

The organizational value of humility: proposing a typology of culture maturity

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Abstract

Purpose – Although virtuous practices enhance organizational excellence, the virtue and culture of humility are little studied in the field of management due to their conceptual challenges. In order to cover this gap, and considering that the virtue of humility is increasingly evolving as a cultural value, this study proposes a typology of humility culture maturity (THCM) that signals a progressive path of this virtue as a value in organizations.

Theoretical framework – This theoretical-exploratory study is derived from Schein's (2010) organizational culture models, Galbraith's (1983) concepts, Maldonado et al.'s (2018) organizational humility model, and Owens et al.'s (2013, 2015) individual humility model.

Design/methodology/approach – The typology design is based on the procedures for configuring culture maturity models, such as those of Parker (2006) and Rocha et al. (2024).

Findings – The combination of these theories makes it possible to propose a continuum of five stages of culture maturity: rhetorical, embryonic, stimulated, full and virtuous, with each stage reflecting different behavioral regimes respectively, progressing from unconcerned, reactive, obligatory, voluntary to unconscious, where humility practices are performed in an organic way and internalized in virtuous actions, in a demonstration of culture maturity.

Practical & social implications of research – The study broadens the understanding of the humility culture, making its analysis more useful, since it indicates specific descriptions and behaviors of humility related to each stage of cultural progression towards maturity. This theoretical study makes the examination of humility in organizations more utilitarian, opening space for further design and empirical testing of both functional models of organizational culture and humility culture maturity, which are instrumentally lacking in the literature and so important for organizational excellence.

Originality/value – The THCM represents an original proposal that fills a gap in the literature in management studies dedicated to organizational humility and humility culture maturity.

Keywords: Humility, virtue, humble behavior, culture maturity.

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How to cite:

Cuenca, R., & Tomei, P. A. (2025). The organizational value of humility: proposing a typology of culture maturity. *Revista Brasileira de Gestão de Negócios*, 27(1), e20240062. <https://doi.org/10.7819/rbgn.v27i01.4291>

Received on:
May/09/2024
Approved on:
Jan/25/2025

Responsible editor:
Prof. Dr. Natalia Rese

Reviewers:
Camilla Fernandes; Fabricio Stocker

Evaluation process:
Double Blind Review

This paper does not include any data.



Revista Brasileira de Gestão de Negócios

<https://doi.org/10.7819/rbgn.v27i01.4291>

I Introduction

Organizational culture is an intangible asset of an organization, seen as a set of shared values that produce norms of behavior that are substantially accepted when facing challenges, shaping attitudes, putting down roots, and replicating with members of the organization (Zheng et al., 2019). It is not a static resource, but a dynamic aspect of the company that can evolve over time as new practices are introduced (Maldonado et al., 2018). In a context where organizational scandals have become frequent (Ghoshal, 2005), organizations are urged to adopt organizational precepts based on virtuous actions (Argandona, 2015) that express noble behavior and excellence (Comte-Sponville, 2001), creating space to reconsider the role of virtuousness in organizational environments (Rego et al., 2010). In this sense, the adoption of virtuosity is a strategy for coping with the environment (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009), incorporating new practices and fostering the formation of a new organizational culture. Virtuous practices predict behaviors that promote the functioning of corporate excellence and are recognized as building the culture of the organization itself (Rego et al., 2010).

Organizational values constitute the main elements of organizational culture research (Zander et al., 2016), as they explain what the organization believes and guide corporate behavior (Bourne et al., 2019). They are the cornerstone of organizational culture, creating a sense of direction for the daily behavior of members (Malbašić et al., 2015). Among the cultural values associated with a set of virtuous practices is the virtue of humility (Owens et al., 2011), which is related to a moral sense (Murray, 2001), an ethical precept (Jennings et al., 2005), and is considered to be an authentic virtue in a constellation of virtues and an asset for the effective practice of social work (Bibus, 2015). Thus, the adoption of the virtue of humility as a corporate cultural value results in the formation of an organizational culture of humility, which functions as a new rule and spreads throughout the organization (Schein & Schein, 2018), favoring the maturation of virtuous organizations.

The research linking corporate culture and values is vast in the field of management (Hofstede, 1990; Oc, 2018; Schein, 2010; Tomei & Russo, 2014), but most studies do not consider how this relationship can be affected by the adoption of the virtue of humility as a corporate cultural value. The growing approach to the humility construct in organizational contexts has only

increased in the last decade, in parallel with the ethical scandals and corporate frauds (e.g. Lehman Brothers, Parmalat, WorldCom, Enron, Volkswagen) that have highlighted that virtues such as humility are essential for management and business (Cuenca et al., 2022a), in part because other virtues such as courage, loyalty and practical wisdom were more easily combined with a competitive business environment (Argandona, 2013) and more sensitive to ethical dysfunctions. The only recent attention to the subject is justified by many authors who claim that humility is a virtue that has been little studied in the organizational environment due to its conceptual and methodological challenges (Anand et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2010). Empirical studies have explored humility behaviors in organizations and identified them as a source of competitive advantage, indicating positive effects on team performance, project success, and organizational effectiveness (Ali et al., 2021; Owens & Hekman, 2016; Peng et al., 2020). The recent meta-analysis by Chandler et al. (2023) reinforces the role of humility in organizations by examining a comprehensive set of prior studies and combining the results to provide an overview of its effects. It highlights that humility behaviors positively impact organizational climate, strategic decisions, and overall performance, particularly in fostering an ethical culture, teamwork, and employee satisfaction.

Humility can be introduced as a cultural value in a progressive and continuous way, and tends to advance in an increasing regime, integrating all its practices (Maldonado et al., 2018; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), in order to advance to a stage of internalization where humility practices are carried out organically and adopted as appropriate by the members of the organization, as evidence of cultural maturity (Schein, 2010). Since it is a virtue with conceptual complexity that advances progressively, the introduction of humility in the corporate world requires alternative options to the traditional factors of cultural diffusion, demanding structured interventions based on objective instrumental support that brings specific simplifications to its virtuous essence (Jespersen et al., 2016; Ruberton et al., 2017), in order to enable its internalization path. However, the tools for understanding humility in organizations are substantially linked to the individual dimension (McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019), while there is no variety in the literature related to the organizational culture of humility and, in particular, to models of humility culture

maturity (Tomei et al., 2022), resulting in a gap in this literature that this research identifies.

Due to the benefits and positive impacts that humility has been shown to generate in the corporate spectrum, organizations interested in virtuous practices and wishing to incorporate the cultural value of humility in their corporate philosophy need a certain point of reference to be able to determine the level of progress in this process, and therefore a tool that acts as a guiding compass of cultural types that will lead them towards a virtuous regime of organizational practices. It is possible that a specific proposal for humility, configured with organizational characteristics and humble behaviors, under a progressive regime and objective tutelage, could be fruitful in organically internalizing the behaviors and norms of conduct of humility, functioning as an initial stage of a roadmap for the evolution of the culture of humility.

This defines the key question of this research: **how does the proposition of a typology of humility culture maturity (THCM) show a path of internalization of humble behaviors in organizations?**

Therefore, considering the specificity and complexity of the humility construct, the role of humility in driving positive impacts on the organizational environment, and the lack of studies in the organizational context, especially on the subject of humility culture maturity, the main objective of this exploratory study is to propose a theoretical typology of humility culture maturity (THCM) that signal a progressive path of this virtue as a value in organizations, in order to help analyze the humility culture maturity and virtuous practices in different organizations. To achieve this objective, a methodological approach anchored in a theoretical foundation and based on the configuration of culture maturity models, such as those of Parker et al. (2006) and Rocha et al. (2024), is adopted for the creation of the THCM, in order to promote the proposition of stages of humility culture maturity, with a conceptual framework specific to humility. Although the organizational literature presents several subdimensions of humility, such as cultural humility and intellectual humility, this project deals exclusively with the phenomenon of humility culture (Maldonado et al., 2018, 2022). Likewise, even if it is acknowledged that exploring moral theories of leadership that are similar to humility (Lemoine et al., 2019) would be appropriate to understand the cultural practices of humility, in this

research the topic of leadership is only considered from the perspective of its practices.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that humility has a positive impact on organizational climate, strategic options, and performance (Chandler et al., 2023), as well as being essential for management and business because it promotes organizational excellence (Argandona, 2015), making it an opportune virtue for dealing with ethical scandals and corporate fraud, with space for introduction and development in different organizations. In addition, the incorporation of the virtue of humility as a cultural value results in a source of competitive advantage for the organization, as it introduces specific norms of conduct (Maldonado et al., 2018), aimed at learning (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), creativity (Hu et al., 2018), and strategic collaboration (Zhou et al., 2022), fronts that facilitate the introduction of new practices, in a virtuous circle.

In this sense, the study aims to contribute to organizational studies by: (i) shedding light on the relationship between the constructs of organizational culture and humility, (ii) filling an academic gap in terms of a culture maturity instrument focused on the virtue of humility based on the theoretical construction of the THCM, and (iii) signaling a roadmap for the development of the culture of humility that can serve as an analytical compass for organizations interested in virtuous practices.

Finally, this article is organized into six parts. In addition to this introduction, the second part presents the theoretical background that supports the configuration of the proposed typology. The third part details the construction of the THCM. The fourth part provides some analysis and discussion, while the fifth part presents the implications and opportunities for future research. The last section presents the final considerations of this study.

2 Theoretical background

The theoretical base chosen to support this research is centered on virtuous practices, humility in organizations, and culture maturity, due to the strong connection that these theoretical fronts have with the objective of this research.

2.1 Virtuous practices

To understand the concept of virtue, it is necessary to study Cameron and Winn (2012), who present the attributes of virtuousness: (i) the human tendency to

do good, (ii) disinterest in the pursuit of rewards, and (iii) the promotion of sustained positive energy, with virtuous behaviors being reinforced when experienced. The authors emphasize that the individual development of virtues is based on three main components: (i) reason, which helps us to understand what is good – either through study, example or self-reflection; (ii) will, which involves the desire and motivation to act virtuously; and (iii) feelings and emotions, which can facilitate practices and make the habit easier and more enjoyable. Thus, in a favorable cultural context that stimulates reason and will, the repetition of humility practices will create a healthy habit that promotes the ease and spontaneity of the development of virtue in individuals.

The introduction of virtuous practices into organizational philosophy has been advocated by organizational theories (Crossan et al., 2013). Such practices become qualities of the organization and help develop its moral muscle when manifested collectively (Cameron & Winn, 2012). Thus, when organizations develop cultural perspectives that encourage the expression of virtuous behaviors – moral compasses – they become truly virtuous and endowed with a morally rich environment that can have a positive impact both within and beyond their boundaries (Stephens et al., 2013). Making virtuous values explicit is effective when it translates into virtuous practices on the part of the leadership, which are reflected in the members, avoiding a dissonance between declared virtuous values and vicious practices, opening up space for the maturation of virtues and the consolidation of a virtuous cultural philosophy (Cunha & Rego, 2015).

2.2 Humility in organizations

The term humility has lost its luster in the modern era due to its possible unworthy connotation and association with low self-esteem (Tangney, 2000). Recently, new theories have begun to portray humility as a strength and talent (Argandona, 2015).

Humility has three interrelated and distinct dimensions: self-awareness, openness to others, and transcendence of self for others (Morris et al., 2005), involving a sophisticated awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses, active engagement with others, and consideration beyond oneself (Nielsen et al., 2010; Ou et al., 2014). More than being modest, humility makes people aware of their imperfections, open to new ideas, holistic and appreciative (Tangney, 2000), and

emerges as a virtuous middle ground between arrogance and a lack of personal self-worth (Cunha & Rego, 2015), notions that lead to humility being treated as a virtue of temperance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humility is also perceived as a characteristic that is attentive to human limitations and is manifested through a virtuous triad of behaviors: (i) the ability to accurately assess oneself, (ii) seeing others in an appreciative way, and (iii) learning from others by being open to new ideas, feedback, and advice (Owens et al., 2011).

Measurement scales for humility are appropriate tools for a utilitarian understanding of the phenomenon of humility, and although there are numerous scales in the literature for measuring individual humility, there is no consensus on the methodological aspect of which would be the best measure (McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019). However, the measurement of organizational humility and its respective culture maturity is a gap that can be identified in the organizational literature (Tomei et al., 2022). Another relevant aspect for understanding humility in the organization is related to the behavior of its members (Argandona, 2017; Maldonado et al., 2022), with everyday behaviors and practices speaking louder than formal statements (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Humble leaders demonstrate strong will, fearlessness, and professional determination (Collins, 2001). Leader humility specifically emphasizes five traits: accurate self-awareness, valuing others, openness to learning from others, a low self-focus, and a service orientation (Ou et al., 2014; Owens & Hekman, 2012). The unique personal blend of these traits in humble leaders, which is evidenced by their behaviors (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), has led to the idea that humility behaviors can be accommodated at different levels on a progressive continuum.

The importance of humility in management has been demonstrated in recent studies (Argandona, 2015; Frostenson, 2016), such that empirical studies (Paterson et al., 2023; Rego et al., 2019, 2022) have provided support for considering humility as a positive and effective quality for individuals, teams and organizations (Nielsen et al., 2010). Regarding the impact of humility on organizational outcomes, the display of humility behaviors tends to create specific climates in organizations: (1) autonomy, through the fluid sharing of information (Ou et al., 2014); (2) engagement, by forming involved work teams (Waseem et al., 2025); (3) ethical, with decentralized decision-making that fosters a sense of justice and fairness (Cortes-Mejia et al., 2022); and (4) innovative, by generating

creative new ideas (Li et al., 2022). Similarly, humility positively influences an organization's strategic choices by promoting options such as ambidextrous strategic plans (Ou et al., 2018) and innovation actions (Zhang et al., 2017). Finally, in terms of organizational performance, humility in leadership affects operational outcomes by promoting the development of team psychological capital and its impact on task allocation (Rego et al., 2019), as well as employee satisfaction, thus reducing voluntary turnover (Ou et al., 2017).

In this sense, humility turns out to be not only an individual characteristic, of leaders or members, but also of the organizations themselves, which allows the introduction of the concept of organizational culture of humility presented by Maldonado et al. (2018), whose empirical research seems to be the only one on humility that focuses on the organizational dimension (Tomei et al., 2022), demonstrating theoretical relevance as it summarizes six norms of conduct of an organizational culture of humility: (i) accurate self-assessment and awareness, (ii) tolerance of errors, (iii) transparency and honesty, (iv) openness, (v) employee development, and (vi) employee recognition, reinforcing that only the integrated and systemic presence of all these assumptions is what attests to a culture of humility in organizations. However, this model does not put humility behaviors in a functional perspective, making their practical application dysfunctional as a utilitarian tool for organizations, as it inhibits a better understanding of humility based on everyday practices, which is more appropriate than mere formal declarations of norms of conduct (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004).

A temporal analysis of studies on humility in organizations (Cuenca et al., 2022a) reveals: (i) the first studies focused on consolidating the positive concept of humility; (ii) consensus on three key behaviors: accurate self-awareness, appreciation of others, and learning from feedback; (iii) validity consolidation of the individual humility scale, called *expressed humility*; (iv) humble leadership as a source of competitive advantage and facilitator of organizational excellence; (v) a recent focus on the role of humility in the individual and team dimensions, but still without delving into organizational humility; (vi) the dark side of humility, as humble leadership can be seen as a sign of weakness and insecurity, reflected in hesitation and slowness in decision-making, particularly in competitive cultures.

The introduction of the concept of expressed humility by Owens et al. (2013) represents a milestone

in research on humility in organizations, as it creates a scale of 11 behaviors that can be effectively observed by others. The individual (i) seeks feedback, even if critical; (ii) demonstrates awareness of his/her own strengths and weaknesses; (iii) recognizes the greater knowledge of others; (iv) admits mistakes; (v) admits when he/she does not know how to do something; (vi) perceives the strengths of others; (vii) is open to new ideas; (viii) is open to receiving advice; (ix) appreciates the contribution of others; (x) learns from others; and (xi) praises others.

The approach considers an integrated and systemic view of all behaviors and captures the three virtuosity constructs of humble behavior (Owens et al., 2011), supporting the understanding of humility in organizations. The *expressed humility* instrument is frequently used in management studies published in top business journals, making it recognized in the field of management, and it seems to be the measure of choice for studying humility in studies focused on organizations (Cuenca et al., 2022b). However, the instrument focuses on the individual dimension to the detriment of an organizational approach, limiting discussions about cultural practices and, in this sense, about humility culture maturity in organizations.

2.3 Culture maturity

Culture maturity considers the continuum of evolution from a more elementary and visible dimension of culture (visible artifacts), to a more central and less visible dimension (values practiced within the organization), and finally to a more mature dimension of organizational culture, despite the practical incorporation of cultural assumptions through the adoption of unconscious behaviors that are assumed to be intrinsic to everyday organizational life (Schein, 2010). In this way, culture maturity is an evolution of organizational culture to the deepest level of penetration of unconscious assumptions, a level at which the behaviors and organizational practices that translate that culture are incorporated, become organic, no longer foreign, and are adopted as appropriate by the members of the organization as evidence of internalization and culture maturity. In this state of culture maturity, members' behaviors begin to reflect organizational excellence (Argandona, 2015) under attitudinal regimes that express the ethics of responsibility, and no longer the ethics of obedience perpetrated through reinforcements under punishment or reward (Galbraith, 1983), as they unconsciously assume the organization's cultural assumptions, in a responsible

and voluntary regime, and no longer out of an obligatory duty, signaling that behavioral regimes must also progress to reach the highest level of culture maturity. Thus, for this cycle to be continuous and favor increasing levels of humility, it is necessary to accept that the existence of this virtue is not dichotomous – either one is humble or one is not – but a question of the degree of humility in a given path (Kupfer, 2003).

There are five central elements that favor the development of humility in organizations: (i) structured interventions wrapped in the meaning of humility, which tend to stimulate the incorporation of similar behaviors (Ruberton et al., 2017); (ii) organizational values, core elements of organizational culture that guide organizational behavior and practices (Diana et al., 2021); (iii) the role of leadership, which is central to spreading a culture of humility, influencing the actions of members and the adoption and maturation of new habits and humble behaviors (Schein & Schein P. A., 2018), reinforcing the identity (Hamzagić, 2018) of a virtuous organization; (iv) the role of organizational communication, striving for a frank and truthful approach (Maldonado et al., 2018), an approach that flows in all directions, reproducing the assumptions of humility and being a lever for the dissemination of the practices desired by the organization, promoting a close alignment between the declared value of humility and the daily humility behaviors (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004); and (v) cultural process-building factors that can be applied to a culture of humility, such as rituals, conspicuous symbols and training (Tomei et al., 2022).

Humility, like all organizational values, can be acquired in the daily life of these organizations, and its practices, when internalized in their culture, serve as a key factor of success and source of competitive advantage (Maldonado et al., 2018; Maldonado & Vera, 2019). However, this is a multidisciplinary concept (Frostenson, 2016), and based on the theoretical concepts presented here, it can be inferred that the cultural value of humility is specific and different from other values, to the point that it does not require instruments other than the traditional ones that build an organizational culture, since humility: (i) has its own subjectivity and conceptual diversity; (ii) is little explored in the organizational dimension; (iii) is a virtue that is not dichotomous and advances progressively; (iv) is associated with virtuous behaviors that are particularly reinforced when experienced; and (v) requires structured interventions based on objective

instrumental support that brings specific practical simplifications to its virtuous essence.

Given the peculiar nature of humility as a cultural value, it is possible that the presentation of a theoretical cultural typology, in the form of a specific instrument that identifies organizational characteristics and humble behaviors, put in a functional perspective and related to the cultural evolution of humility, under a progressive regime and under objective tutelage, would be useful in highlighting a trajectory of cultural maturation towards the internalization of organizational humility.

Culture maturity models are valuable tools for monitoring the evolution of a culture because they: (i) define specific stages that mark the completeness of a given construct (Wendler, 2012), usually five stages (Rocha et al., 2024), (ii) design typologies and indicators that strengthen an organizational culture through progression (Jespersen et al., 2016), (iii) trace the evolutionary perimeters of different contingent moments of a given construct (Siuta et al., 2022), (iv) provide precise and objective descriptions of each stage of cultural evolution (Parker et al., 2006), (v) are useful for developing personalized structured interventions to improve culture maturity (Spagnoli et al., 2023b), and (vi) offer a comprehensive conceptual framework that gives credibility and multidimensionality to cultural progression (Spagnoli et al., 2023a). The phenomenon, mainly studied from the perspective of culture maturity, is represented by safety culture, largely due to its conceptual precision (Tomei & Russo, 2014). Thus, the absence of a typology of humility culture maturity, which can signal a structure of evolutionary parameters of a culture, inhibits a program of development of changes within the organization itself, along the lines recommended by Domańska-Szaruga (2020).

The studies that propose the creation of culture maturity models (Hudson, 2001; Jespersen et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2006; Rocha et al., 2024) define specific stages and typologies that assess the completeness of the analyzed construct through various sets of multidimensional criteria (Wendler, 2012). The adoption of a particular conceptual framework and indicators specific to the humility construct naturally come to represent the configuration of a culture maturity model specific to humility.

Considering, based on the theoretical foundations presented, the difficulties of (i) understanding the concept of humility, as it is a complex and multidisciplinary one, (ii) measuring the phenomenon using functional

measurement instruments focused on the organizational dimension, and (iii) identifying culture maturity models focused on the humility construct, the article moves on to the methodological design and theoretical propositions of a THCM, which can function as an initial stage in a process of cultural analysis and tends to collaborate with an evolutionary assessment of the culture of humility and, in this sense, with the virtuous practices of a culture of humility in organizations.

3 Proposition of a Typology of Humility Culture Maturity (THCM)

Considering the main objective of this work, which is to propose a theoretical typology of humility culture maturity (THCM) that signals a progressive path of this virtue as a value in organizations, the methodological approach used for this purpose is based, as a starting point, on two fronts: (i) the theoretical foundation of the construct of humility, which points to it as a specific cultural value; and (ii) culture maturity models such as those of Parker et al. (2006) and Rocha et al. (2024), which essentially adopt a procedural path of building stages of maturity loaded with content derived from a conceptual mapping of the topic studied by these models, the first of which has been a reference in the work of culture maturity and the second of which represents some update of the model configuration.

Thus, the process of configuring the THCM considers two stages: (i) the proposition of the stages of humility culture maturity, in the light of Schein's (2010) concept of culture maturity and under the tutelage of the behavioral regimes in progression, inspired by Galbraith (1983); (ii) the incorporation of objective descriptions that include a conceptual framework specific to humility based on two models: norms of conduct of a culture of humility by Maldonado et al. (2018) and instrumental and observable indicators in the form of expressed behaviors by Owens et al. (2013, 2015).

Just as the topic of humility has a conceptual multiplicity, this methodological approach is also influenced by a variety of disciplines as the configuration process: (i) draws on social economics and Galbraith's (1983) sources of power to propose behavioral regimes for the stages of the THCM; (ii) uses organizational behavior to suggest that different levels of leader humility behaviors (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004) can be arranged along

a progressive continuum represented by the THCM; (iii) integrates philosophy to consider that humility behaviors can be shaped to benefit an organizational humility culture; and (iv) applies psychology through humility measurement scales that indicate markers of humility behavior and link these to the two theoretical models (Maldonado et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2013, 2015) that support the development of the THCM, guiding the identification of humility behaviors that are put in a functional perspective at each stage of the theoretical framework.

Regarding the first stage, the proposition of the stages of humility culture maturity contemplates spectra referenced in this study: (i) the intrinsic characteristics of culture maturity models; (ii) the concept of culture maturity qualified by unconscious assumptions; (iii) a cultural evolution towards the internalization of behaviors, which become unconscious and organic; (iv) behavioral regimes that also evolve progressively towards maturity, from obedient to responsible; (v) the specificity of humility, in terms of being a virtue, having conceptual complexity, and evolving progressively. In this sense, this study proposes a theoretical typology of humility culture maturity (THCM), in a continuum of five stages: (i) rhetorical culture – there is no alignment between discourse and practice, and there is no concern with adopting humble behavior; at this stage, it is necessary to recognize the risks of arrogant cultures and toxic leadership within organizations in order to evolve to the next stage; (ii) embryonic culture – the value of humility, although widespread, does not resonate with behavior, which is reactive and impulsive, based on a demand; at this stage, it is necessary to take advantage of this embryo of the value of humility so that it can be recognized and developed as a practice that benefits the organization; (iii) stimulated culture – the value of humility is disseminated and assimilated through behaviors that take place under the rule of obligation; at this stage we have a great opportunity to advance with the practice of humility as positive behaviors are reinforced and praised and negative ones are pointed out as challenges to be overcome; (iv) full culture – there is broad alignment between discourse and practice, and humble behaviors are adopted voluntarily; at this stage we need to encourage the cycle of knowledge and learning about the culture of humility; (v) virtuous culture – there is absolute alignment between discourse and practice, and humble behaviors occur unconsciously (as a matter of course), since behaving in line with the principles of humility is natural to every member of the organization;

at this stage, all cultural manifestations (visible artifacts) need to reinforce the advantages of this virtuous culture for organizational identity, organizational excellence and competitive advantage.

The first three stages do not yet reflect a culture of humility and are associated with the ethics of obedience (Galbraith, 1983), as humble behaviors are only manifested under a regime that moves between unconcerned (rhetorical culture), reactive (embryonic culture), and obligatory (stimulated culture) attitudes. As progression occurs, the last two stages come to reflect a culture of humility and include an ethic of commitment, which is no longer that of obedience, but that of responsibility (Galbraith, 1983), which is closely linked to humble behaviors, since one consciously comes to believe in its value and benefits, so that humble behaviors start to occur under a regime of spontaneous volunteering (full culture), which evolves into an organic and unconscious internalization (virtuous culture). In its final stage, this progression reaches a virtuous regime that is conducive to organizational excellence (Argandona, 2015), which is evidence of culture maturity (Schein, 2010). Figure 1 shows an illustration of the theoretical proposition of the stages of humility culture maturity, which is particularly suited to this construct due to its virtuous and non-dichotomous nature, whose introduction in organizations has a progressive content in favor of a path of internalization.

The presented structure of the five stages of the THCM is designed to reflect the progressive nature of the culture of humility itself, allowing it to incorporate

descriptions of an organization in relation to a series of characteristics representative of a culture of organizational humility. Thus, in line with the second stage of configuring a THCM, this incorporation includes a conceptual framework specific to humility that considers a proposal for convergence of the two models referenced, accommodating the translation of the conceptual precepts of the norms of conduct with each description of expressed humility behavior, under the criterion of similarity of conceptual meaning. The combination becomes useful since we have, on the one hand, a unique conceptual model of organizational culture of humility, with its norms of conduct, and, on the other, an instrumental model of humility behaviors, with practical indicators, representative for studies in the field of management, supporting a theoretical structure for the declination in perspective of the stages of humility culture maturity. Figure 2 proposes how each of the instrumental indicators of Owens et al. (2013, 2015) can be conceptually aligned with a theoretical norm of conduct of a culture of organizational humility by Maldonado et al. (2018). The integrated adoption of norms of conduct translated into cultural precepts, mixed with the indicators manifested by individual attitudes of humility (Figure 2), makes it possible to put humility behaviors in a functional perspective and to signal the progressive stages of a culture, with the state of culture maturity, in the virtuous culture (Figure 1), being the moment in time when norms and behaviors are adopted in a responsible, unconscious and organic way (taken for granted) for the benefit of shared excellence and virtuosity.

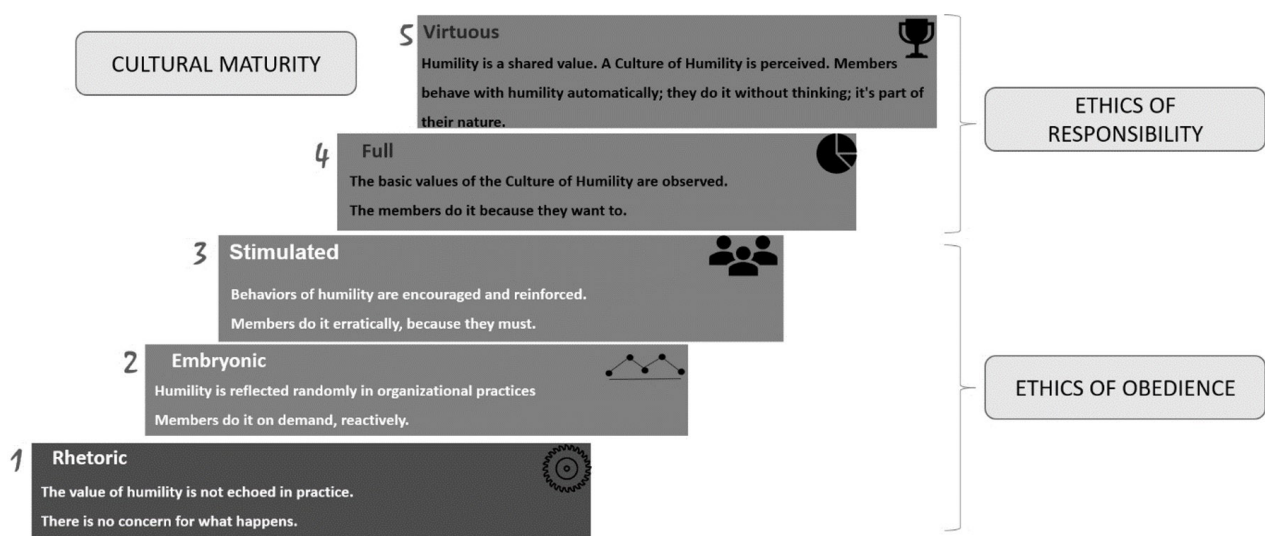


Figure 1. Proposed stages of the THCM

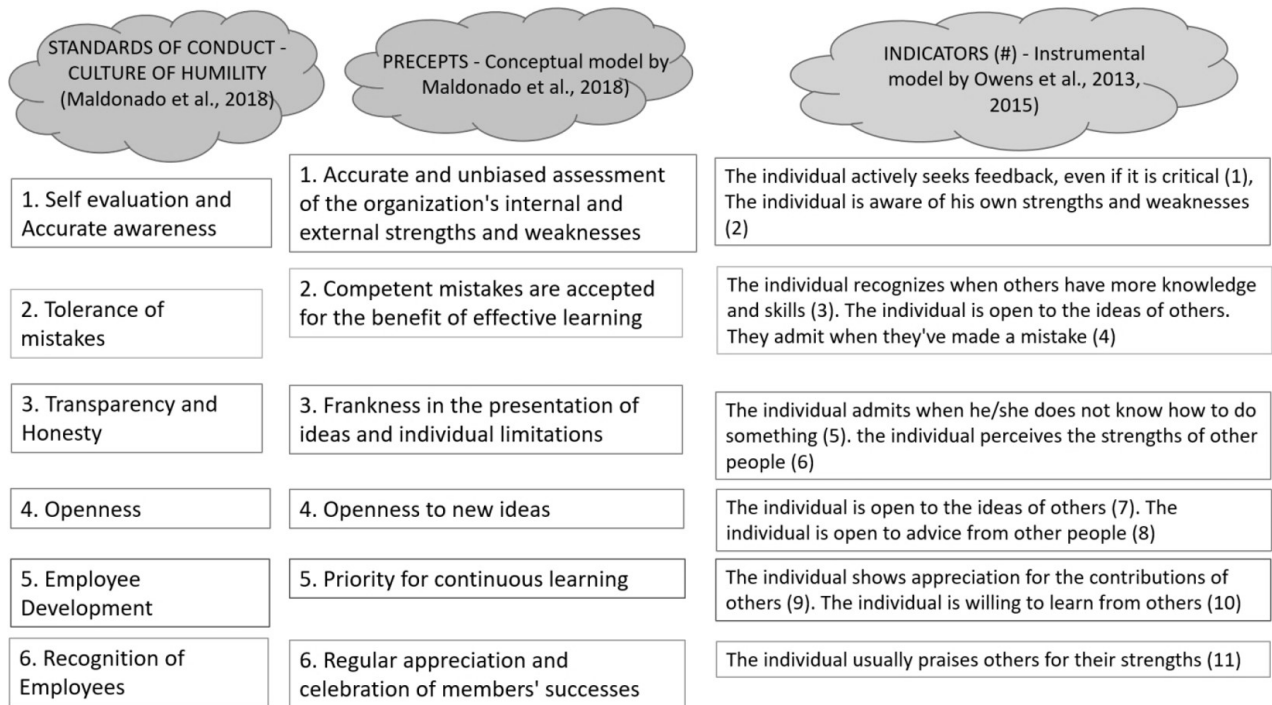


Figure 2. Proposed combination of the norms of conduct of the organizational humility culture and its precepts according to Maldonado et al. (2018) with the instrumental model of Owens et al. (2013, 2015)

Once the stages of humility culture maturity have been proposed in the first stage of configuration, it becomes convenient to present these descriptions of cultural precepts and behaviors of humility that make it possible to identify a conceptual framework related to humility, giving rise to the manifestation of an objective portrait of an organization in terms of a set of characteristics and behaviors representative of an organizational culture of humility, showing a trajectory of internalization of humble behaviors, as the behavioral regimes follow one another in a dynamic representative of the evolutionary progression of the virtue of humility.

Table 1 summarizes and puts in a functional perspective the organizational and exemplary characteristics of humility behaviors related to the respective stages, in order to present the theoretical proposition of a THCM.

4 Discussion

The configuration presented focuses on the role of leadership in the embryonic stage of the culture of humility, highlighting its challenge in reminding followers of the importance of humility due to reactive behaviors. In the advanced stages of the culture of humility, the focus shifts to the members of the organization, considering that there

is a more frequent adoption of humility practices, either erratically, under an ethic of obligation in the stimulated stage, or more voluntarily and unconsciously, in the full and virtuous stages, under an ethic of responsibility. Each cultural typology proposed here reflects a characteristic way of dealing with the cultural value of humility, representing increasing levels of advancement that combine the adoption of observable humble behaviors with a specific regime of action – unconcerned, reactive, obligatory, voluntary and unconscious, in a continuum of culture maturity towards the internalization of humble behaviors.

Cultural maturity models tend to be exemplary in the process of introducing and progressively internalizing cultural values because they: (i) provide objectively measurable reference points; (ii) simplify broad concepts; (iii) support cultural recognition; (iv) lend credibility and multidimensionality to cultural maturity; and (v) are useful for developing organizational improvements.

Recently revisited cultural maturity models highlight their strength in promoting diagnostics for both food safety culture (Spagnoli et al., 2023b) and cybersecurity culture (Dornheim & Zarnekow, 2024) based on strict concepts of the cultural value of safety, positioning themselves to present a methodology for analyzing cultural maturity

Table 1

Proposition of a Typology of Humility Culture Maturity (THCM): stages of maturity, organizational characteristics and humble behaviors

Stages of Maturity	Organizational characteristics	Humble behaviors
1. Rhetorical culture of humility	The declared value is not reflected in organizational practices. Humility is a stated desire of top management. Behavior unconcerned with humility practices such as: (i) giving constructive feedback; (ii) accepting one's own limitations; (iii) recognizing the strengths of others; (v) giving praise; (vi) being willing to live with counterpoint; (vii) being willing to learn from others; (viii) listening carefully to advice; (ix) being open to different ideas.	There is no concern about what happens in everyday life with regard to humble behaviors: (i) members act in isolation, there is no teamwork and no feedback; (ii) mistakes are usually punished without opening spaces for individual and organizational learning, and gossip adds to the climate of insecurity; (iii) recognition policies are rare, and the practice of praise is seen as a deviation; (iv) communication is veiled, and there is abrasiveness in interpersonal interactions; (v) the assumption of responsibility is concealed; (vi) there is a fear of saying "I don't know how to do this" or "I know less than you."
2. Embryonic culture of humility	Humility does not advance uniformly in organizational practices. The meaning of humility is diffused tentatively among the members of the organization. Humble behaviors are adopted only reactively, in response to positive and negative reinforcement. There is always a recurring memory or impulse that reminds the leadership of the need to incorporate humility practices into organizational routines.	Leadership: (i) strives to encourage feedback; (ii) corrects signs of arrogance; (iii) often invites members to explore collective learning by creating teamwork mechanisms; (iv) always remembers that it is natural to make mistakes when seeking to create, renew and innovate; (v) reinforces that there are no demigods in the organization, but actors with limitations that can be overcome through greater openness to others; (vi) often reiterates the importance of paying attention to the contribution of others; (vii) works for clarity, transparency of exchanges and mutual consultation; (viii); recurrently encourages integration between the different groups; and (ix) sometimes reinforces the rituals of recognizing achievements.
3. Stimulated culture of humility	Humility is reflected in everyday practices, whether it is through the examples of leadership that emulate reason and sense with the members of the organization, or through the protagonism, dissemination and encouragement of self-reflection. Manifestations of humility are based on an assumed sense of obligation and duty. Humble practices are aligned with shared beliefs within the organization, as a proactive response based on a clear sense of duty. Only some of the norms of a culture of organizational humility are present in the organizational routine because the regime of duty signals the discontinuity of these practices.	The members of the organization: (i) perceive the benefits of and are committed to the practice of constructive feedback; appreciate listening to advice as the organization encourages the principles of mentoring; (ii) have less difficulty accepting their own limitations because they perceive that leadership ensures an environment of psychological safety; (iii) think that humility is important and hold themselves accountable for transcending and recognizing the strengths of others, learning from others and working as a team; (iv) tend to maintain temperate interpersonal relationships, being open to different ideas and inhibiting groupthink; (v) are formally encouraged to praise their colleagues, live with counterpoint, and adopt conciliatory approaches.
4. Full culture of humility	The basic assumptions of humility are disseminated, understood and put into practice in an integrated and systemic way through manifest and expressed humble behaviors. Humble behaviors are practiced through the voluntary desire of the members of the organization, as they voluntarily choose to act in this way and they see value in this practice and action, combining reason, genuine interest, and satisfaction. Humble behaviors occur intentionally, leaving behind the ethic of obedience and embracing the ethic of responsibility. The norms of conduct of humility are present in the organizational routine.	The members of the organization: (i) listen actively and attentively to each other, with respect and genuine interest in guidance; (ii) foster collaborative relationships that encourage seeking feedback, even when critical; (iii) have a clear assessment of their contributions and limitations and authentically recognize the contributions and strengths of others, encouraging constructive conflict; (iv) stimulate new ideas by creating spaces for face-to-face or virtual socialization; (v) communicate transparently, without fear of their perspectives, mistakes and limitations; (vi) foster teamwork with an emphasis on the belief in collective learning; (vii) publicly praise and recognize the achievements of others.
5. Virtuous culture of humility	Humility is a shared value. Repetition of humility practices creates habit and develops the virtue. Humility is a value that is practiced in the dominant culture of the organization, referenced in organizational practices, and authentically disseminated by leadership. Humble behaviors occur naturally in everyday life, organically and unconsciously. The norms of conduct of organizational humility are present in everyday life.	The following humble behaviors stand out: (i) evaluations of achievements, derived from the exercise of constructive feedback, are natural, accurate, objective and measured, without overestimating or underestimating achievements; (ii) feedback is seen as a developmental exercise, actively sought and willingly received; (iii) there is no value judgment with regard to individual limitations and imperfections; (iv) mistakes are assumed without fear, and smart mistakes are consciously tolerated for the benefit of learning; (v) interactions are characterized by transparent communication, respect and consideration for others; (vi) recognition, praise and individual appreciation are ritualized and recurring practices; (vii) the strengths of others are usually made explicit, to the detriment of personal exhibitionism; (viii) the word of individuals is trusted; (ix) teamwork flows naturally, and there is a real interest in each other's ideas and contributions; (x) collaboration, participation and gratitude for sharing are valued.

opportunities (Spagnoli et al., 2023a) or even refining conceptual descriptions of corporate safety parameters (Sahri et al., 2023). These models, anchored in the cultural value of safety, operate under an objective concept with defined areas of capabilities, specific behaviors, and a propositional approach for organizational development using empirically validated safety behavior standards. The challenges of implementing cultural maturity models include the involvement of leadership and all organizational levels in a collaborative process, as well as the careful selection of structured interventions tailored to the context, making the practical operationalization of maturity diagnostics more effective (Spagnoli et al., 2024b). In terms of measurement challenges, the importance of identifying specific and valid indicators stands out, as well as conducting pre- and post-intervention evaluations to compare maturity levels. When these aspects are well addressed, they tend to enhance the practical application of the results derived from cultural maturity analysis (Spagnoli et al., 2024a).

A comparative analysis of these cultural maturity models with a theoretical proposition of the THCM reveals a unique similarity, which is reflected in the common interest of all investigations in maturing a specific cultural value. However, humility is a dense and multidisciplinary concept, making a theoretical investigation a timely starting point to simplify the understanding of which humility behaviors can be distributed across specific evolutionary parameters. Additionally, it highlights the opportunity for practical studies that tend to refine, test, and validate the theoretical proposition of a THCM that could serve as a guide for diagnosing more developed and underdeveloped behavioral dimensions within the organizational spectrum. Moreover, the theoretical proposition of a THCM suggests the possibility of overcoming barriers to the maturation of cultural values associated with the subjective spectrum, such as other virtues, since the configuration design of this cultural typology can serve as an initial theoretical reference.

The conceptual subjectivity present both in humility (Frostenson, 2016) and in the behavioral regimes of Galbraith (1983) can represent a barrier to understanding humility practices that can be shared (Maldonado et al., 2022), reflecting on the appropriateness of humility behaviors at each stage of the THCM, with a particular impact on cultural maturity. On the other hand, this limitation amplifies the need for a model of organizational humility culture that offers calibrated and

tested indicators that function as descriptive tools that objectively translate the complexity of the construct and facilitate the assimilation of developmental stages of an evolutionary pathway for humility.

Although the conceptual subjectivity of humility is both a challenge and a stimulus for seeking more substantial indicators, it is possible to operationalize humility behaviors at each cultural stage with the support of the THCM. In the rhetorical humility culture, organizations can promote workshops and showcase examples of humble leaders, in addition to initiating a self-assessment process of organizational culture based on the designed typology. In the embryonic humility culture, the use of 360° feedback, the mentoring process, and the ritualization of public recognition reinforce the learning of desired humility behaviors. In the stimulated humility culture, organizations can integrate humility into training and development, link rewards to humility behaviors, and expand feedback channels as actions that reinforce practice. In a full humility culture scenario, organizations can focus on developing humble leaders who emerge regardless of the legitimate power of their position, guided by trust and empathy to encourage feedback seeking and continuous learning about humility behaviors. Finally, in the virtuous humility culture, sharing success stories and integrating humility into the mission, vision, and values of the organization consolidate humility practices that can be disseminated through organizational communication. The consistent operationalization of humility at each stage requires the translation of abstract concepts into observable and measurable behaviors. As a starting point, the THCM, with its stages and specific humility behaviors, provides a framework that serves as a guide for developing the cultural value of humility and enables reflection on gaps that can be the subject of targeted interventions. The timely combination of measurable behavioral indicators with robust evaluation methods helps reduce subjectivity and promotes a strong organizational culture of humility.

Considering this study's interest in extending the discussion of humility to the organizational dimension, it is encouraged to note that beyond culture, other intrinsic organizational elements influence the presence and sharing of humility, thereby reinforcing the organizational culture itself. Leadership, as a key factor, plays a crucial role in promoting humility by demonstrating relational attributes such as avoiding arrogance and embracing modesty (Oc et al., 2015), while being expected to exhibit

virtuous practices of excellence. A leader interested in developing humility may face challenges in autocratic or competitive cultures (Tomei et al., 2022) and will need to adopt a fearless and professional approach (Collins, 2001). Communication also plays a critical role in embedding humility values, requiring openness and transparency to ensure alignment between declared values and daily behaviors (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), both internally and with stakeholders. In addition to the challenge posed by specific cultures, the presence of internal subcultures limits the effective application of the THCM, as does resistance to cultural change from both members and the organizational structure itself. Additional challenges include the resource allocation difficulties that smaller organizations may face in implementing structured interventions and the specific characteristics of stakeholders (Tomei et al., 2022). In this context, courageous leadership and active corporate communication are critical elements in mitigating such challenges. Lastly, human resources policies can influence humility by focusing on recruitment processes that identify candidates with potential for humility and by implementing training programs that reinforce this cultural value and help employees recognize key elements and situational triggers for humility (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018; Ruberton et al., 2017).

Considering that the THCM deepens the understanding of humility behaviors in the organizational context and that leadership, corporate communication, and human resources policies influence their presence and sharing, organizations can adopt practices that demonstrate the applicability of this typology: (i) socialization circles within multidisciplinary groups to present and discuss humility behaviors at each cultural stage, encouraging their adoption; (ii) AI tools that can be trained to identify the presence and level of humility during candidate selection, strengthening the workforce with greater maturity in this behavior; (iii) video tutorials that exemplify desired behaviors, facilitating practical learning; (iv) workshops aimed at commercial and supply chain areas, fostering virtuous humility behaviors with ethical impacts on negotiations with suppliers and customers.

Organizations interested in the cultural practices of humility (Cuenca et al., 2022b) require a tool that will act as a guiding compass, leading them toward a virtuous regime of organizational practices. Both a model of organizational humility culture (Maldonado et al., 2018), with more functional characteristics, and a model of culture maturity (Schein, 2010) are likely to serve as an

initial step in a roadmap for the evolution of a humility culture. In this sense, the theoretical proposition of a THCM represents an unprecedented milestone for both the theoretical discussion of virtuous humility practices and the promotion of empirical studies using different methodologies to test the practical application of humility behaviors in organizations. These studies will refine the content of the cultural typology and encourage the design of functional models that foster a cultural change development program (Domańska-Szaruga, 2020). Empirical studies based on the THCM could evolve into structured analyses of opportunities for the maturation of an organizational humility culture, like empirical models of cultural maturity (Spagnoli et al., 2023b). Likewise, it is important that such models of culture maturity can be generalized for application in different organizational sectors and national cultures, thus increasing the methodological strength and pervasiveness of the instruments and supporting the opportunities arising from empirical studies.

5 Implications and future research

Following the assumptions of the culture maturity models, the THCM proposition, based on Schein's (2010) concept of culture maturity and inspired by Galbraith's (1983) concepts, extends the foundations of the Maldonado et al. (2018) and Owens et al. (2013, 2015) models, presenting four fundamental implications for the management of organizational humility: (i) it reinforces and dynamizes, in a temporal sphere, the six norms of conduct of an organizational culture of humility identified in the empirical research of Maldonado et al. (2018); (ii) it favors the transposition of the 11 expressed behaviors described in the individual humility model of Owens et al. (2013, 2015) for understanding humility in organizations; (iii) it contributes to the analysis of the maturity of the organizational humility culture and virtuous practices in organizations, since it indicates specific descriptions and behaviors of humility related to each stage of cultural progression towards maturity, providing input for diagnosing underdeveloped and mature fronts; and (iv) it presents a proposal for a unique and unprecedented THCM in the organizational literature that fills a gap in management studies dedicated to organizational humility and humility culture maturity, opening up a new space for discussion around specific virtuous practices that expand organizational capacities in the face of environments subject to recurring corporate scandals.

The proposed THCM has the following limitations: (i) the conceptual framework is restricted to the models of Maldonado et al. (2018) and Owens et al. (2013, 2015),-although this is a multidisciplinary topic; (ii) the proposed design is applicable to any organizational and cultural context, but the effectiveness of its application depends on the quality of the diagnosis of the external and internal organizational environment.

The study also identifies some avenues for future research, outlining possible empirical methodologies: (i) validate the THCM with the leaders of organizations that express humility as an essential corporate value through semi-structured interviews; (ii) validate the propositions of humility behaviors with experts (through theoretical validation and face validity with experts), in the prerogative of creating a model of cultural maturity that lends itself to customized structured interventions for improving the organizational humility culture; (iii) promote an empirical study of the THCM with different organizations (through an experiment) in order to test and refine the theoretical proposition of this cultural typology, expanding the discussions on its applicability; (iv) design a model of organizational humility culture, with norms of conduct and observable indicators (through mixed methods – qualitative interviews, survey generation, empirical study and exploratory plus confirmatory analysis), to broaden the universe of representative constructs of the phenomenon investigated – humility is a complex and less tangible phenomenon – in order to refine the parameters of the THCM; and (v) analyze the influence of national culture on the application of the THCM, based on the management of humility in global organizations through the study of multiple cases.

6 Final considerations

The proposition of the THCM is suitable for highlighting a growing path of virtuous practices in favor of a culture of humility, as it proposes stages of temporal displacement from an unconcerned to an unconscious, virtuous behavioral regime of the humility construct. This is justified: (i) because humility is a non-dichotomous virtue with conceptual diversity, whose introduction in the corporate world requires practical experimentation in a progressive behavioral regime through structured instruments, seeking an alternative proposal to the traditional factors for building an organizational culture; and (ii) because culture maturity models provide evolutionary

parameters that outline simplified and objective descriptions of tangible practices for specific stages that lead to the internalization of behaviors representative of a mature culture. The THCM proposal shows more tangible signs of this construct, as it merges the descriptions of cultural precepts and humble behaviors with the stages of culture maturity, providing cultural types with distinct and progressive attitudinal regimes, signaling the content of each perimeter of culture maturity, and showing a growing roadmap towards the internalization of humble behaviors. In this sense, it is precisely the way in which the THCM was configured and the utilitarian essence of the instrument of cultural progression towards humility that answers the main question of this research.

Considering that virtuous practices lead to organizational excellence and are powerful tools for preventing ethical scandals and corporate fraud, and in light of the theoretical propositions of the THCM, it is possible to summarize the main attributes of the tool: (i) evolutionary progression – the THCM outlines the stages of cultural evolution of humility, and its configuration is specific to the desire for the introduction and development of the virtue; (ii) support from theoretical approaches – by drawing on Schein's (2010) concept of culture maturity, on Galbraith's (1983) concepts of the ethics of obedience and responsibility that inspire the behavioral regimes of the typology, on Maldonado et al.'s (2018) unique conceptual model, and on Owens et al.'s (2013, 2015) methodologically strong instrumental model, the understanding of the organizational humility culture is broadened by addressing a tangible instrument for empirical validation; (iii) theoretical advance – the configuration of the THCM, based on the articulation of two theories and two specific models, expands the knowledge around the culture of humility in favor of the construction of theoretical propositions aimed at virtuous practices of humility and its culture maturity; (iv) fostering excellence – the theoretical proposition of the virtuous humility culture stage tends to highlight the internalization of humility behaviors as natural and unconscious habits, addressing discussions on organizational capabilities; and (v) organizational development – the instrument helps in analyzing humility culture maturity, offering objective signs of virtuous practices.

Finally, the study hopes to stimulate further reflection on the importance of humility as a corporate cultural value, so that further research can critique the propositions put forward here and take them to a higher

level of contribution in the interest of spreading virtuous practices related to humility for the benefit of a culture based on organizational excellence, which is so dear in contemporary contexts.

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Financial support:

There are no funding agencies to report.

Open Science:

This paper does not include any data.

Conflicts of interest:

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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