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Servant leadership: A meta-analytic examination of incremental contribution, moderation, and mediation

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Authors:



Allan Lee
University of Exeter



Joanne Lyubovnikova
Aston University




Amy Tian
Curtin University



Caroline Knight
Curtin University

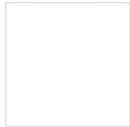
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Abstract and Figures

Research suggests that when leaders, as servant leaders, focus on their followers' needs, this can have a positive effect on organizational functioning. Yet results are inconsistent in establishing the strength of the relationships, limiting understanding of the theoretical impact and practical reach of the servant leadership (SL) construct. Using a quantitative meta-analysis based on 130 independent studies, the current research provides evidence that SL has incremental predictive validity over transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership. Further, the link between SL and a range of individual- and team-level behavioural outcomes can be partially explained by trust in the leader, procedural justice, and leader-member exchange. The paper also explores moderators to better establish SL's criterion-related validity and to clarify the magnitude of effects across boundary conditions, such as research design, national culture, and industry. Practitioner points Servant leadership has predictive validity over other leadership approaches, and therefore, organizations would benefit by developing their current leaders into SLs. Organizations should aim to select SLs into influential positions: Training programmes and selection profiles and processes would need to be aligned and developed to capture attitudes and behaviours associated with SL inside and outside the organization. Servant leaderships should seek to create a culture that positively promotes the development of trust, fairness, and high-quality leader-follower relationships, as these conditions collectively enable the effects of SL to be transmitted onto desirable follower outcomes.





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Servant leadership: A meta-analytic examination of incremental contribution, moderation, and mediation

Allan Lee^{1*}, Joanne Lyubovnikova², Amy Wei Tian³ and Caroline Knight⁴

¹Exeter Business School, University of Exeter, UK

²Aston Business School, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

³Curtin Business School, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia, Australia

⁴Centre for Transformative Work Design, Future of Work Institute, Faculty of Business and Law, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Research suggests that when leaders, as servant leaders, focus on their followers' needs, this can have a positive effect on organizational functioning. Yet results are inconsistent in establishing the strength of the relationships, limiting understanding of the theoretical impact and practical reach of the servant leadership (SL) construct. Using a quantitative meta-analysis based on 130 independent studies, the current research provides evidence that SL has incremental predictive validity over transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership. Further, the link between SL and a range of individual- and team-level behavioural outcomes can be partially explained by trust in the leader, procedural justice, and leader–member exchange. The paper also explores moderators to better establish SL's criterion-related validity and to clarify the magnitude of effects across boundary conditions, such as research design, national culture, and industry.

Practitioner points

- Servant leadership has predictive validity over other leadership approaches, and therefore, organizations would benefit by developing their current leaders into SLs.
- Organizations should aim to select SLs into influential positions: Training programmes and selection profiles and processes would need to be aligned and developed to capture attitudes and behaviours associated with SL inside and outside the organization.
- Servant leaderships should seek to create a culture that positively promotes the development of trust, fairness, and high-quality leader–follower relationships, as these conditions collectively enable the effects of SL to be transmitted onto desirable follower outcomes.

In an era when corporate scandals have become increasingly rife, organizational leaders are striving to act more responsibly to rebuild trust with followers (Pless, Maak, & Waldman, 2012). Consequently, there is a growing appetite for more moral and ethical styles of leadership (Lemoine, Hartnell, & Leroy, 2019), with an emerging and increasingly influential form being that of servant leadership (SL). SL explicitly captures the dimensions

*Correspondence should be addressed to Allan Lee, Exeter Business School, University of Exeter, Streatham Court, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4PU, UK (email: allan.lee@exeter.ac.uk).

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... This demand is particularly evident in the non-profit sector, where leadership decisions must be transparent and often directly and profoundly impact vulnerable communities (Günzel-Jensen et al., 2018; Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2020). A particular leadership model that has gained prominence through the years is servant leadership (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). There is growing interest in the practice of servant leadership as opposed to the traditional hierarchical leadership models in businesses and organizations (Lemoine et al., 2019). ...

... Leaders who take this approach strive to build strong interpersonal relationships, creating environments in which members of the organization feel appreciated and empowered to contribute to the overall mission and vision. Servant leadership tends to emphasize serving the needs of the team and community first (Lee et al., 2020). Prioritizing personal well-being and growth helps servant leaders build a trusting atmosphere that supports long-term involvement. ...

... However, the daunting reality is that they should be able to operate as profitable businesses (Sanderse et al., 2020; Wei, 2019). The study by Lee et al. (2020) and Bilal et al. (2021) showed a significant association between servant leadership and employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in non-profit organizations. The results revealed how servant leadership promoted non-profit organizations in developing resilient teams committed to the organization's mission and in attaining social impact goals. ...

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... This leadership style fosters an environment where innovation is not only encouraged but actively supported, creating a culture of experimentation and dynamic problem-solving (Islam et al., 2024). A metaanalysis by Lee et al. (2020) confirms that EL is among the most effective leadership styles for promoting creativity and cultivating an innovative organizational climate. ...

... By emphasizing employee-driven solutions and valuing entrepreneurial thinking, EL can create sustainable competitive advantages for organizations operating in dynamic markets (Malibari & Bajaba, 2022). A meta-analysis conducted by Lee et al. (2020) underscores the effectiveness of EL in cultivating an innovative organizational climate. By fostering trust and collaboration, EL motivates employees to contribute creative ideas and engage in activities that directly improve organizational processes, products, and services. ...

... Entrepreneurial leaders inspire employees to believe in their creative potential by offering both tangible and intangible support, such as access to resources and recognition of achievements. This encouragement fosters a workplace environment conducive to innovation, where employees feel empowered to experiment and take ownership of their ideas (Lee et al., 2020). Additionally, leaders who clearly articulate organizational goals and align them with employees' creative efforts create a shared sense of purpose that further enhances IWB. ...

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... approaches that emphasize employee empowerment, recognition, and support lead to greater engagement, as employees feel more connected to their roles and the organization's mission, resulting in improved productivity, job satisfaction, and commitment [23]. ...

... The findings revealed that servant leadership was particularly effective for retention because it addressed employees' needs for recognition, personal growth, and meaningful work-factors increasingly valued by the workforce, particularly among younger employees in the Glawan Village Government. These results align with research [23], who found that servant leadership builds trust and a sense of community, leading to stronger organizational commitment. The current study extends this understanding by demonstrating how servant leadership in a local government context creates emotional bonds that significantly influence retention decisions, even when competing opportunities offer better compensation. ...

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... The study by Lee et al. (2020) revealed that servant leadership has a significant positive effect on various aspects of workplace functioning. Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers, which can enhance organizational functioning. ...

... When employees feel emotionally supported and can heal from their experiences, they are more likely to maintain a positive mindset, which enhances their productivity. Similarly, the result is aligned with the statements of the authors (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021; Lee et al., 2020) who mentioned that

putting subordinates first can uniquely contribute to positive workplace outcomes beyond what these other styles offer. Servant leadership enhances employee engagement by fostering an environment of trust, empowerment, and support. ...

SERVANT LEADERSHIP BELIEF, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND WORK VALUES: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL ON PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

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... Among numerous leadership styles, meta-analytic evidence also indicates that servant leadership stands out due to its unique contribution to key follower outcomes over and beyond moral and authentic leadership, because servant leadership directly focuses more on followers' needs (Hoch et al., 2018;Lemoine et al., 2019). To date, research on servant leadership has consistently revealed its positive implications in management domain Lee et al., 2020). While most research has treated servant leadership as a stable concept that remains steady across days (Lord et al., 2017;McClellan et al., 2019), recent research on the dynamic perspective of leadership suggested that leader behaviors fluctuate and vary over time (Johnson et al., 2012;McClellan et al., 2019;Tepper et al., 2018). ...

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... Görgens-Ekermans and Roux [22] contend that emotional intelligence, encompassing empathy and active listening, is vital for effective leadership as it cultivates trust and collaboration within teams. Additionally, Lee et al. [23] note that fostering an inclusive and supportive environment is key to encouraging innovation and effective problem-solving within organizations. Srivastava et al. [24] further emphasize that leadership behaviors focused on supporting and developing team members are closely linked to enhanced patient outcomes and greater staff satisfaction. ...

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September 2020 · European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology

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Trust plays a critical role as a key mechanism through which the positive impact of leadership can be elicited. This meta-analysis examines the incremental validity of eight leadership styles (transformational, transactional, authentic, ethical, servant, abusive, paternalistic and empowering) in predicting affective and cognitive dimensions of trust as mediating mechanisms in the relationship ... [\[Show full abstract\]](#)





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July 2018 · The Leadership Quarterly

 Nathan Eva ·  Mulyadi Robin ·  Sen Sendjaya · [...] ·  Robert C Liden


Notwithstanding the proliferation of servant leadership studies with over 100 articles published in the last four years alone, a lack of coherence and clarity around the construct has impeded its theory development. We provide an integrative and comprehensive review of the 285 articles on servant leadership spanning 20 years (1998–2018), and in so doing extend the field in four different ways. ... [\[Show full abstract\]](#)

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 Gary Roberts

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January 2020 · International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management

● Ali Bavik

Purpose The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it systematically reviews and synthesizes research on servant leadership in management and hospitality management literature. Second, by reviewing and comparing the characteristics of the hospitality industry and servant leadership attributes, this study provides insights concerning the conceptualizations and theorization of servant leadership ... [\[Show full abstract\]](#)

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December 2019 · European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology

Aaron McCune Stein · ● Chris M. Bell · Yan Ai Min

Servant leadership is a popular style of ethically-based leadership developed in the cultural context of the United States and other Anglo-Saxon (Anglo) countries with a similar culture and managerial context. However, much of the empirical research on this leadership style has been conducted in China, a country with very different cultural and managerial traditions. It is not known whether the ... [\[Show full abstract\]](#)

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