.759			
HL	0.216	0.768		
OC	0.341	0.492	0.765	
PS	0.213	0.560	0.577	0.748
Panel B. Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT)				
Construct	EI	HL	OC	PS
EI	—			
HL	0.229	—		
OC	0.356	0.531	—	
PS	0.220	0.608	0.620	—

Note: Bold diagonal values represent the square root of AVE.

B. Common-Method Bias and Structural Model Assessment

Common-method bias was assessed using the full collinearity approach proposed by Kock (2015). Full collinearity VIF values ranged from 1.135 to 1.765, remaining below the recommended threshold of 3.3 and providing no indication of substantial common-method bias according to this diagnostic.

The structural model was subsequently evaluated for collinearity, explanatory power, predictive relevance, and model fit. As summarized in Table 4, the model explained 31.1% of the variance in OC ($R^2 = 0.311$) and 43.3% of the variance in PS ($R^2 = 0.433$). Q^2 predict values were positive for both OC (0.291) and PS (0.314), indicating predictive relevance (Shmueli et al., 2019). Inner VIF values ranged from 1.011 to 1.324, indicating no problematic structural collinearity (Hair et al., 2022), while the SRMR value of 0.049 was below the commonly applied threshold of 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2014).

Table 4
Structural model assessment and predictive relevance

Construct	R^2	Q^2 predict
OC	0.311	0.291
PS	0.433	0.314

Note: Inner VIF = 1.011–1.324; SRMR = 0.049.

C. Direct and Indirect Relationships

The direct and indirect relationships were assessed using 5,000 bootstrap resamples. As reported in Table 5, HL was positively associated with PS ($\beta = 0.365$, $SD = 0.055$, $t = 6.668$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.257, 0.472]); therefore, Hypothesis 1 (H1) was supported. HL was positively associated with OC ($\beta = 0.442$, $SD = 0.043$, $t = 10.172$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.357, 0.528]), supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2). OC was positively associated with PS ($\beta = 0.397$, $SD = 0.053$, $t = 7.540$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.293, 0.501]), supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3).

The indirect relationship between HL and PS through OC was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.176$, $SD = 0.029$, $t = 5.987$, $p < 0.001$). Its 95% bootstrap confidence interval [0.123, 0.240] excluded zero, indicating a significant mediating role for OC. Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 (H4) was supported.

Table 5
Direct and indirect relationships

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	SD	t-value	p-value	95% CI
H1	HL $\rightarrow$ PS	0.365	0.055	6.668	<0.001	[0.257, 0.472]
H2	HL $\rightarrow$ OC	0.442	0.043	10.172	<0.001	[0.357, 0.528]
H3	OC $\rightarrow$ PS	0.397	0.053	7.540	<0.001	[0.293, 0.501]
H4	HL $\rightarrow$ OC $\rightarrow$ PS	0.176	0.029	5.987	<0.001	[0.123, 0.240]

Note: β = standardized coefficient; SD = bootstrap standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; bootstrapping = 5,000 resamples.

D. Moderation Analysis

As presented in Table 6, the interaction between EI and HL was positively associated with OC ($\beta = 0.102$, $SD = 0.039$, $t = 2.590$, $p = 0.010$, 95% CI [0.024, 0.180]). Because the confidence interval excluded zero, Hypothesis 5 (H5) was supported. The conditional HL–OC relationship increased from $\beta = 0.340$ at low EI (-1 SD) to $\beta = 0.442$ at the mean level of EI and $\beta = 0.544$ at high EI ($+1$ SD). The confidence intervals excluded zero at all three levels.

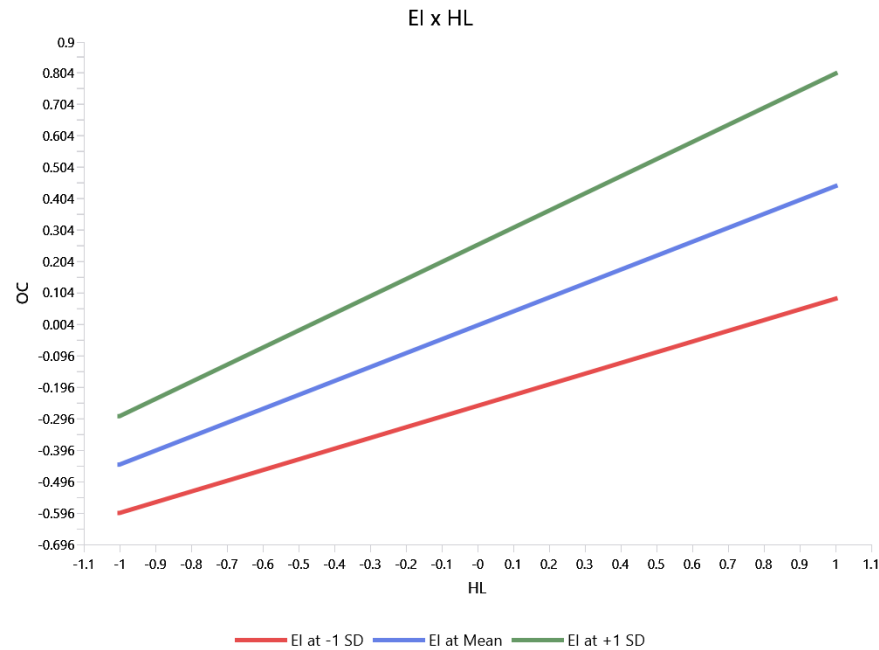
Figure 2 graphically illustrates this interaction pattern. The slope becomes steeper as EI increases, indicating that the positive association between HL and OC is stronger at higher levels of the project manager's EI.

Table 6
Moderation and conditional direct relationships

Hypothesis / Relationship	β	SD	t-value	p-value	95% CI
H5: EI $\times$ HL $\rightarrow$ OC	0.102	0.039	2.590	0.010	[0.024, 0.180]
HL $\rightarrow$ OC at low EI (-1 SD)	0.340	0.059	5.773	<0.001	[0.225, 0.460]
HL $\rightarrow$ OC at mean EI	0.442	0.043	10.172	<0.001	[0.357, 0.528]
HL $\rightarrow$ OC at high EI ($+1$ SD)	0.544	0.058	9.325	<0.001	[0.430, 0.661]

Note: Conditional effects are reported at -1 SD, mean, and $+1$ SD of EI; bootstrapping = 5,000 resamples.

Figure 2
Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence on the Relationship Between Humble Leadership and Organizational Commitment



E. Moderated Mediation Analysis

Finally, the moderated mediation results are reported in Table 7. The index of moderated mediation was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.041$, $SD = 0.017$, $t = 2.363$, $p = 0.018$, 95% CI [0.009, 0.077]). Because the confidence interval excluded zero, Hypothesis 6 (H6) was supported.

The conditional indirect relationship between HL and PS through OC increased across levels of EI. As shown in Table 7, the indirect association was $\beta = 0.135$ at low EI, $\beta = 0.176$ at the mean level of EI, and $\beta = 0.216$ at high EI. The corresponding 95% bootstrap confidence intervals excluded zero in all three cases. Together with the interaction pattern shown in Figure 2, these findings indicate that the positive indirect relationship between HL and PS through OC was stronger at higher levels of the project manager's EI.

Table 7
Moderated mediation and conditional indirect relationships

Hypothesis / Relationship	β	SD	t-value	p-value	95% CI
H6: EI $\times$ HL $\rightarrow$ OC $\rightarrow$ PS	0.041	0.017	2.363	0.018	[0.009, 0.077]
HL $\rightarrow$ OC $\rightarrow$ PS at low EI (−1 SD)	0.135	0.029	4.656	<0.001	[0.083, 0.198]
HL $\rightarrow$ OC $\rightarrow$ PS at mean EI	0.176	0.029	5.987	<0.001	[0.123, 0.240]
HL $\rightarrow$ OC $\rightarrow$ PS at high EI (+1 SD)	0.216	0.038	5.644	<0.001	[0.147, 0.299]

Note: Conditional indirect effects are reported at −1 SD, mean, and +1 SD of EI; bootstrapping = 5,000 resamples.

V. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships among HL, OC, EI, and PS in Tunisian private-sector organizations. Drawing on COR theory, the findings show that HL was positively associated with PS, that a significant indirect relationship through OC was observed, and that both the HL–OC relationship and the indirect HL–PS relationship through OC were stronger at higher levels of EI. These results suggest that humble leadership operates within a broader resource process in which relational resources associated with HL are linked with stronger organizational attachment, while the project manager's emotional capabilities shape how effectively these resources are translated into commitment. This interpretation is consistent with COR theory, which emphasizes acquiring, preserving, and investing valued resources under demanding conditions (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2014).

The findings for Hypothesis 1 (H1) show that HL was positively associated with PS. This result is consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of humble leadership in communication, collaboration, learning, and recognition of others' expertise (Owens and Hekman, 2012; Owens et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2018). Humble project managers acknowledge their limitations, remain receptive to feedback, and recognize team members' contributions, thereby facilitating participation. These behaviors matter in project settings, where execution depends on interdependence, knowledge integration, coordination, and stakeholder interaction (Müller and Turner, 2010; Ika et al., 2012; Aga et al., 2016). From a COR perspective, HL may provide relational resources such as trust, support, voice, openness, and access to others' expertise. Such resources can reduce interpersonal friction and facilitate coordination under uncertainty, reinforcing the relevance of humility-related leadership behaviors to project outcomes.

The results for Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 (H2–H4) clarify the role of OC in the HL–PS relationship. HL was positively associated with OC, OC was positively associated with PS, and the indirect relationship between HL and PS through OC was statistically significant. These findings are consistent with the argument that leadership behaviors characterized by respect, openness, recognition, and participation can strengthen organizational attachment (Mowday et al., 1979; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Owens and Hekman, 2012). Individuals are more likely to invest themselves in organizational goals when they experience recognition, involvement, and supportive relational conditions (Meyer and Maltin, 2010; Newman et al., 2011). From a COR perspective, relational resources associated with HL may encourage project managers to conserve and reinvest psychological resources in organizational objectives (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al.,

2014). OC can therefore reflect continued attachment and willingness to sustain such investment. The positive OC–PS association is also consistent with research linking commitment with persistence and performance-related outcomes (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Kim et al., 2017). Importantly, the mediation result indicates that OC constitutes an explanatory pathway through which HL is associated with PS.

The findings for Hypothesis 5 (H5) indicate that EI positively moderated the HL–OC relationship, such that the association became stronger at higher levels of EI. This result supports the conceptualization of EI as a personal resource that can facilitate the effective use of relational resources (Côté, 2014; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Humble leadership involves interpersonal behaviors such as admitting limitations, seeking feedback, recognizing others' expertise, and sharing influence. Project managers with higher EI may be better able to perceive emotional cues, regulate their own reactions, and communicate humility in ways that preserve trust and constructive relationships (Wong and Law, 2002; Mayer et al., 2016). Research in project settings similarly highlights the relevance of EI to communication, conflict management, relationship coordination, and stakeholder relations (Clarke, 2010; Khosravi et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). The conditional effects observed in this study are consistent with this interpretation, as the positive HL–OC relationship became progressively stronger from low to high EI. Thus, relational resources associated with humble leadership appear more strongly linked with organizational commitment when project managers possess greater emotional capabilities.

The findings for Hypothesis 6 (H6) show that EI moderated the indirect relationship between HL and PS through OC. The significant index of moderated mediation indicates that the indirect HL–PS relationship through OC was stronger at higher levels of the project manager's EI. This result integrates the mediation and moderation findings within a single COR-based resource process. HL can be interpreted as providing relational resources, EI as a personal resource that facilitates their effective use, and OC as reflecting organizational attachment and continued investment of effort. At higher levels of EI, project managers may be better positioned to interpret interpersonal signals, manage emotional exchanges, and sustain constructive relationships while displaying humble leadership behaviors. These capabilities may strengthen the association between HL and OC, which is subsequently associated with PS. The conditional indirect effects at low, mean, and high levels of EI reinforce this interpretation by showing that the indirect HL–PS relationship through OC became progressively stronger as EI increased. This pattern is consistent with project-management research emphasizing EI in coordination, communication, and relationship management under pressure (Clarke, 2010; Khosravi et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021).

VI. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A. Theoretical Implications

This study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it extends research on HL and PS by moving beyond a direct relationship and identifying OC as an explanatory pathway linking HL with PS. Although previous research has established the relevance of humble leadership for project-related outcomes, less attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which this relationship operates. By positioning OC as a mediator,

the present study provides a more differentiated explanation of the HL–PS relationship and highlights the importance of organizational attachment in understanding leadership-related project outcomes.

Second, the study extends COR theory by showing how relational and personal resources operate jointly within a project-management framework. COR theory emphasizes that individuals seek to acquire, preserve, and invest valued resources that support effective functioning (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Within this framework, the relational resources associated with HL are more strongly connected with OC when project managers possess higher EI. This finding complements previous COR-based research emphasizing the importance of personal and contextual resources in demanding work environments (García-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Aktar and Pangil, 2018; Hou et al., 2018).

Third, the study identifies EI as a boundary condition rather than merely an additional predictor of project outcomes. The results indicate that the HL–OC relationship is stronger at higher levels of EI and, consequently, that the indirect HL–PS relationship through OC is also stronger. This moderated-mediation perspective provides a more nuanced explanation of why the association between HL and PS may differ across project managers. The theoretical contribution therefore extends beyond the Tunisian setting by specifying both how HL is associated with PS through OC and when this indirect relationship becomes stronger through the project manager's EI.

B. Practical Implications

The findings offer several implications for Tunisian private-sector organizations and project managers. Leadership-development programs may benefit from incorporating behaviors associated with humility, including openness to feedback, recognition of others' expertise, acknowledgement of limitations, and participative interaction. Humility can be developed through training and experiential learning, suggesting that such behaviors may complement the technical competencies traditionally emphasized in project-management development (Rego et al., 2017; Cheung et al., 2020).

The moderating role of EI also suggests that organizations should pay attention to project managers' emotional capabilities. Development activities focusing on self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and constructive communication may help managers deal more effectively with interpersonal demands and stakeholder relationships. Prior research similarly highlights the relevance of EI for interpersonal management and project-related interactions (Kundi et al., 2023; Watanabe et al., 2024).

The significant indirect relationship through OC further suggests that leadership-development initiatives should be accompanied by organizational practices that support attachment and involvement. Recognition, transparent communication, participation in decisions, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to project activities may create conditions supportive of stronger commitment. These implications are most directly applicable to private-sector project environments comparable to those represented in the present sample and should not be generalized automatically to public-sector organizations.

C. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit conclusions regarding temporal ordering or causality. Future studies could employ longitudinal, time-lagged, or multi-wave designs to assess whether the proposed relationships remain stable over time and to establish their temporal sequence more rigorously.

Second, all focal constructs were measured through a questionnaire completed by the same respondents. Although procedural remedies were adopted and the full-collinearity assessment provided no indication of substantial common-method bias according to this diagnostic, reliance on single-source measurement remains a limitation. Future research could combine project-manager responses with ratings from team members, supervisors, clients, or objective project-performance indicators.

Third, respondents were recruited purposively through LinkedIn Premium. Although this approach facilitated access to project managers meeting the eligibility criteria, the non-probability sampling procedure may introduce selection bias and limits claims regarding representativeness. Future studies could employ probability-based or multi-channel recruitment strategies where feasible.

Finally, the sample was restricted to private-sector project managers in Tunisia. The findings should therefore not be assumed to apply to public organizations, other occupational groups, or other national contexts. Future research could replicate the model across sectors and countries and examine whether cultural, institutional, or project-related conditions alter the observed relationships.

D. Conclusion

This study develops a COR-based framework integrating HL, OC, EI, and PS. The findings indicate that HL is positively associated with PS, that OC provides an important indirect pathway linking HL with PS, and that both the HL–OC relationship and the corresponding indirect relationship through OC are stronger at higher levels of EI. By integrating relational resources, organizational commitment, and personal emotional resources within a single model, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of leadership in project settings. Within the boundaries of the Tunisian private-sector sample, the findings highlight the value of considering humble leadership, organizational commitment, and project managers' emotional intelligence jointly when examining project success.

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APPENDIX

Supplementary Table S1
Indicator-level outer loadings of the retained measurement items

Construct	Indicator	Outer loading
HL	HL1	0.762
HL	HL2	0.779
HL	HL3	0.766
HL	HL4	0.766
HL	HL5	0.750
HL	HL7	0.751
HL	HL8	0.787
HL	HL9	0.784
EI	EI1	0.757
EI	EI4	0.721
EI	EI5	0.737
EI	EI6	0.760
EI	EI7	0.753
EI	EI8	0.772
EI	EI9	0.749
EI	EI10	0.764
EI	EI11	0.777
EI	EI12	0.729
EI	EI13	0.819
EI	EI14	0.759
OC	OC1	0.774
OC	OC2	0.778
OC	OC4	0.807
OC	OC5	0.789
OC	OC7	0.718
OC	OC8	0.761
OC	OC9	0.773
OC	OC10	0.744
OC	OC11	0.729
OC	OC12	0.772
PS	PS2	0.721
PS	PS3	0.755
PS	PS4	0.716
PS	PS6	0.758
PS	PS7	0.777
PS	PS8	0.770
PS	PS9	0.749
PS	PS10	0.733
PS	PS11	0.722
PS	PS12	0.774

Note: HL = humble leadership; EI = emotional intelligence; OC = organizational commitment; PS = project success. All reported indicators were retained in the final measurement model.