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# SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND SERVING CULTURE: INFLUENCE ON INDIVIDUAL AND UNIT PERFORMANCE

**ROBERT C. LIDEN**
**SANDY J. WAYNE**
**University of Illinois at Chicago**

**CHENWEI LIAO**
**Michigan State University**

**JEREMY D. MEUSER**
**University of Illinois at Chicago**

**In a sample of 961 employees working in 71 restaurants of a moderately sized restaurant chain, we investigated a key tenet of servant leadership theory—that servant leaders guide followers to emulate the leader's behavior by prioritizing the needs of others above their own. We developed and tested a model contending that servant leaders propagate servant leadership behaviors among followers by creating a serving culture, which directly influences unit (i.e., restaurant/store) performance and enhances individual attitudes and behaviors directly and through the mediating influence of individuals' identification with the unit. As hypothesized, serving culture was positively related both to restaurant performance and employee job performance, creativity, and customer service behaviors, and negatively related to turnover intentions, both directly and through employee identification with the restaurant. Same-source common method bias was reduced by employing five sources of data: employees, restaurant managers, customers, internal audits by headquarters staff, and external audits by a consulting firm.**

Servant leadership is based on the premise that leaders who are best able to motivate followers are those who focus least on satisfying their own personal needs and most on prioritizing the fulfillment of followers' needs (Greenleaf, 1970). Leaders who are more concerned about others than themselves are humble, and their humility stimulates strong relationships with followers and encourages followers to become fully engaged in their work (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Given its focus on leader behaviors that help followers to realize their full potential, servant leadership represents a positive approach to organizational behavior (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012), the study of which refers to the "application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002: 59). Servant leadership consists of seven dimensions (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008), including *emotional healing* or being sensitive to the personal setbacks of followers, *creating value for the community*, such as encouraging followers to engage in volunteer activities that benefit local communities, *conceptual skills*, or the problem-solving abilities and task knowledge that are prerequisites for providing help to followers, *empowering*, *helping subordinates grow and suc-*

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*ceed*, *putting subordinates first*, and *behaving ethically*. Although other approaches to leadership include supporting followers, the strong emphasis on leading by serving followers, captured in the name, *servant* leadership, is unique among leadership approaches. It is thought that when leaders place a priority on providing tangible and emotional support to followers and assisting followers in reaching their full potential, followers in turn see the leader as a role model and engage in appropriate behaviors, not through coercion, but because they want to do so (Greenleaf, 1970).

Research has demonstrated that servant leadership is related to follower outcomes, including job attitudes, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and performance (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011) as well as outcomes at the team (Ehrhart, 2004; Hu & Liden, 2011; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011) and organizational (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012) levels, even when controlling for two dominant leadership approaches (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014), namely transformational leader behaviors and leader–member exchange (LMX) (Liden et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2012; Schaubroeck et al., 2011). This explanation of important outcomes beyond the two prevailing leadership approaches begs an explanation for *how* servant leadership influences employee behaviors. Our main purpose is to continue the momentum on servant leadership research by enhancing our understanding of how it promotes positive outcomes.

Initial research on the processes through which servant leadership relates to outcomes has revealed that procedural justice climate (Ehrhart, 2004), team potency (Hu & Liden, 2011), and trust (Schaubroeck et al., 2011) mediate relationships between team/unit-level servant leadership and team/unit performance and/or team/unit OCB. In a cross-level study, Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke (2010) showed that team-level procedural justice and service climates and individual-level self-efficacy and commitment to the supervisor mediated the relationship between team-level servant leadership and individual-level OCBs. Hunter et al. (2013) also found support for the role of service climate as mediating the relationship between team-level servant leadership and subjectively rated team performance. These studies have provided evidence concerning how servant leadership influences outcomes at the team level. The purpose of the current investigation was to extend theory development on the processes underlying relationships between servant leadership and outcomes at the work unit levels, as well to contribute to the sparse research on the cross-level effects that unit-level variables have on individual responses. Although Greenleaf (1970) provided a general philosophy for how serving others influences outcomes, and Graham (1991) delineated differences between servant leadership and transformational leadership, theory enhancements capable of supporting refined testable hypotheses are needed.

Consistent with Greenleaf's (1970) contention that servant leaders instill in followers a desire to serve others, we introduce *serving culture* as a key mechanism through which servant leadership behavior affects individual and unit outcomes. Culture is defined as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 2010: 18). More specifically, serving culture resides in the current investigation at the unit level and refers to the "behavioral norms and shared expectations" of placing a priority on helping others (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988: 255). Engagement in these behaviors, which are thought to be relevant to all members of the unit, can be substantially influenced by upper-level leadership (Gelfand, Leslie, Keller, & de Dreu, 2012; Schein, 1990). Underlying behavioral expectations are values upon which these expectations are based (Rousseau, 1990). Cultural values serve to solidify the behavioral norms and expectations. We contend that leaders may influence the culture by directly encouraging follower engagement in serving behaviors and indirectly by modeling desired behaviors, which then are adopted by followers, as explained by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). We propose that because servant leaders tend to be respected and admired by followers, they become motivated to emulate their leaders' behaviors. Follower modeling of the helping and supportive behaviors displayed by servant leaders are further strengthened as followers solidify their identification with the group. As they begin to view and project themselves to others as a proud member of the group, their positive work behaviors become part of how they see themselves as individuals (Ashforth, 2001). We thus rely on social learning and social identity theories in explaining the emergence of a serving culture and the

positive effects this culture has on key individual and unit outcomes.

In the current investigation, we contribute to the leadership literature in three ways. First, we assess the critical premise of servant leadership theory that servant leaders strive to develop a serving culture that is based on behavioral norms and expectations that place a priority on helping others. Second, we explore the influence of servant leadership behavior via the mediating effect of serving culture on both individual job behaviors and unit-level performance. Third, we develop and test cross-level hypotheses based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), proposing that a serving culture that is based on prioritizing the needs of others above one's own needs enhances followers' identification with the unit. Through this process we expect servant leadership to indirectly impact individual behaviors and attitudes, including performance, creativity, orientation toward serving others, and turnover intentions. We test our hypotheses with a large sample of employees and managers working in 71 restaurants/stores of a moderately sized restaurant chain.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

One of the central tenets of the servant leadership philosophy extolled by Greenleaf (1970) is that serving others includes grooming some followers so that they too can become servant leaders. Follower emulation of leader behavior has been identified as a key attribute of servant leadership (Graham, 1991). Whereas other leadership approaches, such as ethical and transformational leadership, include the notion of follower imitation of leader behavior, the cultivation of servant leadership among followers is central to servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leaders may consciously or unconsciously encourage follower behaviors through role modeling (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999), a process explained by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory represents a departure from reinforcement theories of learning by arguing that people can learn simply by observing and replicating the behavior of others. Consistent support for modeling behavior as outlined in social learning theory has been found in laboratory experiments (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005) as well as field examinations (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009) of the "contagion" or "trickle-down" effects of leadership through follower modeling of leader behavior.

Leaders are often viewed as role models given their formal status, position power, and referent power (Yukl, 2010), which results in followers imitating the behaviors of their immediate superiors (Weiss, 1977; Yaffe & Kark, 2011). Follower modeling of leader behavior may also be prevalent because leaders often serve as mentors to their followers (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000) and protégés often learn by imitating the behaviors of their mentors (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Followers are especially inclined to model leader behaviors when they perceive the leader as possessing desirable qualities (Hannah, Walumbwa, & Fry, 2011; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, & Roberts, 2008), and servant leaders possess many attractive characteristics. Servant leaders' integrity and concern for others enhance their attractiveness, as does the trust that servant leaders inspire in others (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). In addition, their expertise, as reflected in the conceptual skills dimension of servant leadership identified by Liden et al. (2008), likely translates into followers perceiving that the leader is credible (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2010). When followers perceive the leader as possessing desirable qualities, they aspire to be like the leader and thus model their leaders' behavior (Mayer et al., 2012). Indeed, it has been empirically demonstrated that although there is variance in individuals' reactions to servant leadership behaviors, most individuals express a preference for leaders who engage in these behaviors (Meuser, Liden, Wayne, & Henderson, 2011). We therefore contend that engagement in servant leadership behaviors propagates from leaders to followers.

Empathy and behaving ethically are aspects of servant leadership behavior that increase the attractiveness of servant leaders in the eyes of their followers. Schaubroeck et al. (2011) found empirical support for Greenleaf's (1970) key proposition that servant leaders' empathy, ethical behavior, and prioritization of follower needs develop mutual trust between leaders and followers over time. Indeed, good leaders are trusted more by their followers than poor leaders (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). This trust in leaders primes followers' receptivity to leader initiatives designed to encourage them to engage in serving behaviors (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). Reciprocation represents one way that followers may model the servant leader behaviors of the leader, because "Imitation is the sincerest [form] of flattery" (Colton, 1824: 114). By openly prioritizing

the personal and professional growth of followers, servant leaders provide guidance and direction in assisting follower modeling of servant leader behaviors. Modeling that involves both a demonstration of the behaviors as well as the guidance of followers through activities that illustrate the behavior has been shown to be especially effective in evoking behavior and attitude change in followers (Bandura, Blanchard, & Ritter, 1969).

When multiple followers engage in serving behaviors, either as the result of direct grooming by the leader or indirectly through the modeling of leader behavior, a unique serving culture ensues. Serving culture offers a way to theoretically integrate servant leadership with the social context (Glisson & James, 2002; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011). We define "serving culture" as the extent to which all members of the work unit engage in servant leadership behaviors and operationalize it as aggregated individual employee reports of perceived collective unit behavior. Serving culture is characterized as a work environment in which participants share the understanding that the behavioral norms and expectations are to prioritize the needs of others above their own and to provide help and support to others. We stress that serving culture includes the behaviors of *all* members of the collective of interest (e.g., group, unit), not only the formal leaders. Defining serving culture in this way achieves consistency with servant leadership theory, which stresses that servant leaders cultivate serving behaviors among those around them, including their followers (Graham, 1991; Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2014).

We argue that for a serving culture to germinate, grow, and eventually propagate within the collective, it is critical for the highest-level formal leader of that entity to engage in servant leadership behaviors. This is because top leaders set the tone for the behaviors expected of employees (Peterson et al., 2012). This appears to occur through processes described by social learning theory in which the leader's behaviors "trickle down" to subordinates (Mayer et al., 2009, 2012; Sy et al., 2005). Servant leadership, an approach to leading that is consistent with positive organizational scholarship (Bono & Ilies, 2006), represents a positive force that spreads to followers through "contagion" processes. Indeed, servant leaders as positive role models stimulate employees' personal change in efforts to emulate the desired qualities and behaviors of that role model (Lord & Brown, 2004). Through the direct developmental activities of the servant leader and through follower modeling of servant leader behaviors, a serving culture emerges. But this culture does not surface unless those in formal positions of authority embrace servant leadership (Schein, 1990). We therefore contend that the extent to which a serving culture exists is determined by the degree to which the formal leader of the entity engages in servant leader behaviors. In the current investigation, the restaurant/store manager is the highest-level formal leader within each unit and thus fulfills this role of cultivating a serving culture.

*Hypothesis 1. Store Manager servant leadership is positively related to serving culture.*

We propose that serving culture drives the effectiveness of the entity as a whole. When the majority of members of an entity are aligned in terms of what behaviors are appropriate in the collective environment, the behavioral norms that make up the serving culture provide a roadmap that individuals use in order to evaluate how best to respond to different situations that they encounter at work. When multiple people in the work unit are engaged in serving behaviors, the culture is perceived by participants as one defined by putting the needs of others first, behaving with integrity, and developing conceptual skills associated with thoroughly understanding the tasks and overall business (Liden et al., 2008). When serving others is seen as a defining characteristic of the work unit, we contend that members of the collective engage in behaviors that benefit the unit and are willing to help each other, such as freely sharing one's task knowledge. Thus, although the focus of servant leadership is on meeting the needs of individual followers, we propose, based on servant leadership philosophy espoused by Greenleaf (1970), that servant leadership also provides substantial benefits to the collective through the culture cultivated by servant leaders. Specifically, serving cultures are characterized by a focus on understanding the needs of others and helping others, both within and outside of the unit. Help and support can range from disseminating technical advice to providing emotional support to assisting those in need of personal healing. Help and support from others tends to motivate participants in the system to engage in behaviors that benefit the whole (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

Whereas some cultures are destructive and linked to ineffective performance (Gelfand et al., 2012), we contend that serving cultures are positive and encourage participant behaviors that enhance

work unit performance (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Peterson et al. (2012) proposed that this occurs because followers who are empowered, encouraged to reach their highest potential, and provided with clarity of focus, strive to perform at the highest level. Expanding on this, we argue that the norms for behavior that provide the basis for a serving culture result when servant leaders encourage mutual support among coworkers that benefits unit performance. A culture based on serving others not only creates norms for behaviors among its members that promotes effectiveness internally, but extends to interactions between members and customers (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). In the restaurant setting studied in the current investigation, this includes satisfying customers in multiple ways, including the provision of clean stores, fresh food, accurate orders, quick delivery, and delivery accuracy. Consequently, a serving culture encourages members of the work unit to put customers' needs ahead of their own, culminating in superior customer service (Schneider et al., 1998).

*Hypothesis 2. Serving culture is positively related to store performance (composite of carryout accuracy, delivery accuracy, customer satisfaction, facility audit, and sanitation audit).*

Integrating the first two hypotheses suggests the possibility that serving culture acts as a mediator of the relationship between the store manager's servant leadership behavior and store performance. Cultures act to clarify behavioral expectations for members of the collective (Schulte, Ostroff, Shmulyian, & Kinicki, 2009). A serving culture that promotes humility, caring for others, putting the needs of others above one's own needs, and concern for the best interests of all stakeholders sends clear signals that self-centered and unethical behaviors are not tolerated. A serving culture provides members of the collective with the understanding that the focus is on behaviors that provide benefits for others. The degree to which store managers engage in servant leadership acts to build the culture and helps members of the unit learn the behavioral expectations linked to the culture (Schein, 1990). Specifically, when the leader exhibits servant leadership behaviors, followers also engage in serving behaviors (Schein, 1990; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). We contend that the more the work unit's culture is characterized by a focus on serving others, the more employees engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the entity, culminating in higher collective performance.

*Hypothesis 3. Serving culture mediates the relationship between store manager servant leadership and store performance (composite of carryout accuracy, delivery accuracy, customer satisfaction, facility audit, and sanitation audit).*

In addition to its effects on store performance, we contend that serving culture, through its focus on cooperation, sharing, mutual trust and support, and caring for each other, fosters in employees an identification with the store in which they work. Born from the implications of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), group identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) occurs when employees adopt a view of themselves as members of a group. An individual's personal identity becomes inseparable from the store to the extent that the employee identifies with the unit and that collective identity is activated (Pratt, 1998). Specifically, part of how a person defines one's self is based on working in the store (Tajfel, 1978). In essence, "as the individual's identity and fate become intertwined with those of the group, he or she becomes a microcosm of the group" (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008: 333). Although group identification can involve negative reactions (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), it generally conveys positive emotion that entails employees interpreting their membership in the group as a dominant characteristic that defines them as a person.

Interestingly, theory on both culture and identification has stressed the sense-making capabilities of each (Ashforth et al., 2008; Harris, 1994). Group identification helps employees make sense of their surroundings, reducing ambiguity and uncertainty (Hogg, 2000), and serves as a guide for behavior in order to maintain consistency between internal views of self and external action, thereby avoiding cognitive discord and increasing self-continuity (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). It follows that individuals may find it easier to make sense of their group experiences when they identify with the group. And it is easier to identify with a group whose culture is unambiguous and consistent with the values of its participants (Ashforth, 2001). Indeed, employees identify with a group to increase self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1982).

As Ashforth et al. (2008) observed, group identification may represent a top-down process whereby qualities of the group foster employee identifica-

tion with the group. Qualities of the group are evident from its culture, and it is through the culture that its members form a cognitive frame (or schema) that encapsulates the values and behavioral expectations of the group. It is from this schema representing the group's culture that individuals make sense of their work environments (Harris, 1994). When working within a strong serving culture, the pervasiveness of positive elements, such as trust in and helping and caring for others, clarifies the expected behaviors and values of the group and eases the process through which individuals identify with the group. As group members engage in behaviors that are consistent with the group's culture, these behaviors are reinforced by other group members, which in turn serve to strengthen individuals' identification with the group.

Because people generally value the features of a serving culture, such as being able to trust others, as well as feeling cared for, respected, and supported (McAllister, 1995), we argue that the positive relationship between serving culture and group identification is pervasive (Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, Wang, Workman, & Christensen, 2011). Identification with a positive, helpful serving culture acts as a guiding principle for viewing oneself in a positive manner (Ashforth et al., 2008). Serving cultures also focus on internal cooperation and interdependence, which further enhances the degree of identification with the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The stronger the serving culture, the clearer the defining characteristics of the collective, and the easier it is for members to make sense of the setting in which they work.

*Hypothesis 4. Serving culture is positively related to employee identification with the store.*

We contend that servant leaders enhance followers' identification with the work unit through the creation of a serving culture. For example, leaders are often seen as representatives of the organization (Levinson, 1965), even to the point of embodying the characteristics of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010). As a relational leadership style, the servant leader's one-on-one attention to, and care for, followers magnifies the salience of followers serving fellow coworkers and customers. The personal relationships the servant leader forms with followers help them to make sense of the work unit and to develop an identity intertwined with the work unit as represented by the leader. The helpful, benevolent behaviors of the servant leader spread, via social learning (Sy et al., 2005), to create the culture. These values of serving others become a defining characteristic of membership in the work unit, strengthening the saliency of work unit identity as well as the positive perceptions of identifying with that work unit. Therefore, it is through the process of creating a serving culture that servant leaders enhance the prominent characteristics of the group—caring for others—and promote followers' identification with the group.

*Hypothesis 5. Serving culture mediates the positive relationship between store manager servant leadership behaviors and employee identification with the store.*

According to Pratt (1998), individuals incorporate the group's values and beliefs into their own identities as part of the emulation process. Thus, when the store has established a serving culture that emphasizes behaviors that assist others, employees who identify with the store are likely to incorporate these values and use them to guide their behaviors and attitudes that are linked to the values espoused by the store. Thus, identification with the store facilitates the transmission of a serving culture from the store level to employee behaviors and attitudes at the individual level.

When employees' identification with their store is high, the overlap in values and goals prompts employees to form attitudes and engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the unit. Specifically, when employees identify with the collective—in this case the store—employees feel a sense of camaraderie and unity with fellow employees (Ashforth & Mael, 1989); and because of the strong bond that they have with their coworkers, they desire to perform well. Conversely, when identification with the unit is low, individuals feel a sense of detachment from the team. Employees who do not identify with the team are less inclined to emulate the behavior of colleagues with whom they have little or no connection (Ashforth et al., 2008). The degree to which employees emulate the normative behaviors of the unit translates into a positive association between identification with the store and individual job performance.

In addition to performing at lower levels, employees whose identification with the unit is low are likely to feel detached from the work unit, which may prompt them to search for a more hospitable and supportive environment (Mael & Ashforth, 1995). This is because most humans are social beings and seek to fulfill needs of belonging and affiliation through relationships developed in

the workplace (Maslow, 1943). Meta-analytic results indicate a positive relationship between organization and team identification and job performance, and a negative relationship between organization and team identification and turnover intentions (Riketta & van Dick, 2005). Employees are not likely to leave a store whose culture has helped them develop a personal understanding of themselves. Indeed, for individuals who highly identify with a group, leaving is akin to leaving part of oneself behind, along with the psychological safety, consistency, and self-esteem associated with that social identity.

We contend that identification with the store also promotes employee creativity. The stronger employees' identification with the store, the more they care about the success of the store, which prompts them to explore creative approaches to carrying out their jobs (Cohen-Meitar, Carmeli, & Waldman, 2009). Indeed, creativity can be essential for fulfilling the unique needs or specific requests of customers. Identification with the store with its concomitant mutual support exchanged between employees provides employees with psychological safety that encourages creativity by reducing the risk associated with initiating novel solutions for serving customers (Ashforth et al., 2008; Pratt, 1998). Although Pratt (2001) has cautioned that identification can be negatively related to creativity because over-identification with a group may engender conformity to rules, we contend that serving cultures uniquely stress empowerment and freedom to express divergent points of view (Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2008) in a psychologically safe environment.

We posit that employee identification with the unit also serves to build an orientation towards providing service to customers. When employees see themselves as intertwined with their store, their behaviors are driven by norms of the store, such as a focus on serving customers (Schuh, Egold, & van Dick, 2012). Indeed, when employees highly identify with the store, they see themselves as representatives of the store and feel responsible for maintaining a positive store image in their interactions with customers.

*Hypothesis 6. Employee identification with the store is positively related to employee (a) in-role performance, (b) creativity, and (c) customer service behaviors, and negatively related to (d) turnover intentions.*

We reason that a serving culture directly and indirectly (through store identification) affects individual outcomes. Regarding a direct effect, employees immersed within a serving culture learn the culture (Schein, 1990) by modeling the behaviors of members of the collective, including both their leaders and colleagues (Bandura, 1977). Positive cultures are characterized by perceived fairness, opportunities for growth, and clear role expectations, and people embedded in such cultures tend to develop positive attitudes and engage in behaviors that are conducive to effectiveness. It appears that positive cultures instill in people hope and confidence in their abilities, which enables them to perform well (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007), and to bolster their resilience so that they can handle setbacks and are less inclined to quit their jobs.

We argue that, in addition to a direct effect between serving culture and individual outcomes (Hypothesis 4), store identification partially mediates these relationships. Simply by being immersed in a culture predicated on serving others (as suggested by Hypothesis 6), some may find the culture so compelling that they begin to see oneness between themselves and the store. In this sense, the relationship between serving culture and individual attitudes and behaviors operates in part through their identification with the store. Indeed, beyond the implications of social learning theory concerning employees' tendency to observe and imitate behaviors that are normative to the group's culture, social identity theory also implies that when employees identify with the group, they absorb its core values and exhibit attitudes that are consistent with these values. In sum, we contend that serving cultures promote favorable employee attitudes and behaviors, both directly and indirectly, as implied by social learning theory and social identification theory, respectively.

*Hypothesis 7. Serving culture is positively related to employee (a) in-role performance, (b) creativity, and (c) customer service behaviors, and negatively related to (d) turnover intentions.*

*Hypothesis 8. Employee identification with the store partially mediates the relationships between serving culture and employee (a) in-role performance, (b) creativity, (c) customer service behaviors, and (d) turnover intentions.*

## METHOD

### Sample and Procedure

Store general managers and hourly employees of 76 restaurants (34% of the chain's total restaurants) located in 6 U.S. states were invited to participate. To enhance data collection efficiency, we ran-

domly selected restaurants within the 10 metropolitan areas containing the largest number of restaurants in the chain. Managers responded to a web-based survey and employees completed paper surveys on site during paid work hours with a member of our research team present.

Seventy-one managers (response rate = 93%) and 1,143 employees (response rate = 71%) completed surveys. We restricted our sample to employees who worked at least 20 hours a week and had a store tenure of at least 1 month, resulting in a final employee sample size of 961. The average number of employees per store in the final sample was 13.53 ($SD$ = 4.44). The average age of the managers was 35.37 ($SD$ = 7.35) years; 5 (7%) were women; in terms of ethnicity, 47 described themselves as Caucasian (66%), 11 Hispanic (16%), 5 Asian (7%), 2 African-American (3%), and 1 Middle-Eastern (1%), with 5 (7%) missing responses; with regard to education level, 33 (47%) had a high school diploma, 12 (17%) had an associate degree, 21 (30%) had a college degree, and 1 (1%) had a graduate degree, with 4 (5%) missing responses; average tenure was 8.62 ($SD$ = 4.04) years for the organization and 3.51 ($SD$ = 3.12) years at the store. The average age of employees was 30.25 ($SD$ = 10.61) years; 494 (51%) were women; in terms of ethnicity, 519 considered themselves Hispanic (54%), 245 Caucasian (26%), 75 African-American (8%), 24 Asian-American (3%), 6 Native American (1%), and 7 Middle-Eastern (1%), with 85 missing responses (7%); 594 employees (62%) had a high school degree, 119 (12%) had an associate degree, 55 (6%) had a college degree, 16 (2%) had a graduate degree, 171 (18%) had no degrees, and 6 did not report. Employees had an average of 3.63 ($SD$ = 3.80) years of organizational tenure and had worked 2.99 ($SD$ = 3.19) years in their current store.

## Measures

The variables included are part of a larger study. All response scales for the measures were on a 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* scale with the exception of the response scale for the store performance dimensions.

***Servant leadership.*** Employees evaluated their managers' servant leadership using a shortened version of the servant leadership scale developed by Liden et al. (2008). The original scale has 28 items measuring 7 dimensions of servant leadership; the 7-item scale is composed of the highest loading item from each of the 7 dimensions: (1) My manager can tell if something work-related is going wrong; (2) My manager makes my career development a priority; (3) I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem; (4) My manager emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community; (5) My manager puts my best interests ahead of his/her own; (6) My manager gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best; (7) My manager would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success. Thus, all 7 dimensions were captured in the short version ($\alpha$ = .84).

Given that we did not use the full 28-item servant leadership scale, we assessed the validity of the 7-item short version by comparing the 7- and 28-item versions of the scale using an independent field sample in which followers rated their leaders using the 28-item version of the Liden et al. (2008) servant leadership scale. We obtained a sample from a large real estate company. The dyadic sample consisted of 190 employees for which complete data on the 28-item scale were available (38% effective response rate). There were 178 complete dyads that included all 28 servant leadership items as well as organizational citizenship behavior directed toward the organization (OCB-O) items as measured with Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter's (1990) 14-item scale ($\alpha$ = .88). The correlation between the 28-item and 7-item composites was .97 and the $\alpha$'s for the 7- and 28-item versions were .87 and .96, respectively. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provides support for our 7-item scale as representing a single factor (comparative fit index (CFI) = .99; normed fit index (NFI) = .97; goodness of fit index (GFI) = .96; standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = .03; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07). In order to assess comparative criterion-related validity, we also tested the relationships between servant leadership and manager-rated OCB-O, comparing the 7-item and the 28-item scales. The 7-item scale was significantly related to OCB-O ($R^2$ = .15, $F$(1, 177) = 30.45, $p < .01$; $\beta$ = .38, $p < .01$) as was true with the full 28-item scale ($R^2$ = .17, $F$(1, 177) = 34.96, $p < .01$; $\beta$ = .41, $p < .01$).

***Serving culture.*** Serving culture of the store was reported by employees. Following the referent-shift consensus model (Chan, 1998), we modified the 7-item servant leadership scale described above to create the serving culture measure ($\alpha$ = .82). We replaced "managers" with "managers and employ-

ees" for all 7 items to assess perceptions of the extent to which everyone within a store engaged in the behavior depicted in the item: (1) Managers and employees at our store can tell if something work-related is going wrong; (2) Managers and employees at our store make employee career development a priority; (3) Managers and employees at our store would seek help from others if they had a personal problem; (4) Managers and employees at our store emphasize the importance of giving back to the community; (5) Managers and employees at our store put others' best interests ahead of their own; (6) Managers and employees at our store give others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that they feel is best; (7) Managers and employees at our store would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.

***Identification with the store.*** We used a 5-item organizational identification scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) to assess employee identification with the store. A sample item is, "When someone criticizes our store, it feels like a personal insult" ($\alpha$ = .86).

***Store performance.*** The store performance measure was a composite formed by five measures from three sources collected by the corporate headquarters. Specifically, store performance was a composite of carryout accuracy, delivery accuracy, customer satisfaction, facility audit score, and sanitation audit score. These measures were provided by our human resources contact at the corporate headquarters and were regularly collected and used internally as overall store performance indicators by the organization. Customers provided ratings on *carryout accuracy*, *delivery accuracy*, and *customer satisfaction*. *Facility audits*, conducted by corporate headquarters staff, reflected how well each store maintained its exterior and interior facilities, such as patio furniture, floor tiles, salad bar, drink station, and ice cream machine, with higher scores indicating higher-quality conditions. The *sanitation audit*, which was conducted by an external firm, assessed the levels of health, safety, and cleanliness of food, with higher scores indicating better sanitation. Because the indicators were not on the same measurement scale, we standardized them (*z*-scores) prior to model estimation. This standardization procedure ensured that each of the five indicators had an equal weight in determining the store performance composite.

***In-role performance.*** Employees' in-role performance was evaluated by their managers using 4 items from the scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). A sample item is, "In general, this employee adequately completes assigned duties" ($\alpha$ = .92).

***Creativity.*** Managers rated employees with Tierney and Farmer's (2011) 4-item scale. A sample item is, "This employee tries out new ideas and approaches to problems" ($\alpha$ = .92).

***Customer service behaviors.*** Employees were rated by managers using an adaptation of the 4-item customer orientation scale from Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, and Schmitt (2001). An example item is, "This employee consistently anticipates customer needs and takes appropriate actions to satisfy their needs" ($\alpha$ = .88).

***Turnover intentions.*** Turnover intentions were based on employees' self-reports on a 5-item scale from Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997). A sample item is, "As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave [*company name*]" ($\alpha$ = .81).

### Confirmatory and Exploratory Factor Analysis

Results of CFAs, run to determine whether our measurement model captured distinct constructs, showed that the hypothesized 7-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data, with $\chi^2$ (573, $n$ = 961) = 2,060.66, CFI = .92, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .92, RMSEA = .05, and SRMR = .04. All of the observed items had significant loadings on their respective latent factors. We further compared our hypothesized measurement model to three alternatives: (1) a 2-factor model with manager-rated outcomes loading on 1 latent factor and employee-rated variables loading on another, which provided a significantly worse fit to our hypothesized model, with $\Delta\chi^2$ (20, $n$ = 961) = 6,335.42, $p < .01$; (2) servant leadership and serving culture, specified to load on 1 latent factor, employees' attitudinal variables (i.e., employee identification with the store, and turnover intentions) on a 2nd latent factor, and employee behavioral outcomes on a 3rd factor, which provided a worse fit than our hypothesized model, with $\Delta\chi^2$ (18, $n$ = 961) = 5,103.87, $p < .01$; and (3) a 6-factor solution with servant leadership and serving culture loading on one factor and the other variables on their own respective factors, which provided a worse fit than our hypothesized model, with $\Delta\chi^2$ (6, $n$ = 961) = 595.67, $p < .01$. In addition, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring extraction and oblique rotation, and we found that servant leadership and serving culture were perceived distinctly by employees, with items from the two measures

**TABLE 1**
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations**

| Variables | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Store-Level* | | | | | | | |
| 1. Store Manager Servant Leadership | 5.41 | .54 | **.84** | | | | |
| 2. Serving Culture | 4.99 | .42 | .69** | **.82** | | | |
| 3. Store Performance | .00 | .56 | .31* | .27* | — | | |
| *Individual Level* | | | | | | | |
| 1. Employee Identification with the Store | 5.78 | 1.18 | **.86** | | | | |
| 2. In-Role Performance | 5.82 | .87 | .10** | **.92** | | | |
| 3. Creativity | 4.48 | 1.09 | .10** | .43** | **.92** | | |
| 4. Customer Service Behaviors | 5.32 | 1.14 | .10** | .58** | .66** | **.88** | |
| 5. Turnover Intentions | 3.12 | 1.21 | −.26** | −.06 | −.05 | −.06 | **.81** |

*Note:* $n$ = 952–961 for individual-level variables. $n$ = 53–71 for store-level variables. Internal consistency coefficients, Cronbach's alphas, are reported in bold on the diagonal. Store Performance consists of carryout accuracy, delivery accuracy, customer satisfaction, facility audit, and sanitation audit, all of which were $z$-standardized in forming the composite.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

having clean loadings on their respective construct. These results indicated that the measures used in the present study captured distinct constructs as expected.

### Data Aggregation and Levels of Analysis

To test the hypothesized multilevel model, servant leadership of the manager and serving culture were aggregated to the store level, which was appropriate based on results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), which showed that the means of servant leadership and serving culture differed significantly across stores, with $F(70, 888) = 2.71$, $p < .01$, and $F(70, 887) = 1.99$, $p < .01$, respectively. In addition, intra-class correlations, ICC(1) and ICC(2), were respectively .11 and .60 for servant leadership and .07 and .50 for serving culture. Lastly, the median within-group inter-rater reliability ($r_{wg(j)}$; James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984) across stores was .94 for servant leadership and .95 for serving culture.

### Analytic Strategy

Because employees' responses were nested within stores (units), we used Mplus 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010), which allowed us to estimate our multilevel model simultaneously. Given the nature of our path model, we used manifest variables in the estimation. Also, maximum likelihood with robust standard errors was used for coefficient estimates (for technical details, see Muthén & Muthén, 2010). We tested the significance of multilevel indirect effects using the Monte Carlo method[1] to compute confidence intervals (CIs) (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010).

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of the variables.

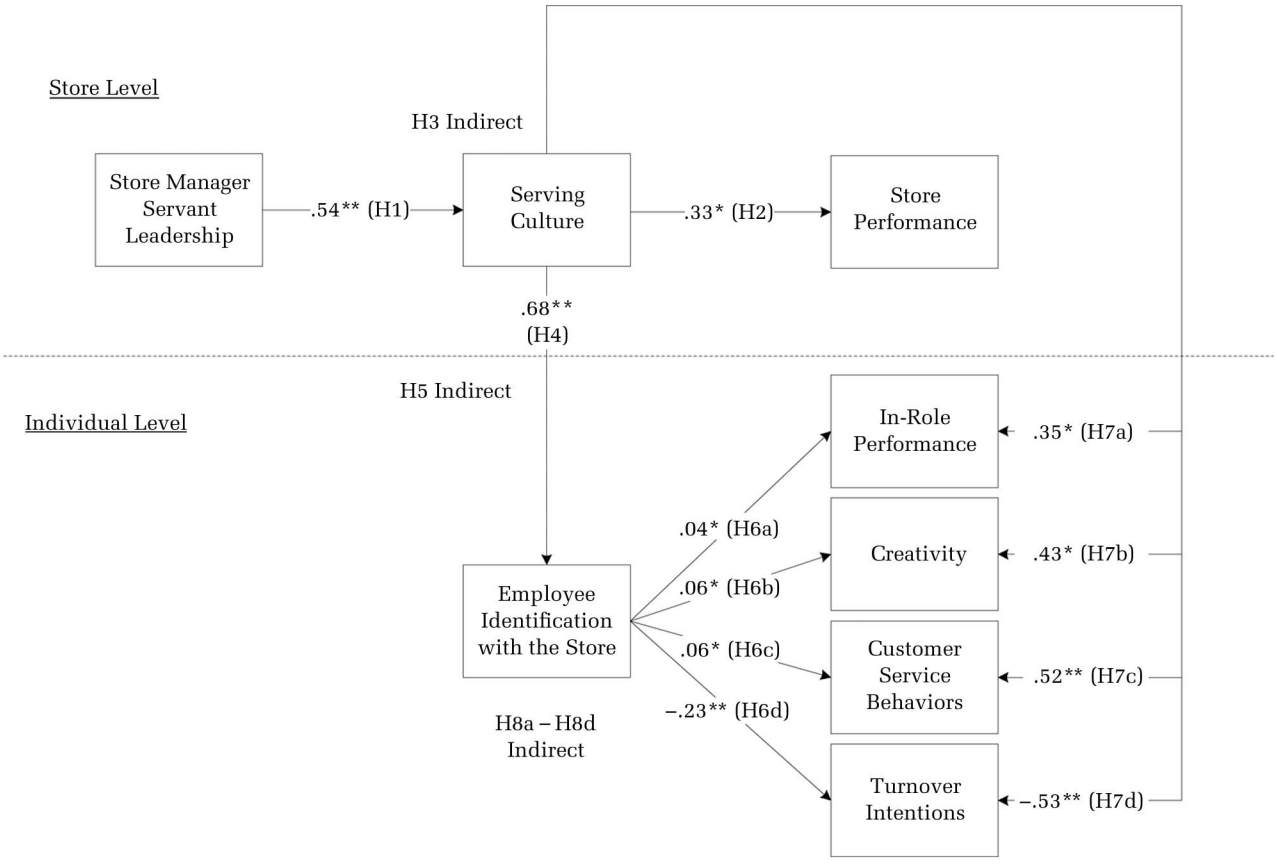
### Model Estimation

In order to estimate our model, we specified paths from employee identification with the store to outcomes at the individual level, allowing slopes to randomly vary across stores. Cross-level direct effects were specified from serving culture to employee identification with the store and individual outcomes. At the store level, store manager servant leadership was specified to have a direct effect on serving culture, which would, in turn, relate positively to store performance. The Akaike information criterion (AIC) value of the hypothesized model was 12,425.23, smaller than that of the model without direct paths from serving culture to individual outcomes (AIC = 13,545.93); this indicated that our hypothesized model was superior.[2] Furthermore, pseudo $R^2$ ($\sim R^2$) was calculated using

[1] Technical details and the *R*-based Monte Carlo simulator are available from http://www.quantpsy.org.

[2] We estimated an alternative model with additional direct paths specified. The alternative model added direct paths from servant leadership to store performance, individual outcomes, and employee identification with

**FIGURE 1**
**Cross-Level Servant Leadership Model Results**




Unstandardized Path Coefficients for the Hypothesized Model.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Snijders and Bosker's (1999) formulas to indicate the total amount of variation in the level-1 and level-2 outcome variables that were accounted for by our model. In total, the proportion of variance explained by our model was 6% for store performance, 8% for in-role performance, 6% for creativity, 9% for customer service behaviors, and 68% for turnover intentions.

## Tests of Hypotheses

Results of direct effects appear in Figure 1, while Table 2 presents the estimated indirect effects. As shown in Figure 1, store manager servant leadership was positively related to serving culture ($\beta = .54$, $p < .01$); therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Furthermore, supporting Hypothesis 2, serving culture related positively with store performance ($\beta = .33$, $p < .05$). To test the mediation hypothesis, we used a parametric bootstrap procedure with 20,000 Monte Carlo replications (Preacher et al., 2010). Bootstrapping results showed significant positive indirect effects of store manager servant leadership on store performance, with the indirect effect = .18 (95% CI: .03, .35). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Our next hypothesis involved a cross-level direct effect of serving culture on employee identification with the store. As shown in Figure 1, we found this relationship to be positive and significant ($\gamma = .68$, $p < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. Moreover, supporting Hypothesis 5, 20,000 Monte Carlo

the store. None of these additional direct paths was significant, suggesting that serving culture fully mediated the effects of servant leadership on store performance, individual outcomes, and employee identification with the store.

**TABLE 2**
**Summary of Estimated Indirect Effects**

| Indirect Paths | Indirect Effects (95% Confidence Interval) |
|---|---|
| H3: Store Manager servant leadership → serving culture → store performance | .18 (95% CI: .03, .35) |
| H5: Store Manager servant leadership → serving culture → employee identification with the store | .37 (95% CI: .22, .54) |
| H8a: Serving culture → employee identification with the store → in-role performance | .03 (95% CI: .002, .06) |
| H8b: Serving culture → employee identification with the store → reativity | .02 (95% CI: .01, .07) |
| H8c: Serving culture → employee identification with the store → customer service behaviors | .02 (95% CI: .01, .08) |
| H8d: Serving culture → employee identification with the store → turnover intentions | –.16 (95% CI: –.23, –.09) |

replications showed that the indirect effect for store manager servant leadership → serving culture → employee identification with the store was .37 (95% CI: .22, .54). Supporting Hypotheses 6a through 6d, employee identification with the store was positively related to in-role performance ($\beta$ = .04, $p < .05$), creativity ($\beta$ = .06, $p < .05$), and customer service behaviors ($\beta$ = .06, $p < .05$), and negatively related to turnover intentions ($\beta = -.23$, $p <$ .01). Hypotheses 7a–7d reflected the direct effects of serving culture on individual outcomes. Results show that serving culture was positively related to in-role performance ($\gamma$ = .35, $p < .05$), creativity ($\gamma$ = .43, $p < .05$), and customer service behaviors ($\gamma$ = .52, $p < .01$), and negatively related to turnover intentions ($\gamma = -.53$, $p < .01$). Therefore, Hypotheses 7a through 7d received full support.

In addition to the direct effects, Hypotheses 8a to 8d proposed a series of multilevel indirect effects from store serving culture to individual employee outcomes via employee identification with the store. With 20,000 Monte Carlo replications, we found that the indirect effect for serving culture → employee identification with the store → in-role performance was .03 (95% CI: .002, .06). The indirect effect for serving culture → employee identification with the store → creativity was .02 (95% CI: .01, .07). The indirect effect for serving culture → employee identification with the store → customer service behaviors was .02 (95% CI: .01, .08). The indirect effect for serving culture → employee identification with the store → turnover intentions was –.16 (95% CI: –.23, –.09). Thus, Hypotheses 8a–8d were supported.

## DISCUSSION

Building on prior research, the current investigation explored mechanisms through which servant leadership impacts individual effectiveness and unit (store) performance. Drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), we proposed that followers model the servant leader behaviors of their formal leaders, creating a serving culture at the store level. Modeling of servant leadership occurs among followers as a result of the qualities that comprise servant leadership and the leader's encouragement. Servant leaders are characterized as possessing strong conceptual skills, high levels of integrity, and concern for followers. These qualities create desirable role models for followers, such that they emulate their leaders' behaviors. Furthermore, servant leaders actively encourage followers to model their behavior by emphasizing that they should also put others' needs ahead of their own. Supporting social learning theory, our results revealed a positive relation between servant leadership and serving culture, indicating that there is a relationship between followers' perceptions of their formal leaders' servant leadership behaviors and their reports of the degree to which everyone employed within their store focuses on serving others. This finding is noteworthy in that the process by which servant leadership impacts followers is through a serving culture, which differs from other approaches to leadership. Our results suggest that servant leadership impacts followers through a role modeling process and in turn, impacts interactions among all members of the unit. Consequently, servant leadership operates not only at the individual or dyadic level between the leader and follower but also through culture at the unit level. Servant leadership creates norms and expectations for behavior among followers, which illuminates their other-orientation motives, resulting in a strong serving culture and supportive coworker interactions. Importantly, our results revealed that through a serving culture, servant leadership is positively related to store/unit performance. Studies have found that cohesive groups develop a strong collective expectation that members perform behaviors that benefit the group (e.g., Ehrhart, 2004). Because of a serving culture, all of those employed by the store support

each other and work together to meet customer needs, thereby enhancing store performance.

While our model posits that serving culture is related to individual outcomes as well as store-level outcomes, we argued for the critical role of employee identification with the store as an underlying explanation for why servant leadership is related to individual outcomes. As noted, for most individuals, servant leadership includes behaviors that are desired and viewed positively by others, especially followers. Leaders who engage in these behaviors create a culture whereby norms and expectations are based on being cooperative, caring, supportive, and trusting. Because most individuals desire to "fit in" and be accepted by the group, group norms and expectations often drive employee behavior. While strong group norms are persuasive in terms of guiding behavior, we proposed and found that employee identification with the store underlies the linkage between serving culture and employee outcomes, consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972, 1978).

These results underscore that individuals not only model the behavior of their leader, as predicted by social learning theory, but also activate an internal process of identification with their group that leaves them cognitively attached to their store, such that they feel a sense of belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, through the process of creating a serving culture, leaders highlight the importance of nurturing group members and pursuing unit objectives, which in turn encourages employees to view themselves as members of the unit. It may be because of this internal change that a serving culture impacts a broad set of individual outcomes, including in-role performance, creativity, customer service behaviors, and reduced turnover intentions—all of which benefit the store. We therefore contribute to the growing body of research that suggests leaders influence their followers' identities (Lord & Brown, 2004).

The positive relationship found between identification and creativity is critical, as theory suggests and research has shown that identification does not always result in positive outcomes. For example, Pratt (2001) has cautioned that identification can be negatively related to creativity, because high levels of identification with a group may engender conformity to rules, thus thwarting the exploration of better ways to execute jobs. Our finding in the current investigation highlights the feature of servant leadership that promotes empowerment and encourages divergent ways of accomplishing tasks. In essence, when employees identify with their stores' serving culture, their identification leads to creative ways of serving others, including coworkers and customers. Interestingly, Greenleaf (1970) stressed the leader's encouragement of followers to express divergent points of view in his seminal essay on servant leadership. In line with this argument, our study shows an additional intermediate mechanism by which servant leadership impacts employee creativity (Neubert et al., 2008) and thus contributes to the creativity literature as well.

The relationship between serving culture, store identification, and customer service behaviors follows from the cognitive association with the store as an in-group to which the individual belongs. The individual then desires that customers have a positive experience and think highly of the store. To be a member of an in-group within a serving culture is to cognitively associate these servant leader behaviors as the "right" ones. In order to avoid cognitive dissonance, the employee serves not only fellow employees in the store, but customers as well. This is notable, as customers may then be cognitively viewed as members of the in-group. Employees of service organizations can often, ironically, see customers as a burden rather than an opportunity, and engage in tacit neglect or outright sabotage (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011). Our study provides evidence that supports the theoretical view of the servant leader as valuing multiple stakeholders (here, the various customers) and suggests that establishing a serving culture and employee identification with the store may serve as an approach for increasing customer satisfaction.

### Strengths and Limitations

Perhaps the strongest feature of our study's design was the inclusion of data from five sources: employees, managers, customers, internal audits by headquarters, and external audits by consultants. This design feature greatly reduced the possibility of results being influenced by same-source common method bias. Another strength of the investigation was that employee data were collected on site at each restaurant during paid working hours by two of the authors. Unlike web-based surveys, which are typically completed by employees during off-work (unpaid) time, our employee participants completed surveys with a researcher present. This design feature is likely to have been responsible for the high response rates obtained. High response rates are particularly important in our in-

vestigation because several measures were based on aggregated responses, and aggregation to the group (store) level is meaningful only when a substantial percentage of employees complete surveys (Timmerman, 2005). A final strength of our study was the organizational setting of chain restaurants, which was particularly advantageous for testing our multilevel model given that individuals worked within a single store and thus were members of a clearly designated group with little or no contact with other groups.

One weakness of our study was the cross-sectional design, which precludes our ability to make causal inferences. For example, it is possible that individual employee behaviors influenced culture perceptions, which in turn encouraged leaders to reinforce the culture with continued engagement in servant leader behaviors. However, given the formal position power of the leader, we believe the causal direction as depicted in our model is more likely. Longitudinal research is necessary to ascertain the validity of our contentions regarding the causal relations among the variables. Another weakness of our study is our operationalization of servant leadership and serving culture. Owing to survey length limitations, we were unable to include the full 28 items for both constructs on the survey, but instead used a 7-item short form. Although evidence from an independent sample indicates that the content domains of these constructs are assessed, we have been unable to analyze the dimensions of servant leadership and serving culture. An additional limitation of these two measures is that they overlap in content, given that the serving culture items refer to the overall degree to which managers and employees engaged in the same behaviors that were assessed in the servant leadership scale for which the referent was the store manager exclusively. Even though the correlation between these two measures ($r = .69$) does not suggest redundancy, the theoretical overlap between the two makes it difficult to isolate the degree to which leaders' behaviors influenced the behaviors of followers. Another limitation of the serving culture measure is that it focuses on behavioral norms and not the full domain of culture, such as one that also captures aspects of culture (e.g., values and artifacts).

## Implications for Practice

Several trends in organizations around the globe indicate that servant leadership will become progressively more relevant. The increasing size of the service sector combined with escalating levels of competition point to the need for leadership approaches that are best suited toward developing employees so that their full potential is realized. As employees' education levels increase, autocratic leadership approaches will no longer be tolerated. Instead, employees expect a more personal, individualized, and cooperative leadership style. Servant leadership, with its inherent prioritization of fulfilling follower needs, offers promise in fulfilling the expectations of followers. The beneficial outcomes continue as followers adopt a focus on helping others and contributing to meeting goals that satisfy the needs of multiple stakeholders, including customers, other employees, management, and communities in which the organization is embedded.

In order to realize these benefits of servant leadership, it is important for managers to realize that servant leadership is more than creating a pleasant work atmosphere, as this form of leadership positively relates to performance-related outcomes. Because of increased span of control and demands on leaders' time, leaders are often unable to constantly be present or visible to followers. Yet, when a serving culture exists, the desired behaviors are encouraged and maintained through coworker interactions. In this way, servant leadership creates a self-perpetuating cycle, such that followers engage in these behaviors with each other to the point whereby the norms and expectations within the group impact employee behaviors that drive performance. Thus, it is imperative that managers be trained to adopt servant leadership behaviors. While some leaders will more easily gravitate toward servant leadership than other managers (see Peterson et al., 2012), training should be able to move the distribution of servant leadership behaviors towards greater engagement in these behaviors by all managers.

Another practical implication of the current study is that servant leadership goes beyond simply enhancing employee commitment and compliance, and it does this by increasing employee identification with the store or organization. Thus, managers should be encouraged to engage in servant leader behaviors, because these behaviors can create a work culture that not only increases followers' affective attachment to the group but also promotes followers' cognitive acceptance of the group's values.

## Future Research

There are several avenues for future research based on the results of our study. In explaining the

relation between serving culture and store performance, we argued that followers or employees not only engage in servant leadership with each other but also with customers, thereby increasing the quality of customer service. Future research is needed to directly assess this contention as to whether serving culture increases employee servant leadership toward customers, given that we measured employee customer service behaviors but did not directly measure employee servant leadership. This also speaks to the perpetuation process of servant leadership in terms of how servant leaders develop among followers.

While we argued for the critical role of serving culture in explaining outcomes, other group phenomena have been shown to mediate the relation between servant leadership and individual and group outcomes. For example, justice climate and team potency have been found to mediate the relation between servant leadership and group-level OCB (Ehrhart, 2004; Hu & Liden, 2011), as well as OCB at the individual level (Walumbwa et al., 2010). This growing area of research would benefit from clearer elucidation of the relative importance of these mediators with respect to the outcome of interest.

Another direction for future research is to ascertain the generalizability of our findings with a professional sample in a different industry. While the relationships in our model were supported, it may be that the customer-oriented nature of the business increased the importance of servant leadership and the resulting service culture, which supports serving the needs of others, including customers. The restaurants also were composed of highly interdependent positions, which likely facilitated the contagion of servant leadership among coworkers.

An additional way in which to extend and enhance the generalizability of our results, which were based on a sample of 7% female and 93% male leaders, is to examine servant leadership with a sample consisting of a larger percentage of women leaders. With a greater representation of women leaders, it would be possible to explore whether follower reactions to servant leadership varies based on the sex of the leader. An interesting paradox may exist here: research on women and leadership suggests that women generally have a more democratic, collaborative, and participative leadership style (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003); furthermore, women are more transformational compared with male leaders, especially in terms of mentoring and developing colleagues (Eagly et al., 2003). These findings suggest that female leaders may be more likely to engage in servant leadership. Yet, female servant leaders may benefit less from engaging in servant leadership because of people's stereotypes of effective leaders which emphasize masculine qualities, also referred to as "think manager, think male" (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Schein, 1973). Drawing on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), we encourage future research on how leader sex impacts follower responses to servant leadership.

While our results indicate support for employee identification as an explanatory mechanism for the relation between serving culture and individual outcomes, the indirect effects were small for in-role performance, creativity, and customer service behaviors, but moderate for turnover intentions. Furthermore, the direct relationship between serving culture and individual outcomes also received strong support. Thus, rather than employee identification fully mediating the serving culture to individual outcome relation, our results provide evidence of only partial mediation. Extending these findings, we encourage future research to uncover additional mediators that enhance our understanding of how and why serving culture at the group level impacts individual-level outcomes. Although we have argued for identification as the explanatory mechanism based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972, 1978), it may be that a serving culture relates to individual outcomes through other mechanisms, such as enhanced feelings of trust and empowerment (Liden et al., 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011).

Finally, researchers have lamented the lack of theoretical integration of the plethora of leadership theories that exist in the literature (Avolio, 2007; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001). Indeed, researchers have noted the theoretical overlap between many leadership theories, including authentic leadership, charismatic leadership, ethical leadership, humble leadership, the path–goal theory of leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and transformational leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Fry, 2003; Owens & Hekman, 2012). Researchers have begun to address this shortcoming of leadership research. For example, integration work has been undertaken in the area of transformational and trait-based approaches (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Researchers should continue this integration work, which is critical for advancing leadership research.

## CONCLUSION

Servant leadership is at an early stage of theoretical development. While there is a growing body of empirical evidence that this form of leadership has the potential to increase follower behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, limited attention has been devoted to uncovering the underlying mechanisms for how and why this occurs. Through a multilevel study design involving data collected from several sources, our study has extended the development of servant leadership theory. Our results offer promise for role modeling and social identity theories as key explanatory mechanisms based on our demonstration that serving culture and follower identification with the store were related to our outcomes of interest.

Building on our results, we encourage future research on the process by which servant leadership impacts followers and their organizations in order to further develop the theoretical basis of servant leadership.

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**Robert C. Liden** (bobliden@uic.edu) is Professor of Management, Coordinator of the Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management doctoral program, and Director of Doctoral Programs for the College of Business Administration at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He received his PhD at the University of Cincinnati. His research focuses on interpersonal processes within the context of such topics as leadership, groups, and career progression.

**Sandy J. Wayne** (sjwayne@uic.edu) is Professor of Management at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She received her PhD in management from Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on understanding relationships in the workplace, including the antecedents and consequences of employee–leader and employee–organization relationships.

**Chenwei Liao** (cliao@msu.edu) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Human Resources and Labor Relations at Michigan State University. He received his PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research focuses on leadership, leader–follower relationships, employment arrangements, and employment relationships.

**Jeremy D. Meuser** (jmeuse2@uic.edu) is a PhD student in Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research focuses on leadership, identity, and identification.