



Impact of Servant Leadership on Job Performance: Mediating Role of Innovation and Job Satisfaction: Applied to Travel Agencies in Egypt

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Abstract

Servant leadership (SL) is a leadership style that depends on servant leaders who can evolve their subordinates. The most popular dimensions of SL are empowering and developing people, expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, stewardship, and providing direction. Servant leaders have to apply persuasive mapping dimensions, which means that servant leaders put tactics in place to encourage followers to implement the organizational goals through a well-understood mental model of their followers. As innovation is the primary requirement for successful leadership, servant leadership has to encourage solidifying innovation in the work environment as well. This study aims to reveal the impact of SL on the performance of the employees of travel agencies in Egypt through measuring the mediating role of job satisfaction between SL and employees' performance. In addition, measuring the mediating role of innovation between SL and job performance is also important. For this purpose, online questionnaires were distributed to 309 employees of travel agencies in Egypt. Findings showed that servant leadership promotes employees' performance by fostering their ability for innovation and, consequently, their satisfaction.

keywords: Servant leadership, Innovation, Satisfaction, Performance.

Introduction

Robert K. Greenleaf introduced the Servant Leadership (SL) concept in 1970 (Van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2010; Flint and Grayce, 2013). The Greenleaf theory mainly depends on converting leaders into servant leaders that empower employees and enhance the organization (Bilge et al., 2021; Coetzer et al., 2017). The servant leadership theory focuses on two terms: leader and servant -the leader who serves and the servant who leads (Rachmawati and Lantu, 2014). Servant leadership is a multidimensional approach (Coetzer et al., 2017) which relates to many dimensions such as relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual (Eva et al., 2019). The servant leadership theory concentrates on increasing the well-being of the followers/employees and caring about employees' interests to achieve the organization's goals (Adiguzel et al., 2020). Servant leaders also have to serve other stakeholders, including customers, the community, and society as a whole (Wang et al., 2018). SL plays a significant role in service organizations such as the hospitality industry (Li et al., 2021).

From 1998 to 2018, there were 285 articles that tackled servant leadership from different aspects, while most of these studies focused on the impact of servant leadership on organizational behavior and self-efficacy as one of the SL dimensions (Qiu et al., 2020). In addition, most of the literature about the application of SL in the tourism industry is limited to the hospitality industry, such as Ling et al. (2016) and Zia et al. (2021). While there is a scarcity of research about the effects of SL on the travel agency industry, Egyptian researchers have outlined other styles of leadership, such as wisdom leadership and its impact on the Egyptian tourism sector (Elbaz and Haddoud, 2017), transformational leadership and its implications on the employees in travel agencies, (Ali et al., 2020) and strategic leadership (Badr El-Deen and Ali, 2021).

It is worth mentioning that SL is a promising leadership style in a dynamic environment (Eva et al., 2019). Thus, the study's contribution is revealing the impact of servant leadership on employee performance of travel agencies in Egypt by measuring the mediating role of innovation and job satisfaction. In this regard, the applications of SL need more research (Coetzer et al., 2017). Regarding the travel agency industry, there are a few studies that measured the impact of SL on performance, including one by Tuan (2022), who examined the role of SL in employee ambidexterity in terms of attention to detail and adaptive selling in tour companies.

Literature Review

SL and Its Dimensions

Servant leadership is a leadership style that depends on servant leaders who have the ability to evolve their subordinates (Ye et al., 2018). There are many styles of leadership. (Khan et al., 2015) The distinction between servant leadership and transformational leadership is that the former is concerned about stimulating subordinates to achieve organizational goals. (Sim et al., 2021) while the latter is concerned with people and making a deep relationship with them to meet the main goal of the organization (Kaya and Karatepe, 2020). Another type is authentic leadership, in which leaders are keen on developing themselves to be worthy of the leadership of the organization. (Ling et al., 2017)

There are a lot of proposed dimensions related to SL, but it is difficult to determine which exact dimensions reflect the core of the SL theory. (Bauer et al., 2019) The most popular dimensions of SL are: empowering and developing people, expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, stewardship, and providing direction (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1232; Dutta and Khatri, 2017). The altruistic calling dimension is the essential element of the SL, where servant leaders are keener on the individual's life than the company's sake (Beck, 2014). In the emotional healing dimension, servant leaders have the ability to apply emotional healing to help followers/ personnel grow professionally and personally. (Jit et al., 2017) Persuasive mapping is one of the five dimensions of SL (Singh and Ryhal, 2021). Servant leaders must employ the persuasive mapping dimension, which entails putting tactics in place to encourage followers to implement organizational goals based on their followers' well-understood mental models. (Barbuto et al., 2014) Wisdom means that servant leaders have the ability to take reasonable decisions through study of the organization environment, discernment, and intuition (Hashim et al., 2019).

Servant Leadership and Employees' Performance

Servant Leadership's (SL) priority is to improve the well-being of employees. (De waal&Sivro, 2012) Employee performance is defined as "a function of the interaction between ability and motivation"(Sihombing et al.,2018:508). In an organization, leaders provide followers with the organizational goals, guidelines, performance standards, supervise progress, and give feedback on employee performance (Tripathi et al.,2020). A servant leader affects employee performance through social learning and social exchange mechanisms (Darvishmotevali&Altinany,2022). SL theory focuses on developing employees' full potential to complete a productive respective task (Hermanto&Srimulyani, 2022). They motivate followers by giving them new responsibilities, assisting them in developing new skills, taking initiative, and dealing with difficult situations in the manner that the employee deems appropriate (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016).

H1. Servant leadership has a significant and positive effect on employees' performance.

Servant Leadership and Innovation

Innovation is defined as an organization's openness to new ideas, new ways of doing things, creativity, and so on, which allows the organization to be the first to market new products and services. (Broch et al.,2020; Dziallas& Blind ,2019) Innovation motivates increasing competitive advantage for the short-term and long -term (Tan & Sousa,2019). Innovative work environments make employees more customer-focused, which consequently keeps customer loyalty high. (Bag et al.,2018) Employee innovation is strongly linked to leadership. (Hassi,2019) In this regard, management innovation means solidifying modern ideas, procedures, processes, and tools, enhancing organizational performance and competitiveness (Oke et al., 2012). A servant leader is the main factor that activates creativity and innovation. (Karatepe et al.,2020) The servant leadership theory depends on encouraging followers to do their best and to be innovative (Do et al.,2018; Su et al.,2020).

H2. Servant leadership has a significant and positive effect on employees' innovation.

SL and Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as an employee's overall experience that describes how they feel about their job. (Aziri, 2011) It is defined as the positive feeling or attitude that individuals have towards their jobs, which results from balancing their wants from a job with their expectations of it (Farrington and Lillah,2019). The importance of job satisfaction is summarized by enhancing employees' creativity and achieving organizational goals (Akdol and Arikboga, 2015). There has been little research into the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction, though some studies in education and healthcare have begun to investigate the relationship between SL and job satisfaction (Al-Asadi et al.,2019). Bilge et al. (2021) discovered a positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction in their study.

H3. Servant Leadership has a significant and positive effect on employees' satisfaction

Innovation and Employees' Performance

Understanding the relationship between innovation and performance is critical for specialists, policymakers, and managers in both large and small businesses. (Alawamleh et al.,2018) Innovation is necessary to maintain organizations' advantages in such competitive environments. (Kistyanto et al., 2021). The quality of performance and effectiveness of tasks are affected by innovation (Osman et al.,2016). Innovative ideas are the main reason beyond the creative performance of employees (Yamin, 2020). Innovation works on reducing job stress in different organizations (Montani and Staglianò,2022). As a solution tool for challenges and threats, innovation performance is a key goal for both employees and organizations (Zhong et al.,2022).

Wijayati et al. (2022) stated that technology is fundamental for upgrading employee performance. Alawamleh et al. (2018); García-Fernández (2022) found that there is a positive relationship between innovation and employee performance. So, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Innovation has a significant and positive effect on employees' performance.

Job Satisfaction and Employees' Performance

Job satisfaction is considered one of the most significant drivers of employee service quality, productivity, and loyalty (Sharma et al., 2016). Job satisfaction makes employees work beyond their job description, which increases customer satisfaction (Yoopetch et al., 2021). In short, higher levels of job satisfaction lead to higher levels of employee performance. (Khan et al., 2012; Eliyana et al., 2019). The tourism and hospitality industry are a concentrated service industry in which there is high contact between customers and employees (Kong et al., 2018). In this regard, satisfied employees increase customer satisfaction (Pan, 2015). Stamolampros et al. (2019) mentioned that employee dissatisfaction has an impact on their motivation to work and, as a result, the quality of their service. The hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H5. Job satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on employees' performance.

Innovation Mediates SL and Employees' Performance

Leadership style is a critical factor that motivates managers to apply innovation among employees successfully (Khan et al., 2021). As servant leaders, their main aim is to develop their employees' innovative ideas, as it is an employee-centric leadership style. (Faraz et al., 2019) In this context, Hernández-Perlines and Araya-Castillo (2020) mentioned that innovation is the main determinant between SL and employees' performance. It is the responsibility of servant leaders to instill innovative ideas and systems in their followers (Williams et al., 2017). Eva et al. (2019) confirmed that innovation is a mediator between SL and performance. So, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6. Innovation mediates SL and employees' performance.

Job Satisfaction Mediates SL and Employees' Performance

McCann et al. (2014) mentioned that SL affects Job satisfaction and employees' performance. The studies that examine the mediating role of job satisfaction between SL and employee performance regarding travel agencies are scarce. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Yulihardi et al. (2022), revealed that servant leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction, which in turn affects employee performance in tourism companies. So, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7. Job Satisfaction mediates SL and employees' performance.

Research Methodology

Population, Sample and Data Collection Procedures

The respondents to this study are employees of travel agencies in Egypt. There were 309 respondents who met the specified sample size criteria and filled out the questionnaire; the questionnaires were distributed online via Google Forms, so the study gets 100% of responses. Respondents were contacted via email, WhatsApp messages, Instagram and Facebook direct messages, and others.

Construct Measurement and Questionnaire

This study used four variables, including “servant leadership, job performance, innovation, and job satisfaction” with 21 measurement items all of which were based on several prior studies (Liden et al., 2008; Alfandi and Alkawsaneh, 2014; De Jong and Den Hartog, D., 2010; Kaya and Karatepe, 2020). A five-point Likert’s scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used as the measurement scale. All measurement items can be found in detail in Table 1.

Table 1	Constructs Mean and Standard Deviation		
Construct	Items	Mean	SD
Servant Leadership	My manager can tell if something work-related is going wrong.	4.03	1.01
	My manager makes my career development a priority.	3.41	1.23
	I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem.	3.04	1.44
	My manager emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.	3.55	1.28
	My manager gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.	3.45	1.24
	My manager would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.	3.88	1.23
employees' Performance	I care about the results of evaluating my performance because they are a chance to get bonuses.	3.92	1.09
	I'm willing to work harder.	4.52	.800
	I follow the instructions and regulations at work.	4.42	.763
	I pay attention to the quality of the services given to the beneficiaries.	4.57	.729
	I can deal with troubles at work.	4.38	.791
Job satisfaction	I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.	3.96	.889
	I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.	4.04	.889
	I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.	3.83	.890
	I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement.	3.92	.851
	I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.	3.82	.954
Innovation	Our leader encourages us to find new approaches to execute tasks	3.57	1.18
	New services and programs are developed and made available to the staff	3.53	.948
	New training schemes are being developed for members of staff	3.48	1.08
	our leader stresses the importance of team-work and cooperation between its members of staff	4.00	.928
	Staff are encouraged to be more innovative using incentives such as bounces, promotions etc	3.39	1.32

Data Analyses

SPSS program was used for the collected data analysis and hypotheses testing. The validity and reliability of the data were examined using Cronbach’s alpha test (.873), which means that collected data have a high validity and reliability value.

Results

According to data, it was found that all of the respondents were Egyptians, and most of them were female (59.2%). In terms of respondent’s age, most of them were under 37 years old (82.8%). In terms of organizational Tenure 57.6% of the respondents are stable in their agencies for at least 6 years. In terms of educational level, most of them were graduated from college (97.7%) This study found that all the relationships are significant. Tables 2&3 show the hypothesis testing for the relationships. It shows that most the relationship has significant value of 0,000. This means that the entire hypotheses are accepted.

Table 2	Hypotheses testing	
Hypotheses		Asymptotic Significance
H1. Servant Leadership has a significant and positive effect on employees’ performance		.000
H2. Servant Leadership has a significant and positive effect on employees’ innovation		.000
H3. Servant Leadership has a significant and positive effect on Job satisfaction		.000
H4. Innovation has a significant and positive effect on employees’ performance		.000
H5. Job satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on employees’ performance		.000

Note: Asymptotic Significance < 0.001 = high sig.

Hypotheses	Indirect effect	Sobel Test	P-Value	Mediating Effect
H6	SL → Innovation → Performance	34.859	0.000***	Partial
H7	SL → Satisfaction → Performance	22.463	0.000***	Partial

Discussion

This study supports the proposed hypotheses, as it shows that servant leadership has a positive and high significant effect on employees' performance (H1). These findings confirm and reinforce the results of previous studies which stated that servant leadership positively affects employees' performance (Sarwar et al, 2021; Schwarz et al 2016). Furthermore, Servant leadership also has a positive and significant effect on both innovation and job satisfaction (H2&H3), which agreed with findings of previous studies (Karatepe et al, 2020; Bilge et al, 2021).

This study also approved that both innovation and job satisfaction have a positive and significant effect on employees' performance (H4&H5). These findings are consistent with the results of Hernández and Castillo (2020), which found that innovation affects positively job performance, and concur with the findings of Alromaihi et al (2017), Khan et al. (2012) and Eliyana et al (2019), which stated that job satisfaction affects positively employees' performance.

Findings also found that innovation partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employees' performance (H6) (Sobel test = 34.859, $p < 0.001$) as findings approved that there is already a positive and high significant correlation between servant leadership and employees' performance.

Findings also confirmed that job satisfaction has a partial mediating positive role in the relationship between servant leadership and employees' performance (H7) (Sobel test= 22.463, $p < 0.001$) as findings approved that there is already a positive and highly significant correlation between servant leadership and employees' performance. Based on hypothesis testing, all of the study's aims have been achieved, as can be seen in Figure 1.

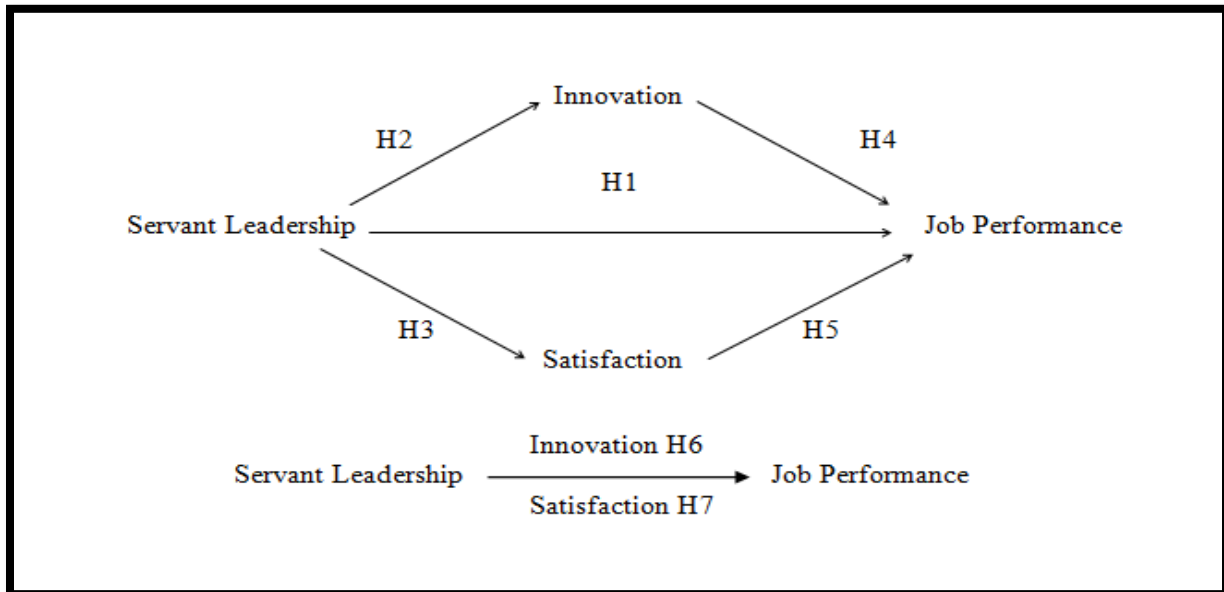


Figure 1: Research model

Conclusion and Implications

The study shows the concept of servant leadership (SL) and its role in the work environment in the travel agency sector. In this context, the research revealed that SL has a powerful impact on the job performance of employees. SL enhances the productivity and profitability of any organizations. There are many requirements for successful servant leadership, some of which are innovation and job satisfaction. In this regard, servant leaders are in need of applying innovation to accelerate the performance of the organization. Regarding job satisfaction, successful servant leaders have to seek to increase the job satisfaction of employees.

Regarding the field, travel agencies in Egypt started to apply servant leadership, with a total mean of (3.56). In addition, employees try to push their performance with a total mean of (4.36). Concerning job satisfaction, quite a few employees have high satisfaction with their career, with a total mean of (3.90). Recently, managers sought to apply innovation techniques to advance the performance of employees, with a total mean of (3.59). The study revealed that both "innovation" and "job satisfaction" can mediate the relationship between SL and job performance.

The research implications are theoretical and practical. The theoretical implication is represented in providing a study focused on applying servant leadership theory in the travel agency sector, as there is a scarcity of research concerning this sector in the tourism industry, especially in Egypt. The study also measured to what extent innovation and job satisfaction have a mediation effect between servant leadership and job performance in travel agencies.

Concerning practical implications, the research is suitable for travel agency general managers as it offers tools for better and more creative performance and for highly satisfied employees at the same time. The research helps general managers and leaders in travel agencies enhance their employees' performance with less turnover by adopting a servant leadership style.

Recommendations

- According to this study, general managers should develop a strategy in collaboration with leaders. This plan should consider the issues that face subordinates in travel agencies. In this regard, general managers and leaders should have a monthly meeting with subordinates to discuss all the problems they suffer inside and outside of work. This step is called "Building Communities".
- An "Evaluation Form" after achieving the required targets should be made by leaders and be directed to employees in order to assess the performance of employees and discover the obstacles they encountered during their tasks and what they really need to develop their skills for the upcoming tasks.
- Leaders should arrange meetings with their subordinates to attract and collect innovative ideas for advancing the work environment.
- It is very important to ask the subordinates for their feedback about the methods the managers apply in order to develop their servant leadership style.
- Leaders should adopt the theory of "building consensus" to ensure that organizational goals are aligned with employees' goals.
- It is crucial to study the employees' needs and goals to set organizational long-term objectives that enhance the productivity and well-being of employees while also increasing the profitability of the firm.

Limitations and Future Studies

According to the literature review, the main limitation is that there aren't sufficient studies about the role of SL in the travel agency sector. In addition, studies that measure the mediating role of innovation and job satisfaction between servant leadership and employee performance are rare. Concerning the field study, there was no effective response from employees in travel agencies, so the researchers tried to connect many times with employees to persuade them to fill out the questionnaire.

This study also has not tested the relationship between servant leadership and travel agency employees' loyalty, so further studies may discuss the direct effect of servant leadership on employees' loyalty and consequently on turnover rate. Further studies can also be conducted on the role of work engagement as a mediator between servant leadership and job performance.

تأثير القيادة الخادمة على الأداء الوظيفي: الدور الوسيط للابتكار والرضا الوظيفي: بالتطبيق على شركات السياحة في مصر

المستخلص

القيادة الخادمة هي أسلوب قيادة يعتمد على القادة الخدميين الذين يمكنهم تطوير مرؤوسيههم بشكل لا يتعارض مع تحقيق أهداف المنظمة. في هذا السياق، من أشهر أبعاد القيادة الخادمة هي تمكين الموظفين وتنميته مهاراتهم، وتشجيع العاملين التعبير عن آرائهم، والإشراف السلسل مع توجيه الموظفين بطريقة ملائمة لتحقيق أهداف المنظمة. نظرًا لأن الابتكار هو المطلب الأساسي للقيادة الناجحة، يجب على القيادة الخادمة ترسيخ الابتكار في بيئة العمل أيضًا. ومن هذا المنطلق، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن تأثير القيادة الخادمة على أداء موظفي وكالات السفر في مصر من خلال قياس الدور الوسيط للرضا الوظيفي بين القيادة الخادمة وأداء الموظفين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، سعت الدراسة أيضًا إلى قياس الدور الوسيط للابتكار بين القيادة الخادمة والأداء الوظيفي. لهذا الغرض، تم توزيع استبيانات على 309 من موظفي شركات السياحة في مصر. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن القيادة الخادمة تعزز أداء الموظفين من خلال تعزيز قدرتهم على الابتكار، وبالتالي إرتفاع رضائهم الوظيفي.

الكلمات الدالة: القيادة الخادمة، الابتكار، الرضا، الأداء.

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