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Servant Leadership and Employee Work Outcomes: Uncovering Underlying Mechanisms by Examining Moderator and Mediator Variables

Vahid Minaei

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PhD in Business | Vahid Minaei

2023



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PhD in Business

**Servant Leadership and Employee Work
Outcomes: Uncovering Underlying
Mechanisms by Examining Moderator
and Mediator Variables**

Vahid Minaei



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BARC

PhD in Business

Thesis title:

Servant Leadership and Employee Work Outcomes: Uncovering Underlying Mechanisms by Examining Moderator and Mediator Variables

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ABSTRACT

This thesis sought to address the underlying mechanisms through which servant leadership influences employees' work outcomes, exploring the boundary conditions, mediators, and moderators related to followers' individual differences. It consists of three independent empirical studies. Each study applies cross-sectional research design to test the research model in different sectors (Study 1, educational sector; study 2, Home electrical appliance manufacturing sector; and Study 3, the SMEs-small and medium enterprise) in Iran. Questionnaires were applied and results were returned directly to the researcher. The hypotheses were tested via structural equation modelling (SEM) and path modeling techniques, applying AMOS (v. 22) and the PROCES macro tool (Hayes, 2018).

This thesis contributes to and extends the servant leadership field by showing its effects on followers' work outcomes. It corroborates that the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is conditioned by employees' emotional intelligence, which serves to reinforce the effect on employees' work outcomes (commitment and turnover intention). It also supports that the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is conditioned by employees' core self-evaluation traits, which in turn impacts their job satisfaction. Lastly, this thesis also provides evidence that employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment are two underlying mediating mechanisms between servant leadership actions and employees' turnover intention.

This thesis is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design of the studies does not allow us to infer causality between the variables included in the research models. Future research could adopt a longitudinal or experimental research design to

overcome this limitation. Second, the studies relied on self-reported measures which might raise the possibility of common method variance and inflate the coefficients. Third, the nature of the sample limits the generalizability of these results to other settings. Future research could obtain more robust findings by testing the model in other contexts (e.g., other industry sectors or additional countries). Finally, future research can also extend these studies' conceptual frameworks by exploring the effects of a larger set of variables on other outcomes.

This thesis contributes to the servant leadership field and provide practical insights for managers and organizations seeking to implement this approach. All three studies' findings provide further support for the significance of servant leadership's benefits and its role in enhancing employees' work outcomes. The study findings suggest that servant leaders have a better impact on employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence and core self-evaluation. Also, findings show that, servant leaders impact employees' work outcomes through enhancing employee's Trust in Leader, Person-Supervisor Fit and Job Satisfaction. This has implications for organizations' talent attraction and retention policies and their ability to improve employee's work outcomes by selecting and developing servant leaders, as well as by recruiting employees with high core self-evaluation traits and high emotional intelligence.

The value of this empirical PhD thesis is to be the first to explore and introduce the constructs of employee's emotional intelligence and the core self-evaluation as moderating variables to gain insights on conditions related to servant leadership and its influence on employees' work outcomes.

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Chapter One:

Thesis Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of this thesis and establishes the context and rationale for the study. It begins with the background and justification and then addresses the research questions and purpose. This introductory chapter concludes with an outline of the different thesis chapters.

1.1 Study Background and Justification

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

Greenleaf

Over the past few decades, numerous studies have recognized that leaders' moral characters are not only important for the betterment of society, but also crucial for achieving sustainable success in organizations (Freeman et al., 2004; Gulati et al., 2010; Padilla et al., 2007). This has resulted in scholars turning their attention towards positive and moral leadership theories, such as transformational, ethical, authentic, and servant leadership, and their influence on desirable individual and organizational outcomes (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Hoch et al., 2018).

The servant leadership concept differs from other leadership approaches by the leaders prioritizing the fulfillment of their followers' needs, encouraging their participation in the wider community, and guiding the employees themselves to display servant leader behaviors (Wu et al., 2021). Placing the followers' needs above those of their leaders requires the latter to fully understand the unique values, concerns, and potential of each individual follower (Greenleaf, 1998). According to Wu et al. (2021), leaders can achieve significant results by defining individualized approaches to help each follower reach their full potential. Indeed, scholars have shown servant leadership to be positively related to follower engagement and citizenship behaviors (Liden et al., 2008), psychological contract fulfillment, interpersonal helping, individual initiative (Panaccio et al., 2015), employee service performance (Chen et al., 2015), team organizational citizenship behavior (Ehrhart, 2004), team performance (Schaubroeck et al., 2011), and organizational return on assets (Peterson et al.,

2012).

As noted by Liden et al., (2014), servant leadership is still at an early stage of its theoretical development. Though a growing body of research suggests that servant leadership has a beneficial impact on both employee performance and work attitudes (Choudhary et al., 2013; Eva et al., 2019; Jenkins & Stewart, 2010; Liden et al., 2014; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011), little attention has been paid to uncovering the underlying mechanisms through which servant leadership impacts workplace outcomes (Wu et al., 2021; Huning et al., 2020) and how employees' individual differences affect their affective and behavioral responses to servant leaders (Sun et al., 2019).

Therefore, since servant leadership engages followers across relational, ethical, and emotional dimensions (Eva et al., 2019), this important focus and emphasis on the leader-follower relationship serves as the foundation for this study to examine to what extent followers' individual differences, such as their attributes, perceptions, and skills, might affect their adoption of these behaviors. Specifically, does servant leadership impact each follower in a similar way? In this regard, this PhD thesis aims to provide answers to the following questions by means of three different empirical studies. These research questions are as follows:

Study 1 – Research questions

1.- How do employee perceptions of servant leadership affect:

- employees' trust in the leader?
- their affective commitment?
- and their turnover intention?

2.- How does employee trust in the leader affect:

- employees' affective commitment?
- and their turnover intention?

3.- How does employee trust in the leader mediate the relationship between servant leadership

- and employees' affective commitment?
- and their turnover intention?

4.- How does employees' emotional intelligence moderate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' trust in the leader?

Study 2 – Research questions

1.- How do employee perceptions of servant leadership affect:

- employees' person-supervisor fit?
- and their job satisfaction?

2.- How does employees' person-supervisor fit predict:

- employees' job satisfaction?

3.- How does employees' person-supervisor fit mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' job satisfaction?

4.- How do employees' core self-evaluations moderate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' person-supervisor fit?

Study 3 – Research questions:

1.- How do employee perceptions of servant leadership affect:

- employees' job satisfaction?
- their affective commitment?
- and their turnover intention?

2.- How does employees' job satisfaction

- affect employees' affective organizational commitment?
- and relate to their turnover intention?

3.- How does employees' job satisfaction mediate the relationship between:

- servant leadership and employees' affective organizational commitment?
- and between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention?

4.- How do employees' job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment serially mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention?

1.2 Study Purpose

According to Eva et al. (2019), research on servant leadership has evolved into three phases. The first phase which initiated the conceptual development of servant leadership, with emphasis on the works of Greenleaf (1977) and Spears (1996). The second phase involved developing measures of servant leadership and examining the relationships between servant leadership and outcomes. And the current third phase of servant leadership research, which is focused on model development. In this phase scholars are using more sophisticated research designs aimed at identifying the antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and boundary conditions of servant leadership, going beyond simple relationships with outcomes.

This thesis thus aims to contribute to bridge the gap by understanding the underlying mechanisms through which servant leadership influences employees' work outcomes, exploring the boundary conditions, mediators, and moderators related to followers' individual differences.

In the three empirical studies undertaken, the author has attempted to provide stand explanations to the theoretical questions regarding how, when and why servant leadership leads to favorable work outcomes. In doing so, the aim is to make the following contributions:

First, these studies seek to provide a theoretical foundation to understand the effects of servant leadership and make additional empirical contributions to the servant leadership field.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, they aim to understand the leader-outcome relationship context and to shed light on the underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms underpinning servant leadership's effects on employees' work outcomes. Specifically, these 3 empirical studies create a context to examine the relationship between servant leadership and employees' work outcomes in depth, exploring the mediating impacts of trust in leader, person-supervisor fit, and job satisfaction.

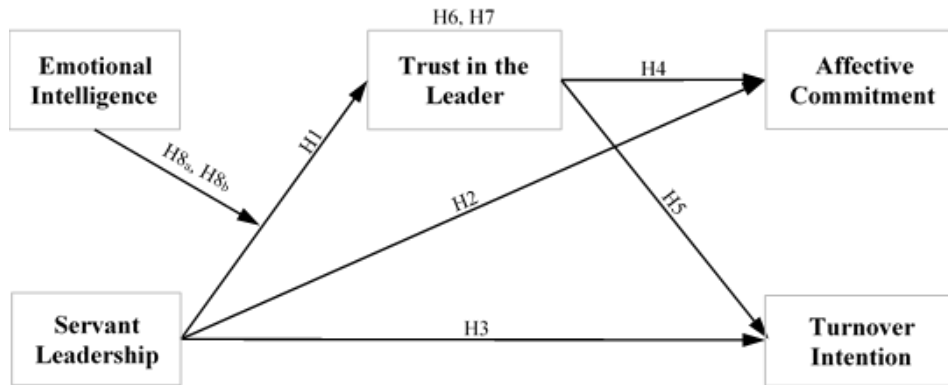
In addition to testing the direct and indirect effects of servant leadership, another significant goal of this research is to empirically evaluate the moderating role of employees' emotional Intelligence and core self-evaluations. In so doing, the aim is to be able to understand the levels of employees' emotional Intelligence and core self-evaluations with which servant leadership has the greatest impact on employees' work outcomes. By understanding these boundary conditions, the studies strive to provide a holistic view of the optimal employee characteristics with which servant leadership behavior can best maximize employees' work outcomes. This will then help create a template for how organizations can best operationalize their practices to obtain the full benefits of servant leadership.

Thirdly, these studies contribute to existing theory by investigating the effects of servant leadership in a non-Western cultural context, answering the call from Eva et al. (2019) to conduct servant leadership research across different cultures.

Study one: SERVANT LEADERSHIP EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES: HOW DO EMPLOYEES'

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRUST IN THE LEADER PLAY A ROLE?

Figure 1.1- Hypothesized model (Study 1)

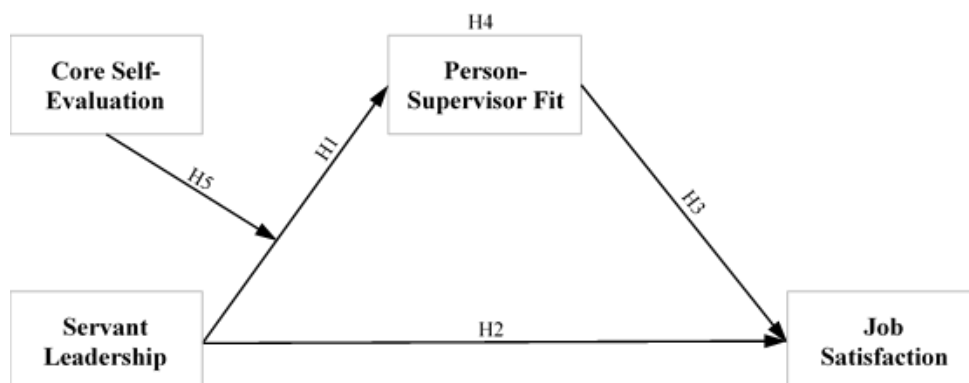


The objective of Study 1 is to provide insights into the relationship between servant leadership and employees' work outcomes, namely, (i) their turnover intention and (ii) affective commitment, examining mechanisms in which trust in the leader is tested as a mediator and employees' emotional intelligence (EI) is used as a moderating variable.

Study two: FOSTERING EMPLOYEES' JOB SATISFACTION THROUGH PERSON-SUPERVISOR FIT:

THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES' CORE SELF-EVALUATION

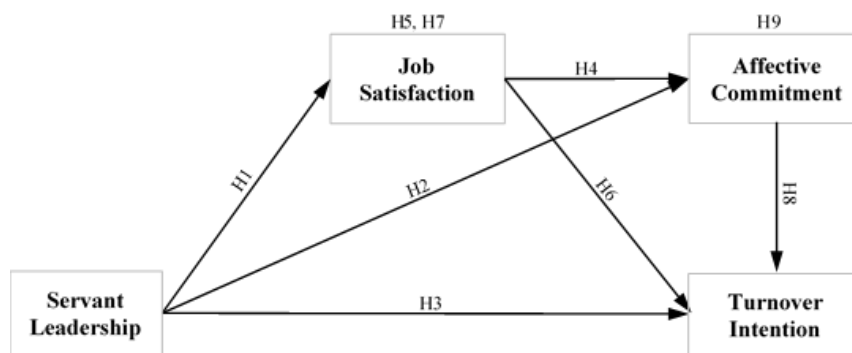
Figure 1.2- Hypothesized model (Study 2)



The aim of Study 2 is to provide insights into the relationship between servant leadership and employees' job satisfaction, examining the indirect and intervening mechanisms in which person-supervisor fit plays a mediating role and employees' core self-evaluations a moderating role.

Study three: SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES' WORK OUTCOMES; THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEES' JOB SATISFACTION AND AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Figure 1.3- Hypothesized model (Study 3)



Study 3 aims to examine the effects that servant leadership has on the outcome variables of the first and second study taken together. It specifically tests the mediating role that employees' job satisfaction plays between servant leadership and employees' affective commitment and turnover intention.

1.3 Thesis Overview

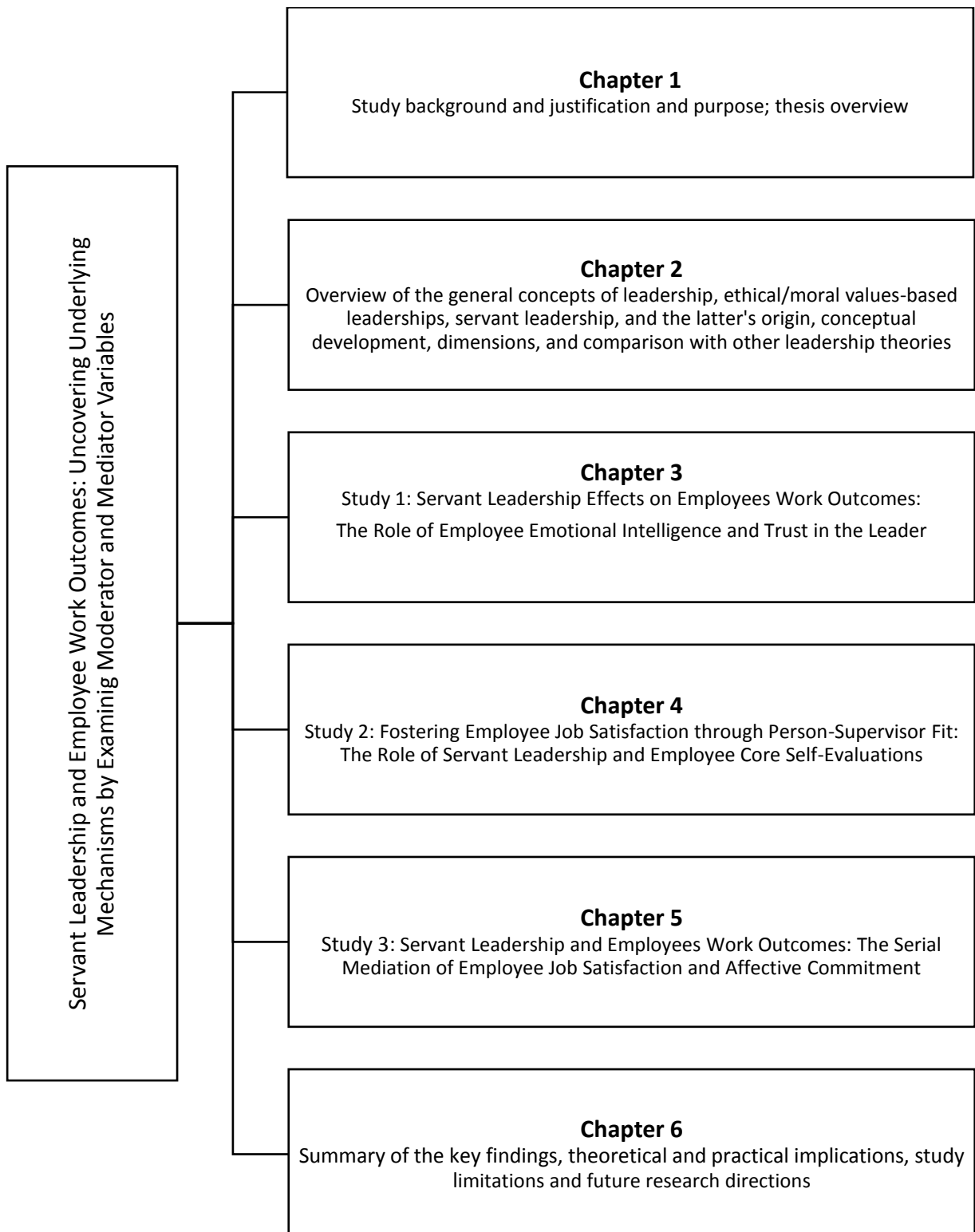
This thesis consists of the following chapters:

- **Chapter One** introduces the thesis with a discussion on the background, research questions, purpose, and thesis synopsis.

- **Chapter Two** provides an overview of the general leadership and ethical/moral values-based leadership concepts and, subsequently, the servant leadership construct and its origin, conceptual development, dimensions, and comparison with other leadership theories.
- **Chapter Three** is the first empirical study of this thesis and provides insight into the relationship between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention and affective organizational commitment, examining mechanisms in which trust in the leader serves as a mediator and employees' emotional Intelligence as a moderating intervening variable.
- **Chapter Four**, the second study of this thesis, empirically examines the underlying mediating mechanism of person-supervisor fit through which servant leadership indirectly affects employees' job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment. In addition, it examines the moderating role played by employees' core self-evaluations on the effects that servant leadership has on outcomes.
- **Chapter Five** is the third and last empirical study of this PhD thesis and explores the serial mediating effects of job satisfaction and affective commitment, two of the previously examined outcomes, on the relationship between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention.
- **Chapter Six** brings the studies' hypotheses together, discussing the extension of both theory and practice through this thesis. It focuses on furthering servant leadership theory based upon the variables discussed above. The chapter goes on to suggest potential future research avenues and models in this field and discusses the thesis' theoretical and practical implications.

Next, Figure 1.4 provides an overview of this thesis' structure.

Figure 1.4- Thesis Structure



Chapter Two:
Servant Leadership
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we would like to review and demarcate the leadership construct within social sciences and management, two fields which have studied this phenomenon within organizations.

Scholars have defined and approached leadership in numerous ways this last century. In general, leadership occurs when a particular individual exerts influence on the goal achievement of others in an organizational context. Effective leadership exerts influence in a way that achieves organizational goals by enhancing the workforce's productivity, innovation, satisfaction, and commitment.

The aim of this chapter is to thus shed light on what is meant by servant leadership from an organizational perspective within the ethical leadership framework. What features does it have? How is it exercised? What influence does it have on followers and organizations as a whole?

Furthermore, we will examine servant leadership outcomes and the theoretical frameworks that have been used for empirical research in this field.

2.2 Leadership within the Organizational Context

The success of all economic, political, and organizational systems depends on the effective and efficient guidance of these systems' leaders (Barrow, 1977). A critical factor to understand an organization's success, then, is to study its leaders.

Over the years, researchers have studied leadership extensively in various contexts and through numerous theoretical lenses. Leadership studies are an evolving discipline, and the concept of leadership will continue to develop (Daft, 2014). As mentioned, however, scholars have adopted diverse perspectives and emphasized different aspects of the phenomenon when exploring the latter (Stogdill, 1974, p. 259).

Rost (1993) defined leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (Rost, 1993, p. 124). Leadership can also be considered a set of behaviors used to influence followers in an organization so that they actively work to achieve established goals, specifically identified for the common good (Barrow, 1977; Cyert, 1990; Plsek & Wilson, 2001).

Yukl and Gardner (2020) also provided a broad definition of leadership, indicating that it “is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, p. 26). Their definition includes efforts not only to influence and facilitate the group’s or organization’s current work but also ensure it is prepared to meet future challenges.

Some scholars have conceptualized leadership as a trait in which those who become leaders and do so well possess a special set of traits (i.e., individual personal characteristics, including physical characteristics, intellectual ability, and personality) (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

Other researchers have conceptualized leadership as certain behaviors (the crucial behaviors leaders engage in and how these behaviors influence employee performance and satisfaction), while others view leadership from an information-processing perspective or relational standpoint (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2019).

Northouse (2019) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019, p. 5), meaning that it is not a trait or characteristic that resides in the leader but, rather, a transactional event that occurs between leaders and their followers. According to Northouse (2007), this “process” implies that leaders affect and are affected by followers. It emphasizes that leadership is not a linear, one-way event but, rather, an interactive process.

This stream of leadership definitions collectively reflects that leadership is not simply an individual characteristic or trait; rather, scholars have depicted it using various models such as dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, global, and complex social dynamic paradigms (Avolio et al., 2009). Leadership involves influence and it is concerned with how leaders affect their followers and the communication that occurs between leaders and followers (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). Both leaders and followers are jointly involved in the leadership process. Leaders and followers need each other (Burns, 1978; Heller & Van Til, 1982; Hollander, 1997; Jago, 1982). Leaders and followers must thus be understood in relation to each other (Burns, 1978; Hollander, 1997), as they are two sides of the same coin (Rost, 1991).

2.3 Ethical and Moral Values-Based Leadership

As the leadership field has developed, so too has the debate on the effectiveness and relevance of the differing approaches. These approaches differ in scope and nature and result in different outcomes for organizations and individuals (Avolio et al., 2009).

In recent years, a series of public corporate scandals have also been associated with increased interest in positive leadership, that is, emphasizing the leaders' ethical and moral behavior (Lee et al., 2020). This focus on moral and ethical behavior stems from a widely-held view that crises of leadership, attributed to unethical behavior among senior organizational leaders, are responsible for corporate scandals (Woods & West, 2010). Among these scandals, some of the most recent are worth mentioning: FTX crypto exchange; Foxconn suicides; FIFA corruption; Volkswagen emissions; Enron; Lehmann Brothers; and WorldCom, among others.

These emerging ethical/moral values-based leadership forms include ethical, authentic, and servant leadership, all of which share a common interest in positive and humanistic behaviors (Dinh

et al., 2014). This classification includes leadership theories which share a core focus on the leaders' altruistic behaviors.

These ethical leadership theories examine leaders' moral priorities, including: how they develop an ethical orientation towards leadership; how this ethical approach to leadership is important; and the consequences of ethical leadership and how to sustain it.

However, most of the existing, previous leadership theories, even transformational leadership, have failed to sufficiently research these altruistic behaviors among leaders (Bass, 1999; Brown et al., 2005; Ciulla, 2003; Yukl, 2008). House and Aditya (1997) suggested that prior theories based their work on hedonistic leaders, not altruistic ones. In fact, research on altruistic and deontic theories has increased (Dinh et al., 2014).

Table 2.1- Scholarly references to three forms of ethical/moral leadership

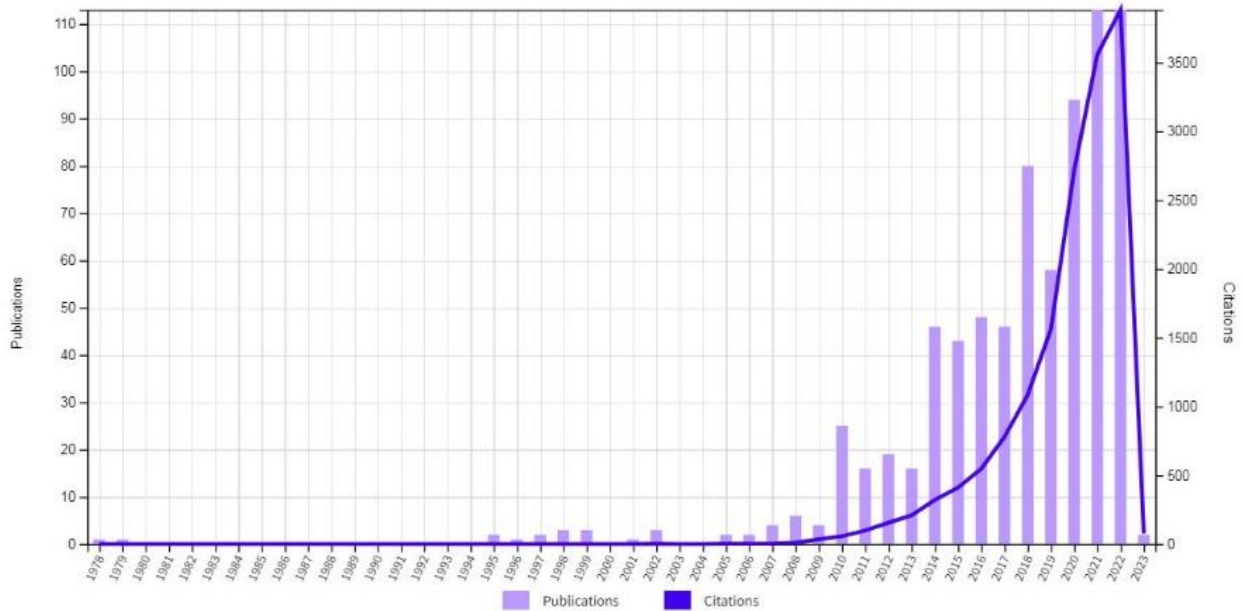
| (Leadership) | 1980 – 2002 | 2003 – 2022 |
|----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Ethical leadership | 35 papers | 1,159 papers |
| Authentic leadership | 6 papers | 702 papers |
| Servant leadership | 15 papers | 735 papers |
| Totals | 56 papers | 2,596 papers |

Source: The author, from Web of Science searches (January 16, 2023)

The rising popularity of these three leadership forms, that is, ethical, authentic and servant leadership, is reflected in the increase in practitioners as well as scholarly references. A Web of Science search for “ethical leadership” yielded 35 papers published from 1980 to 2002, versus 1,159 from 2003 to 2022. Meanwhile, a search for “authentic leadership” generated 6 papers versus 702 in those same two timeframes, and a search for “servant leadership” produced 15 papers versus 735, respectively (See Table 2.1 for details).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the exponential growth of servant leadership in top scientific studies published in leading journals, according to Web of Science records.

Figure 2.1- Number of publications on servant leadership



Source: Web of Science publication records (retrieved January 16, 2023)

Next, we will provide a brief explanation of these theories framed within ethical and moral values-based leadership. In the last section of this chapter, we will empirically compare and discuss these three ethical/moral values-based leadership forms in detail.

2.3.1 Ethical leadership theory. It builds on social learning theory and underscores the importance of these behaviors within leaders who reinforce these values through role modeling, rewards, punishments, and communication about ethics to set their organizations’ moral tones (Brown et al., 2005; D. M. Mayer et al., 2012).

2.3.2 Authentic leadership theory. This framework describes leaders who are self-aware; they process positive and negative ego-relevant information in a balanced fashion, achieve relational transparency with others close to them, and are guided by an internalized moral perspective when taking actions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011).

2.3.3 Servant leadership theory. This approach stands apart from the other two because it prioritizes meeting followers' needs, advocating for followers' involvement within the organizations' larger communities, and encouraging followers to also engage in these behaviors (Wu et al., 2021; Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leadership focuses on moral and compassionate actions and emphasizes the advantages for all stakeholders. It places concern for others above concern for the leaders themselves or the organizations (Laub, 1999; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Sun, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Therefore, some researchers see it as a leadership style that can potentially manage and overcome the demands of the modern workplace (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

In the following section, we will explore the servant leadership construct more in depth, starting with a brief introduction, followed by a discussion of its origins, its conceptual development and its operationalization and dimensions.

2.4 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership theory is a new and growing area of research on leadership (Graham, 1991; Lanctot & Irving, 2010; Parolini, Patterson, & Winston, 2009; Russell, 2001; Whetstone, 2002), which has been linked to ethics, virtues, and morality (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Servant leadership theory emphasizes providing service to others and recognizes that the role of organizations is to develop employees who can build a better tomorrow (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014). This

resonates with scholars and practitioners who are responding to the growing perceptions that corporate leaders have become selfish and who want to find a viable leadership theory to help resolve 21st-century challenges (Lee et al., 2020).

Furthermore, servant leadership differs from the other approaches because of its employee-centered mentality, whereby leaders genuinely care more about their employees' wellbeing than their organizations' bottom lines (Greenleaf, 1977; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

2.4.1 Origins of servant leadership.

According to Greenleaf (1977), a better approach to leadership must first and foremost involve serving others and putting their needs above the leaders' own wants and needs. Servant leadership was introduced in the organizational context through Greenleaf's three foundational essays: "The Servant as Leader" (Greenleaf, 1970), "The Institution as Servant" (Greenleaf, 1972), and "Trustees as Servants" (Greenleaf, 1972). He published all three upon retiring from AT&T after working 40 years in management positions.

Greenleaf defined servant leadership as not just a management technique but a way of life which begins with "the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (1997, p. 7). Greenleaf (1977) was inspired to develop the servant leadership construct after reading Herman Hesse's novel, *The Journey to the East* (Hesse, 1956). The latter describes a fictional religious-spiritual journey by a group of travelers and their servant, Leo. Throughout the journey, Leo performs tedious tasks for the others and keeps them motivated with his songs and good spirit. With Leo there, the travelers' journey is successful, and they overcome the problems they encounter. However, when Leo suddenly disappears, arguments erupt among the group, and the travelers become anxious. Eventually, they end their trip. Some years later, the narrator runs into Leo again, though he is now the leader of the religious order that organized the trip.

From this story, Greenleaf (1977) realized that people are great leaders through service, not because of their power. Greenleaf (1977) believed that servant leadership was an inward, lifelong journey. He used Leo to describe a true servant as follows: “Leadership was bestowed upon a man who was by nature a servant. [...] His servant nature was the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 21).

Therefore, Greenleaf (1977) argued that servant leaders are distinguished by both their primary motivation to serve (what they do) and their self-construction (who they are) and, from this conscious choice of ‘doing’ and ‘being,’ leaders aspire to lead while still maintaining the values of serving (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

While the study of servant leadership in modern times is largely attributed to Greenleaf (1970, 1977), the concept itself is not new and can be traced back to ancient teachings found in various religions. Numerous great leaders and thinkers have incorporated servant leadership principles into their statements and speeches, such as Mother Theresa, Moses, Harriet Tubman, Lao-tzu, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Confucius (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Keith, 2008). Scholars also point to Jesus Christ’s teachings as a prime example of servant leadership (Ebener & O’Connell, 2010; Lanctot & Irving, 2010; Winston, 2004).

Whereas other leadership theories are traditionally defined only by what the leader does, servant leaders are defined by their character and by demonstrating their complete commitment to serving others. However, this creates one of the core challenges for theorists: How to construct models that encompass Greenleaf’s theoretical message of “servanthood-through-leadership-through-practice” (Prosser, 2010), which operates not only at the surface-level but deep within people themselves.

2.4.2 Conceptual development of servant leadership and its operationalization.

Since 1990, Spears and other colleagues have pushed the conceptual development of servant leadership forward (see Spears, 1995, 1996; Spears & Wagner-Marsh, 1998). Based on Greenleaf's writings, Spears (2010) identified 10 characteristics of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to others' growth, and building community. In addition, other scholars such as Russell and Stone (2002) and Peterson, Galvin, and Lange (2012) (see also Farling et al., 1999; Stone et al., 2004; Patterson, 2003; Russell, 2001; Russell & Stone, 2002) began exploring servant leadership at the start of the new millennium.

These conceptual models of servant leadership share certain commonalities, such as the service to others and a clear vision for the future. However, there are differences in other dimensions such as honesty, humility, and a commitment to growth. As these conceptual models lack empirical evidence to corroborate them, they have been open to scrutiny and debate (Russell & Stone, 2002). Laub (1999) was the first scholar to create a multidimensional measure of servant leadership. Since then, though, its theoretical development has moved rapidly.

Eva et al.'s (2019) systematic literature review recommends three measures of servant leadership behavior, all providing strong confirmatory factor analysis, expert validation, and internal consistency, as well as a strong theoretical base from the servant leadership literature (Eva et al., 2019). These three servant leadership measures are:

- The *Global Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7)*, defined by Liden et al. (2015). This scale is based on Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson's (2008) 28-item servant leadership measure (SL-28);
- The *Servant Leadership Behaviour Scale (SLBS-6)*, developed by Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, (2008) and validated as a short form by Sendjaya, Eva, Butar Butar, Robin and Castles (2019);
- The *Servant Leadership Survey (SLS)*, developed and validated by Van Dierendonck and Nuijten

(2011).

Table 2.2- The varying dimensions of the 3 recommended servant leadership scales

| Authors | Dimensions | Definitions |
|---|--|---|
| Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson (2008) and Liden et al. (2015) | Emotional healing | The degree to which leaders care about their followers' personal problems and wellbeing. |
| | Creating value for the community | The leaders' involvement in helping the community surrounding their organization as well as encouraging followers to be active in the community. |
| | Conceptual skills | The leaders' competency in solving work-related problems and understanding the organization's goals. |
| | Empowering | The degree to which leaders entrust their followers with responsibility, autonomy, and decision-making power. |
| | Helping subordinates grow and succeed | The extent to which leaders help their followers reach their full potential and succeed in their careers. |
| | Putting subordinates first | Assessing the degree to which leaders prioritize meeting the needs of their followers before tending to their own needs. |
| | Behaving ethically | Being honest, trustworthy, and serving as a model of integrity. |
| Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora (2008) and Sendjaya, Eva, Butar Butar, Robin, & Castles (2019) | Voluntary subordination | The willingness to relinquish the leaders' own rights and interests in order to serve others. |
| | Authentic self | The deep commitment to stay true and accountable to oneself. |
| | Covenant relationship | The personal, profound, and perpetual bond between leaders and their followers, characterized by shared values, mutual trust, and reciprocal honesty. |
| | Responsible morality | The capacity to engage others in moral reasoning which then results in moral actions. |
| | Transcendental spirituality | The conviction to nurture a sense of meaning, direction, and interconnectedness within oneself and others. |
| | Transforming influence | Helping others to be what they are capable of becoming through personal and professional growth. |

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Van Dierendonck et al. (2017) and Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011) | Empowerment | A motivational concept focused on enabling people and encouraging personal development (Conger et al., 2000). |
| | Accountability | Holding people accountable for performance they can control (Conger, 1989). |
| | Standing back | The extent to which leaders prioritize the interest of others first and give them the necessary support and credit. |
| | Humility | The ability to put one's own accomplishments and talents in a proper perspective (Patterson, 2003). |
| | Authenticity | This is closely related to expressing one's 'true self', expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings (Harter, 2002). |
| | Courage | Daring to take risks and trying out new approaches to address old problems (Greenleaf 1991). |
| | Interpersonal acceptance | The ability to understand and experience the feelings of others and understand where people come from (George, 2000). |
| | Stewardship | The willingness to take responsibility for the larger institution and focusing on providing service instead of exerting control and pursuing one's own self-interest (Block, 1993). |

Source: The author based on Eva et al. (2019)

As presented in Table 2.2, each of these psychometrical measures are distinct, and they emphasize different dimensions. We have chosen to use Liden et al.'s (2015) 7-item composite of the servant leadership measure (SL-7) in this study. One important dimension assessed by this scale is the genuine and deliberate concern of servant leaders towards generating value for the community surrounding the organization, as well as promoting community engagement among their followers. This community-focused dimension is reflected in the example item, *"My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community"*. Moreover, the SL-7 approach to measuring servant leadership behaviors stands out because it incorporates a competence-based element, such as

conceptual skills, in addition to character-based traits. With only seven items, this all-encompassing evaluation of servant leadership is convenient and efficient to use in combination with other evaluations in any study, without making the overall questionnaire too lengthy (Eva et al., 2019).

2.5 Conceptual Theories Used in Servant Leadership Research

The theoretical frameworks used for empirical research in the servant leadership field predominately draw from social-based theories (Eva et al., 2019).

2.5.1 Social exchange theory.

This is a reciprocity-based framework, whereby individuals generally reciprocate the positive behaviors shown to them by people with whom they have a social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964). Servant leadership research has commonly drawn on social exchange theory to explain how servant leadership translates to follower outcomes (Madison & Eva, 2019). Specifically, as servant leaders focus on the growth and development of their followers, followers feel obliged to reciprocate their leaders' positive behaviors with their own positive behaviors. In fact, servant leaders do not ask their followers to reciprocate their own positive behaviors. Rather, followers feel a sense of obligation towards their servant leaders based on the continuous interdependent relationship between themselves and their servant leaders (Eva et al., 2019; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014).

Social exchange theory has been commonly employed by scholars to understand the connection between servant leadership and different outcomes of followers due to the meaningful relationship that servant leaders establish with their followers. According to this theory, servant leaders are able to increase the helping and organizational citizenship behaviors (Newman et al., 2017) and commitment (Ling et al., 2017) of their followers by cultivating trust (Chan & Mak, 2014; Pillay &

Mehta Sunita, 2011) and justice (Schwepker, 2016) as mediating mechanisms.

While social exchange theory has provided an important foundation for servant leadership research, servant leadership's conceptualization also lends itself to behavioral theories that transform followers' mindsets and behaviors over the long term, rather than the leaders seeking a short-term quid pro quo from their followers (i.e., Greenleaf's (1998) argument that servant leaders are likely to transform their followers into servant leaders themselves). To this end, scholars have argued that servant leaders have transformative effects on their followers, changing their mindsets and behaviors, as explained by the social learning and social identity theories.

2.5.2 Social learning theory.

Bandura (1977) developed this theory, proposing that individuals learn required behaviors by observing attitudes, values, and behaviors and modelling them. This theory relies heavily on the modeling concept, whereby individuals learn their behaviors and attitudes by observing prominent people in their environment (Y. Han et al., 2010; Miao et al., 2014; Schwarz et al., 2016). In the workplace, Bandura (1977) posits that, when employees believe their leaders are credible role models in their organizations, they will closely observe them and then emulate their leaders' attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Employees are likely to see servant leaders as reliable role models within the workplace because they act altruistically and are motivated to serve others, without expecting anything in return (Schwarz et al., 2016). Through this role-modelling process, social learning theory explains how servant leaders influence their followers at the individual and group levels.

Studies have shown that, at the individual level, servant leaders, through their role-modelling behaviors, influence their followers' public service motivation (Liu et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2016;

Tuan, 2016), affective organizational commitment (Newman, Neesham, Manville, & Tse, 2018), helping behaviors (Hunter et al., 2013; Neubert et al., 2016), employee job crafting (Bavik et al., 2017), and core self-evaluation (Lacroix & Verdorfer, 2017).

At the team level, researchers have used social learning to explain how servant leadership influences specific elements of a team's culture. By exhibiting positive behaviors and attitudes within the workplace, servant leaders provide an important model to develop positive and ethical team cultures (Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2015; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Pircher Verdorfer et al., 2015). Liden et al. (2014) drew on social learning theory to explain how servant leadership is conducive to fostering a serving climate. Similarly, others have used social learning theory to explain the development of a service climate (Hunter et al., 2013), socio-moral climate (Pircher Verdorfer et al., 2015), an ethical-work climate (Jaramillo et al., 2015), and a knowledge-sharing climate (Song et al., 2015).

2.5.3 Social identity theory.

Tajfel (1974) indicates that leaders can change their employees' behaviors only if they can first modify the workers' self-identity or the part of their self-concept stemming from their knowledge of and emotional attachment to being members of the group (Tajfel, 1974).

Other scholars have utilized social identity theory to understand how servant leadership fosters a sense of partnership between leaders and followers. This theory suggests that servant leaders build strong relationships with their employees through their follower-centered and authentic approach, leading to employees identifying with the organization and feeling a sense of belonging. As a result, employees are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization (Chen et al., 2015). For example, by improving followers' identification with the organization (Chughtai, 2016), the team (Zhao

et al., 2016) or the leader (Yoshida et al., 2014), servant leaders are able to increase employee voice (Chughtai, 2016) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Yoshida et al., 2014), as well as reduce employee burnout (Rivkin et al., 2014).

2.6 Servant Leadership and Outcomes

In management literature, a widely recognized approach to research servant leadership is examining servant leadership's effects on outcomes. This research on servant leadership and its outcomes has continued to grow over the last two decades, with numerous cross-sectional studies published in peer-reviewed journals (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

The fact that servant leadership is centered around the needs of employees, it is not surprising that it has been found to have a positive association with a wide range of outcomes. In fact, research has shown that servant leadership is significantly effective in explaining incremental variance in job-related outcomes above and beyond other leadership styles such as transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership (Hoch et al., 2018).

To improve our field's understanding of how servant leadership affects work related outcomes, we have created a table (see Table 2.3, P. 44) which classifies these outcomes into six main categories, namely: Employees' attitudinal outcomes; employees' wellbeing outcomes; employees' behavioral outcomes; employees' performance outcomes; leader-related outcomes; and, lastly, team and organizational-level outcomes. Accordingly, we expect servant leadership to influence:

2.6.1- Employees' attitudinal outcomes.

Servant leadership is positively associated with a broad range of followers' job-related attitudinal outcomes (Eva et al., 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Based on social exchange theory, servant leaders can evoke reciprocal attitudes among followers in terms of empowerment (Van

Dierendonck et al., 2014), engagement (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017; Wu et al., 2021), organizational commitment (Newman et al., 2015; Wayne et al., 1997), and turnover-intention (X. Chen et al., 2019; Dutta & Khatri, 2017).

2.6.2- Employees' wellbeing outcomes.

Scholars have long argued that leadership styles which provide employees with adequate support help employees better cope with the demands of their jobs (Van Dierendonck, 2011) and are helpful in increasing employees' wellbeing (Zhang, Zheng, Zhang, Xu, Liu & Chen, 2021; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016), job satisfaction (Eva, Sendjaya, & Prajogo, 2013; Farrington & Lillah, 2019), and their perceived organizational support (Zhou & Miao, 2014). In terms of servant leadership as displaying concern and supporting employees (Liden et al., 2008), servant leaders can also contribute to decrease employees' emotional exhaustion (Rivkin et al., 2014; Tang, Kwan, Zhang, & Zhu, 2016) and burnout (Chen et al., 2019).

2.6.3- Employees' behavioral outcomes.

Research has also shown that a close dyadic relationship between servant leaders and their followers is likely to improve employees' behavioral outcomes (Neubert et al., 2008). The social exchange perspective explains the operating mechanism that can further employees' behavioral outcomes (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014). In particular, when servant leaders support their followers and value their needs, followers are highly encouraged to reciprocate with positive follower behaviors (Eva et al., 2019), such as adopting helping (Neubert et al., 2008; Zou et al., 2015), OCB (Newman et al., 2015, 2017), and proactive behaviors (Varela et al., 2019).

2.6.4- Employees' performance management outcomes.

Liden et al. (2008) suggest that servant leaders who create a positive social context based on their deliberate focus on and mutual support for followers can maintain positive exchanges with employees, thus motivating employees to respond with high job performance levels. Research has also revealed that servant leadership not only boosts employees' general job performance but also enhances other performance outcomes such as service quality towards customers in service companies (Chen, Zhu, & Zhou, 2015), customer value co-creation (Hsiao et al., 2015), and creativity (Yang et al., 2017).

2.6.5- Leader-related outcomes.

As with the other outcomes, the process through which servant leadership exerts influence on leader-related outcomes is also explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Outcomes such as leader-member exchange (Hanse et al., 2016; Ling et al., 2016), trust in the leader (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010), and leadership effectiveness (S. S. Han & Kim, 2012) are considered leader-related outcomes.

At the team level, scholars have associated servant leadership with group-level service performance, service climate, task and person-focused OCB, team effectiveness, team innovation, and team organizational commitment (Hu & Liden, 2011; Irving & Longbotham, 2007; Overstreet et al., 2014; Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2016; Yoshida et al., 2014). At the organizational level, research has related servant leadership positively to organizational firm performance, operational performance (Choudhary et al., 2013; Overstreet et al., 2014).

2.6.6- Team-level and organizational-level outcomes.

Finally, studies have also explored the effects of servant leadership at different levels of analysis, including at the team and organizational levels. At the team level, servant leadership has

exhibited increased levels of team innovation (Yoshida et al., 2014), team creativity (Yang et al., 2017), and service climate (Walumbwa et al., 2010). At the organizational level, servant leadership provokes higher levels of organizational performance (Choudhary et al., 2013) and service-oriented OCB (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016).

Table 2.3 provides a broad list of servant leadership outcomes and related studies (see below for further details and references).

Table 2.3- Servant leadership outcomes

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Employees' attitudinal outcomes | Commitment to change | (Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012) | |
| | Ego-depletion | (Rivkin, Diestel & Schmidt, 2014) | |
| | Emotional exhaustion | (Rivkin et al., 2014) | |
| | Empowerment | (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014) | |
| | Engagement | | (Bao, Li & Zhao, 2018) |
| | | | (Carter & Baghurst, 2014) |
| | | | (De Clercq, Bouckenoghe, Raja & Matsyborska, 2014) |
| | | | (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020) |
| | | | (Kaur, 2018) |
| | | | (Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008) |
| | | | (Ling, Liu, & Wu, 2017) |
| | | | (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014, 2017) |
| | | | (Walumbwa, Hartnell & Oke, 2010) |
| | | | (Wu, Liden, Liao & Wayne, 2021) |
| | Individual initiative | (Panaccio, Henderson, Liden, Wayne & Cao, 2015) | |
| | Interpersonal helping | (Panaccio et al., 2015) | |
| | Intrinsic motivation | (C.-Y. Chen, Chen & Li, 2013) | |
| Job boredom | (Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu & Meiliani, 2018) | | |
| Job cynicism | (Bobbio, van Dierendonck & Manganelli, 2012) | | |
| Organizational commitment | (Cerit, 2010) | | |

| | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Employees' attitudinal outcomes (con't) | | (Harwiki, 2016) |
| | | (Jang & Kandampully, 2018) |
| | | (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko & Roberts, 2009) |
| | | (Jit, Sharma, & Kawatra, 2017) |
| | | (Joo, Byun, Jang & Lee, 2018) |
| | | (Liden et al., 2008) |
| | | (Ling et al., 2017) |
| | | (Miao, Newman, Schwarz & Xu, 2014) |
| | | (Newman, Neesham, Manville & Tse, 2018) |
| | | (Van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt & Alkema, 2014) |
| | | (Zhang, Kwong Kwan, Everett & Jian, 2012) |
| | | (Zhao, Liu & Gao, 2016) |
| | | (Zhou & Miao, 2014) |
| | Person-organization fit | (Irving & Berndt, 2017) |
| | Person-supervisor fit | (Kim & Kim, 2013) |
| | | (Safavi & Bouzari, 2020) |
| | Person-group fit | (Safavi & Bouzari, 2020) |
| | Person-job fit | (Babakus, Yavas & Ashill, 2010) |
| | Work meaningfulness | (Khan, Khan, & Chaudhry, 2015) |
| | Psychological contract fulfillment | (Panaccio et al., 2015) |
| Self-identification | (Chen, Zhu & Zhou, 2015) | |
| Organizational identification | (Lord & Brown, 2003) | |
| | (Zhang et al., 2012) | |
| Thriving at work | (Walumbwa et al., 2018) | |
| Trust | (Graham, 1991) | |
| | (Joseph & Winston, 2005) | |
| | (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010) | |
| Turnover intention | (Babakus et al., 2010) | |
| | (Chen et al., 2019) | |
| | (Deconinck & Deconinck, 2017) | |
| | (Dutta & Khatri, 2017) | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | (Hunter et al., 2013) |
| | | (Jaramillo et al., 2009) |
| | | (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016) |
| Employees' wellbeing outcomes | Job satisfaction | (Amah, 2018) |
| | | (Cerit, 2009) |
| | | (Donia, Raja, Panaccio & Wang, 2016) |
| | | (Farrington & Lillah, 2019) |
| | | (Garg, Dar & Mishra, 2018) |
| | | (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002) |
| | | (Hebert, 2003) |
| | | (Huning, Hurt & Frieder, 2020) |
| | | (Jaramillo et al., 2009) |
| | | (Jenkins & Stewart, 2008) |
| | | (Kauppila et al., 2018) |
| | | (Kaur, 2018) |
| | | (Liden et al., 2014) |
| | | (Mayer, Bardes & Piccolo, 2008) |
| | | (Neubert, Hunter & Tolentino, 2016) |
| | | (Schneider & George, 2011) |
| | | (Thompson, 2002) |
| | | (Tischler, Giambatista, McKeage & McCormick, 2016) |
| | (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) | |
| | Burnout | (Rivkin et al., 2014) |
| | | (Chen et al., 2019) |
| | Perceived organizational support | (Zhou & Miao, 2014) |
| | Psychological wellbeing | (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016) |
| | Reduced work-family conflict | (Zhang et al., 2012) |
| | Work-life balance | (Tang, Kwan, Zhang & Zhu, 2016) |
| Collaboration | (Garber, Madigan, Click & Fitzpatrick, 2009) | |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | (Grisaffe, Vanmeter & Chonko, 2016) | |
| Helping behavior | (Neubert et al., 2016) | |
| Organizational Citizenship | (Amir, 2019) | |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Employees' behavioral outcomes | Behaviors (OCB) | (Bouzari & Karatepe, 2017) |
| | | (Elche, Ruiz-Palomino & Linuesa-Langreo, 2020) |
| | | (Newman, Nielsen & Miao, 2015) |
| | | (Newman, Schwarz, Cooper & Sendjaya, 2017) |
| | Interpersonal directed OCB (OCBI) & organizational OCB (OCBO) | (Walumbwa et al., 2010) |
| | OCB focused on the community | (Liden et al., 2008) |
| | OCB focused on co-workers | (Zhao et al., 2016) |
| | OCB focused on customers | (Chen et al., 2015) |
| | Proactive behavior | (Varela, Bande, Del Rio & Jaramillo, 2019) |
| | Relational identification | (Yoshida, Sendjaya, Hirst & Cooper, 2014) |
| | Avoidance of assuming leadership responsibility | (Lacroix & Verdorfer, 2017) |
| | Voice behavior | (Chughtai, 2016) |
| | | (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018) |
| Employee deviance | (Sendjaya et al., 2018) | |
| Performance outcomes | Job performance | (Liden, Wayne, Liao & Meuser, 2014) |
| | Customer satisfaction | (Yang, Zhang, Kwan & Chen, 2018) |
| | Customer service quality and performance | (Chen et al., 2015) |
| | Customer value co-creation | (Hsiao, Lee & Chen, 2015) |
| | Customer-oriented prosocial behavior | (Chen et al., 2015) |
| | High-quality service | (Chen et al., 2015) |
| | Innovation-oriented outcomes | (Panaccio et al., 2015) |
| | Knowledge-sharing | (Tuan, 2016) |
| | Performance | (Liden et al., 2008) |
| | | (Ling et al., 2017) |
| | Return on assets | (Peterson, Galvin & Lange, 2012) |
| | Creativity | (Yang, Liu & Gu, 2017) |
| Service performance | (Chen, Zhu & Zhou, 2015) | |

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Leader-related outcomes | Effectiveness of servant leadership | (Greenleaf, Frick & Spears, 1996) |
| | | (Han & Kim, 2012) |
| | | (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007) |
| | Leader-member exchange (LMX) | (Hanse, Harlin, Jarebrant, Ulin & Winkel, 2016) |
| | | (Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski & Chaudhry, 2009) |
| | | (Lee, 2019) |
| | | (Ling, Lin & Wu, 2016) |
| | Integrity | (Bobbio et al., 2012) |
| | Trust in the leader | (Chan & Mak, 2014) |
| | | (Joseph & Winston, 2005) |
| | | (Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng, 2011) |
| | | (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010) |
| Team and organizational-level outcomes | Group-level service performance | (Liden, Wayne, Liao & Meuser, 2014) |
| | | (Walumbwa et al., 2010) |
| | Service climate at the group level | (Walumbwa et al., 2010) |
| | Service-oriented OCB | (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016) |
| | Task & person-focused OCB | (Hunter et al., 2013) |
| | Team OCB | (Ehrhart, 2004) |
| | | (Hu & Liden, 2011) |
| | | (Nohe & Michaelis, 2016) |
| | Team organizational commitment | (Overstreet, Hazen, Skipper & Hanna, 2014) |
| | Team cooperation | (Yoshida et al., 2014) |
| | Firm performance | (Huang, Li, Qiu, Yim & Wan, 2016) |
| | Operational performance | (Overstreet et al., 2014) |
| | Organizational performance | (Choudhary, Akhtar & Zaheer, 2013) |
| | Team effectiveness | (Irving & Longbotham, 2007) |
| | Team performance | (Hu & Liden, 2011) |
| | | (Schaubroeck et al., 2011) |
| | | (Van Dierendonck & Sousa, 2016) |
| | | (Hunter et al., 2013) |
| | Team psychological safety | (Schaubroeck et al., 2011) |
| | Team creativity | (Yang et al., 2017) |
| Team innovation | (Yoshida et al., 2014) | |

Source: The author based on Eva et al.'s (2019) and Zhang et al.'s (2021) metaanalyses

In the following sections, we will explore the outcome variables used in this empirical thesis to show how servant leadership can improve and influence those outcomes. These include employee's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and trust in the leader, as well as the person-supervisor fit.

2.6.7- Servant leadership and job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction can be seen as a collection of attitudes that people have about their jobs. It represents how they feel and think about their jobs. According to Locke (1976), it is "a pleasurable or positive emotional state from the appraisal of one's job or experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1297).

According to Cerit (2009), job satisfaction reflects employees' attitudes, thoughts, and feelings towards their job conditions (actual work, direct leader, and fellow employees) and job results (job security and remuneration). It also provides very useful information for the organization about employees' perceptions (Harrison, Newman & Roth, 2006). When employees are satisfied with their jobs, they demonstrate positive work behaviors such as low turnover, higher productivity, low absenteeism, and higher performance (Meyer Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004).

The ten servant leadership characteristics previously identified by Greenleaf (1977) and Spears (1998) play a significant role in job satisfaction. Servant leaders value their subordinates by providing them support and nurturing an environment in which all employees feel empowered to grow to their full potential (Greenleaf, 1998). By prioritizing subordinates' needs above their own, servant leaders provide the conditions for employees to experience greater job satisfaction (Donia et al., 2016; Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014). Servant leaders also help shape positive attitudes among their employees and create a positive work environment for both the organization and employees (Eva et al., 2019; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Employees show higher levels of satisfaction when they have leaders whose main concern is their followers' wellbeing (Yukl, 2010). Several empirical studies provide support for the servant leadership-job satisfaction relationship. Employees' perception of this servant leadership significantly increases their job satisfaction (Amah, 2018, Kaur, 2018, Neubert et al., 2016). Scholars have tested and found this to be true in various contexts, such as in the educational field (Cerit, 2009), among sales people (Jaramillo et al., 2009), and in healthcare (Farrington, & Lillah, 2019).

2.6.8- Servant leadership and organizational commitment.

The employees' desire to continue to be members of their organization is conceptualized as organizational commitment. Porter et al. (1974) refer to it as "a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values; willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and definite desire to maintain organizational membership" (Porter et al., 1974, p. 604). Thus, organizational commitment is the employees' attachment to their organization, and it is also related to the achievement of long-term organizational goals.

When employees are committed to their organizations, they are willing to make significant personal contributions, exert additional efforts beyond their job descriptions, and have a strong desire to continue working for the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Organizational commitment impacts whether an employee stays in the organization, is retained there or leaves for another job (Mowday et al., 1979).

According to Allen and Meyer (1990), organizational commitment can be seen in one of three ways: as emotional attachment (*affective commitment*), obligation (*normative commitment*) or perceived cost (*continuous commitment*). Emotional reasons lead to affective commitment or the desire to stay due to employees' emotional attachment to or involvement with their organizations

(Mayer & Allen, 1991). Employees stay because they expressly want to.

There can also be some obligation-based reasons for employees to stay in their current organizations, including a sense of debt to their supervisors, a colleague or the company itself. These reasons result in normative commitment or the desire to remain due to a feeling of obligation (Mayer & Allen, 1991). Employees stay in their organizations because they feel they should.

There are also some perceived cost-based reasons explaining why employees stay in their organizations (salary, benefits, promotions, etc.) which leads to continuance commitment or the desire to stay due to an awareness of the costs of leaving the organization (Mayer & Allen, 1991). Thus, employees stay in their organizations because they need to.

Among the three, scholars consider that affective commitment is the core essence of organizational commitment due to its relevance in determining employees' psychological behavior in organizational settings (e.g., Jackson et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2008; Ling et al., 2017; Parris & Peachey, 2012). In addition, it also has a stronger correlation with a wider range of outcomes compared to the other two types of commitment mechanisms (Mercurio, 2015).

Servant leaders' service orientation and modest attitude towards employees help the latter develop a sense of ownership, leading to a better fit with organizational values and, thus, to a more committed workforce (Dahleez, Aboramadann & Bansal, 2021). Prior research has also found support for the idea that servant leadership plays a key role in improving employees' organizational commitment (e.g., Aboramadan et al., 2020; Jang & Kampully, 2018; Jit et al., 2017; Joo et al., 2018; Liden et al., 2008; Miao et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2018).

2.6.9- Servant leadership and turnover intention.

Turnover intention refers to employee decisions regarding if they should resign from their

organizations. It is a subjective estimation regarding the probability of their leaving the organization in the near future (Mowday et al., 1983). Most studies in this area examine employees' behavioral intentions, such as their intention to search for new jobs and their intention to leave, both of which determine employee turnover. These intentions are better predictors of current turnover than other organizational variables (Carmeli & Weisberg, 2006; Griffeth et al., 2000).

Meta-analytical studies on turnover intention (Griffeth et al., 2000) have confirmed that several determinants led employees to leave their organizations, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and leadership style. Other studies (e.g., Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009) also argue that, in certain circumstances, leadership style is the main factor in determining employees' intentions to leave. However, other scholars have examined the effects of leadership style on employee turnover and provide empirical evidence that servant leadership is negatively associated with employee turnover intention (e.g., Deconinck & Deconinck, 2017; Dutta & Khatri, 2017; Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016).

2.6.10- Servant leadership and trust in the leader.

Trust is defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Trust in leadership is beyond the subordinates' control. Thus, trust in the leader can be described as the amount of confidence that a given individual has in the competence of another and the latter's tendency to act in a fair, ethical, and anticipated manner (Nyhan & Marlowe, 1997). In this study, we understand trust as "faith in and loyalty towards the leader" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990, p. 138).

Trust in the leader is highly related to servant leadership (Joseph & Winston, 2005). To earn the trust of their employees, servant leaders should empower, accept, involve, and empathize with their followers. Greenleaf (1977) argued that leadership is granted to leaders who employees trust due to their leaders' dependability and exemplification as servants. Servant leaders obtain the employees' trust because they prioritize the employees' interests and needs above their own (Farling et al., 1999).

Servant leaders build this trust by prioritizing their followers' goals and desires over their own self-interest, demonstrating their focus on the greater good. In uncertain situations, followers feel that they can rely on their leaders to prioritize their welfare over organizational objectives (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). These leaders can also generate a climate in which followers feel valued, listened to, and invested in, leading followers to reciprocate by trusting in their leaders (Lee et al., 2020).

According to Lee, Tian, and Knight (2020), research has suggested that trust in the leader is a key mechanism which explains the influence servant leaders have on follower outcomes (e.g., Joseph & Winston, 2005; Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng, 2011), as well as demonstrating the positive consequences of servant leaders (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

2.6.11- Servant leadership and person-supervisor fit.

The numerous benefits of a good fit between employees and their work environment have made this approach a point of interest among both individuals and organizations. Employees have a strong need to feel that they fit within their work environment (e.g., Schneider, 2001). In part because of this interest, research on fit continues to be one of the most eclectic domains in management (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). As Caplan (1987) argues, "organizations and their members have a fundamental stake in how well characteristics of the person and the environment of the organization fit one another" (Caplan, 1987, p. 248). Companies also make significant efforts to

find and hire employees who fit the most, in the same way that employees attempt to find compatibility with their organizational environment (Astakhova, 2016).

The concept of fit concerns the extent to which people perceive that their characteristics (personalities and values) are similar to those of their environment (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider, 2001). Several studies have demonstrated that fit at work is related with numerous positive and favorable workplace and individual outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work performance, and lower turnover intention (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Astakhova, 2016; Van Vianen, 2000; Zhang, Lam & Deng, 2017).

Person-environment fit includes different aspects (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), such as person-job, person-supervisor, person-group, and person-organization fit. In this thesis (see study 2), we focus on person-supervisor fit. Person-supervisor fit reveals how employees' personalities and goals are compatible with those of their superiors (Hamstra et al., 2019). Researchers have demonstrated that, if employees feel that their values match those of their supervisors, they are satisfied with their jobs and general work environments (Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, & Couch, 1980).

Broadly speaking, adopting appropriate leadership behaviors in organizations improves the fit between the organization and its employees (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2010; Vondey, 2010). Leaders can improve the perceived fit between their team members and the workplace characteristics that give rise to favorable job outcomes (Klaic, Burtscher, & Jonas, 2018). In this same vein, servant leadership is about achieving compatibility with followers, prioritizing the followers' goals and values, and nurturing a culture of servanthood (Eva et al., 2019). As mentioned, servant leadership mainly focuses on followers' psychological demands as a goal in and of itself (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014).

2.7 Mediator Variables in Servant Leadership Research

Table 2.4 - Mediator variables between servant leadership and outcomes

| SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWER BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES | | |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Outcomes</i> | <i>Mediators</i> | <i>Studies</i> |
| Organizational Citizenship behavior (OCB) | Commitment to the supervisor | Walumbwa et al. (2010) |
| | Organizational commitment | Howladar & Rahman (2021) |
| | Trust | Shim et al. (2016) |
| | Need satisfaction | Chiniara & Bentein (2016) |
| | Job satisfaction | Grisaffe et al. (2016); Ozyilmaz & Cicek (2015) |
| Helping behavior | Job satisfaction | Neubert et al. (2016) |
| Voice behavior | Organizational commitment | Lapointe & Vandenberghe (2018) |
| SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWER ATTITUDINAL & WELL-BEING OUTCOMES | | |
| <i>Outcomes</i> | <i>Mediators</i> | <i>Studies</i> |
| Employee engagement | Trust climate | Ling et al. (2017) |
| | Trust in the leader | Rahal & Farmanesh, (2022) |
| Job satisfaction | Trust | Chan and Mak (2014); Dami et al. (2022) |
| Thriving at work | Organizational commitment | Walumbwa et al. (2018) |
| Turnover intention | Job Satisfaction | Westbrook et al. (2022) |
| | Trust in the leader | Kashyap & Rangnekar (2016) |
| | Person-job fit | Babakus et al. (2010) |
| | Organizational commitment | Jaramillo et al. (2009); Yavas et al. (2015) |
| | Person-organizational fit | Jaramillo et al. (2009) Dahleez et al. (2021) |
| Organizational commitment | Follower need satisfaction | van Dierendonck et al. (2014) |
| | Affective and cognitive trust | Zhou & Miao (2014) |
| | Trust | Ling et al. (2017) |
| SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES | | |
| <i>Outcomes</i> | <i>Mediators</i> | <i>Studies</i> |
| Creativity | Job satisfaction | Neubert et al. (2016) |
| Firm performance | Organizational commitment | Overstreet et al. (2014) |
| Patient satisfaction | Job satisfaction | Neubert et al. (2016) |
| Task performance | Need satisfaction | Chiniara & Bentein (2016) |
| Team performance | Affect-based trust | Schaubroeck et al. (2011) |
| Individual Performance | Job Satisfaction | Westbrook et al. (2022) |

SOURCE: Author's elaboration based on Eva et al. (2019) and Web of Science search

Servant leadership has been linked to a variety of outcomes, including behavioral outcomes, attitudinal and well-being outcomes, and performance outcomes. Similarly, mediating variables have been identified as important factors that help to explain these relationships. See Table 2.4 above which presents previous research findings of the mediating variables used in this thesis.

Mediators for servant leadership and follower behavioral outcomes include organizational commitment, commitment to the supervisor, trust, need satisfaction, and job satisfaction (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Grisaffe et al., 2016; Howladar & Rahman, 2021; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Neubert et al., 2016; Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015; Shim et al., 2016; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Mediators for servant leadership and follower attitudinal and wellbeing outcomes consist of trust climate, trust in the leader, job satisfaction, person-job fit, person-organizational fit, organizational commitment, follower need satisfaction, and affective and cognitive trust (Babakus et al., 2010; C.H. Chan & Mak, 2014; Dahleez et al., 2021; Dami et al., 2022; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016; Ling et al., 2017; Rahal & Farmanesh, 2022; Van Dierendonck et al., 2014; Walumbwa et al., 2018; Yavas et al., 2015; Zhou & Miao, 2014).

Mediators for servant leadership and performance outcomes include job satisfaction, organizational commitment, need satisfaction, and affect-based trust (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Neubert et al., 2016; Overstreet et al., 2014; Westbrook et al., 2022).

2.8 Moderators and Intervening Variables in Servant Leadership Research

Scholars have focused on unraveling the boundary conditions in which servant leadership operates (Eva et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). Researchers have chosen different moderators to help explain the phenomenon.

Based on Eva et al.'s (2019) systematic literature review, we can report that, at the *organizational level*, the industry, the organizational structure, and employees' views of the overall

organizational culture can influence the effectiveness of servant leadership. At the *team level*, the team's perceptions of power distance and a caring ethical climate are important. And, lastly, at the *leader-follower relations level*, analyzing the leader-member-exchange (LMX), trust in leadership, and leader-follower interactions have been a common moderator of choice for researchers.

According to Eva et al.'s (2019) systematic review, other moderators used include followers' personality (proactive personality and extraversion), their beliefs (ideal leader prototype and collectivism), and experience (tenure and in- experience), as well as a range of follower behaviors (e.g., OCB) and attitudes (e.g., psychological contract and satisfaction),

Zhang et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis' findings introduce a cultural perspective and warn that servant leadership is not equally effective across different cultures (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004; van Dierendonck, 2011). By reviewing the extant literature on cultural effects and the effectiveness of servant leadership, some researchers (e.g., Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010; Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009) have analyzed several cultural moderators, including masculinity values, individualism, power distance, and traditionality, which influence the overall predictability of servant leadership's effectiveness and impact on outcomes.

Furthermore, drawing on social learning theory, Wu et al. (2020) argue that follower dispositional self-interest is a boundary condition affecting the transference of managers' servant leadership to followers' engagement in serving behaviors; accordingly, follower serving self-efficacy is the underlying psychological mechanism. Additionally, Wu et al. (2020) encourage further research on the processes through which servant leadership relates to outcomes, as well as further exploration of leader and follower characteristics that may impact these processes (Eva et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020).

For the above reasons and in response to these calls, in this doctoral thesis we will empirically evaluate the moderating role of employees' emotional intelligence and their core self-evaluation. In so doing, we will be able to understand which levels of employees' emotional intelligence and core

self-evaluation servant leadership have the greatest impact on work outcomes.

By understanding these boundary conditions, we will be able to create a holistic view of the optimal employees' characteristics with which servant leadership behavior can best maximize employee work outcomes. This creates a template for how organizations can best operationalize their practices to obtain the benefits of servant leadership. Below we explain these two variables in more detail.

2.8.1- Employee's emotional intelligence as a moderator

Emotional intelligence is related with individuals' ability to understand and manage both their own feelings and emotions and those of others. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's own thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). To summarize, the four dimensions of emotional intelligence are: the perception of emotion; the integration and assimilation of emotion; knowledge about emotions; and management of emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990)

Thus, emotional intelligence implies having abilities such as perceiving and understanding emotions, managing and using them, but also having the ability to combine intelligence, empathy, and emotions to enrich interpersonal dynamics (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008). Individuals with a great deal of emotional intelligence can identify and understand the meanings of emotions and manage and regulate them as the basis for problem-solving, reasoning, thinking, and acting (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 1999).

Research on emotional intelligence has found that it predicts performance in a number of areas, including professional and academic performance (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). More recently, Barabuto et al. (2014) carried out one of the first studies to examine the role emotional

intelligence plays as an antecedent to servant leadership, providing empirical evidence on emotional intelligence's effectiveness from both the leaders' and subordinates' perspectives. Emotional intelligence is thus a good predictor of the servant-leader's approach to leadership, but it may not be a good predictor of servant-leader behaviors as assessed by the leader's followers (Barbuto et al., 2014). By contrast, Du Plessis et al. (2015) argue that subordinates who rate their leaders as having a high level of emotional intelligence also rate their leaders as embodying a high level of servant leadership.

We will analyze the conditional mechanism of employees' emotional intelligence, considering the latter an intervening variable in the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader. We want to examine whether a high degree of emotional intelligence among employees strengthens the positive relationship between the servant leadership employees perceive and their trust in their leaders.

2.8.2- Employee's core self-evaluation as a moderator

Over the last two decades, a growing number of scholars has focused on a comprehensive personality trait called 'core self-evaluation' (Judge Locke & Durham, 1997). Judge et al. (1997) proposed that this concept is a broad and latent personality trait, referring to people's basic evaluation of their own worthiness, effectiveness, and capabilities as individuals (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). Having a high core self-evaluation leads to a sense of effectiveness, confidence, and being in control of the environment; contrarily, lower levels lead to self-underestimation, a lack of confidence, and the inability to control the environment (Judge & Bono, 2001).

To better understand the process through which employees' core self-evaluations influence outcomes, Judge et al. (1997) proposed that core self-evaluations may influence outcomes by affecting the appraisals people make when confronting different job characteristics or the way they behave and

take actions. Chang et al. (2012) argued that employees with high core self-evaluations pay more attention to the positive features of their environment, which, in turn, indirectly impacts their achievement of work outcomes.

The core self-evaluation concept includes four personality traits: 1) self-esteem, which is an overall appraisal of one's self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965); 2) generalized self-efficacy, i.e., an estimate of one's ability to perform and cope successfully within an extensive range of situations (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001); 3) neuroticism, which reflects the way people rate their own feelings of insecurity, guiltiness, and anxiety (Costa & McCrae, 1988); and 4) the locus of control, which is the belief that the desired effects are the result of one's own behavior rather than a question of fate or actions by other powerful individuals (Rotter, 1966).

Judge and colleagues noted that the core self-evaluations construct is a better predictor of outcomes than any of the four traits it encompasses (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge, 2009; Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998; Judge et al., 2003). In fact, research has associated core self-evaluation significantly with critical organizational and work outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Judge, Heller & Klinger, 2008; Zhang et al., 2014), job performance (Kacmar, Collins, Harris & Judge, 2009; Judge et al., 2005, 2003; Judge & Bono, 2001), organizational commitment (Stumpp, Hülshager, Muck & Maier, 2009), and OCB (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2010), to name a few.

Other studies have examined the role core self-evaluation plays as an antecedent of servant leadership. For instance, Liden, Panaccio, et al. (2014) suggest reasons why the core self-evaluation trait has to be positively related to servant leadership: due to the belief in one's ability to exert environmental influence; the focus on the positive side of things; the adoption of altruistic behaviors; and the reduced likelihood to seek approval when given opportunities to fill leadership roles. All these reasons potentially indicate a direct and positive relationship between core self-evaluation traits and servant leadership behavior.

In our research we seek to examine the employees' side of the story. By examining their core self-evaluation traits, we will be able to understand what kind of employees are more compatible and fit better with servant leaders and shed light on the effects employees' core self-evaluation traits have on servant leadership's impact on employees' job satisfaction. Thus, in this study (see study 2), we will use employees' core self-evaluation as a moderator variable.

2.9 Comparison between Servant Leadership and Other Leadership Theories

In this section, we will present a brief overview of the theoretical and empirical arguments presented in the literature of how servant leadership differs from transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership styles.

While there has been a meteoric rise in interest when it comes to these three leadership styles, the field has provided little direction regarding whether these emerging approaches actually perform as their supporters claim. In other words, while there is certainly a lot of attention being focused on these ethical/moral values-based leadership forms, whether they actually explain anything "new" at all remains to be seen. This is reflective of scholars' general concern regarding potential construct redundancy, which occurs when research promotes new leadership theories with novel behavioral constructs without evaluating their distinctiveness and usefulness compared to existing leadership approaches (Derue et al., 2011).

From an empirical standpoint to the best of our knowledge, there have only been two meta-analyses conducted (Banks et al., 2018; Hoch et al., 2018) that have examined that servant leadership is a stronger predictor of follower outcomes than transformational leadership, suggesting that servant leadership has unique effects on follower outcomes that go beyond those of transformational leadership.

Banks et al. (2018) raised doubts about the necessity of multiple leadership theories, as there was insufficient evidence to show that each theory differed significantly from the previous one both theoretically and empirically. Two meta-analyses by Banks et al. (2018) and Hoch et al. (2018) provided empirical evidence that supports the incremental validity of servant leadership over other leadership approaches. Hoch et al. (2018) reported that servant leadership predicted a 12% greater incremental variance in follower outcomes compared to transformational leadership, which was larger than the incremental variance predicted by authentic (5.2%) and ethical (6.2%) leadership. However, these findings are limited by endogeneity bias, measurement errors, and common method bias as suggested by Antonakis et al. (2010). Additionally, the small number of studies and relatively low sample sizes considered in these meta-analyses (Hoch et al., 2018) further limit the ability to verify these findings.

Given the limited samples used in the aforementioned studies, further research is needed before a definitive conclusion can be inferred in the sense that servant leadership is empirically distinct from the three other leadership theories. However, consistent with previous studies (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Eva et al., 2018; Gregory Stone et al., 2004; Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011), we concur with the idea that, conceptually, servant leadership is distinct from other value-based leadership approaches in terms of its overarching motive and objectives.

All in all, conceptually speaking, there is a greater likelihood that servant leaders will set the following priorities for their leadership focus compared to other types of leaders: followers first, organizations second, and themselves last (Sendjaya, 2015). In terms of the other priorities in the organization, Stone et al. (2004) suggested that organizational goals are merely a by-product achieved over the long-term by deliberately focusing on followers' needs.

We will address these conceptual differences in more detail below.

2.9.1- Servant leadership and transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership was first discussed in a more political context by Burns (1978) and later Bass (1985) who developed and expanded on Burns' political concept of transformational leadership and applied it to organizational contexts.

According to Bass, transformational leadership involves a leader's ability in enhancing the performance of followers beyond their beyond ordinary limits" (Bass, 1985). In contrast to Burns' approach, Bass' initial conceptualization and application of transformational leadership to organizations did not specify an ethical or moral dimension, highlighting its importance much later (Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Bass, transformational leaders change their followers to be able to perform beyond expectations by engaging in "the four Is" of behavior: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

With respect to the comparison between servant leadership and transformational leadership, Van Dierendonck et al. (2014) explained that servant leadership prioritizes the psychological needs of followers as an end goal, while transformational leadership places these needs below the organization's objectives. Although servant leadership and transformational leadership share a common emphasis on meeting followers' needs, there is a fundamental distinction in their motives and the importance given to followers relative to other organizational priorities. This is precisely where the two leadership styles diverge.

The primary loyalty of transformational leaders is to their organizations (Graham, 1991). By contrast, servant leaders' motive for focusing on followers' needs is to develop the latter multidimensionally (i.e., an end in itself); contrarily, transformational leaders' motive is to enable their followers to better achieve organizational goals (i.e., a means to an end). There is an obvious risk of manipulation by transformational leaders to achieve organizational goals or to meet their personal goals. These leaders could potentially engage in "inauthentic" transformational leadership (Bass &

Steidlmeier, 1999). Narcissism may also arise, whereby the transformational leaders' narrow focus on short-term maximum profit may ultimately have long-term devastating consequences (Giampetro-Meyer et al., 1998).

According to Van Dierendonck (2011), the primary distinction between servant leadership and transformational leadership lies in the service ideal of servant leadership, which emphasizes humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance. These elements are not explicitly emphasized in transformational leadership theory.

Transformational leadership may be viewed as incomplete due to the absence of a strong, explicitly moral or ethical dimension. Specifically, "transformational" leaders may also be unethical or abusive of their followers and act in ways that are self-serving, as well as contrary to the espoused values and organizational interests (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). This has been exemplified by corporate failures occurring under leaders widely viewed as transformational, such as CEOs, Kenneth Lay (Tourish, 2013) and Albert Dunlap (Fastenburg, 2010).

2.9.2- Servant leadership and authentic leadership

Luthans and Avolio (2003) proposed authentic leadership as a specific type of leadership form. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) and Avolio and Luthans (2006) further developed this concept following major corporate scandals. Authentic leaders are described as having great moral characters and are "deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths" (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 802). Authentic leadership is viewed as a root concept or precursor to all other forms of positive leadership, including transformational, ethical, and servant leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Avolio and Gardner (2005) suggest that authentic leaders exhibit traits such as self-

awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing, which encourage authenticity in their followers. Harter (2002) describes authenticity as the act of individuals expressing their genuine thoughts and emotions, or their "true self."

As occurs with authentic leadership, servant leadership also acknowledges the importance of being authentic and true in the leaders' interactions with others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). However, for servant leaders, the tendency to act with an in-depth sense of self-awareness and self-regulation might come from a spiritual and/or altruistic motive to serve others, both of which are absent in the authentic leadership framework. In other words, servant leaders are authentic not for the sake of being authentic, but, rather, because they are driven by either a higher calling or an inner conviction to serve and make a positive difference for others (Eva et al., 2019).

Comparing this operationalization of authentic leadership with the six servant leadership characteristics, we can see the overlap with two characteristics, namely, authenticity and humility. In terms of humility, authentic leadership places importance on the willingness to learn, but may not prioritize the act of stepping back and giving room to others. With respect to humility, the willingness to learn can only be found in authentic leadership; the willingness to stand back and give room to others is missing. Therefore, there is also the possibility, from an agency theory viewpoint, that leaders may work authentically to increase shareholder value, believing that it is their moral obligation as managers. Thus this restricts authentic leadership as a fundamental theory for positive leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Van Dierendonck (2011) proposes that servant leadership theory incorporates consideration of all stakeholders from a stewardship perspective. In this context, authentic leadership can be incorporated into servant leadership, particularly due to its explicit focus on empowerment, stewardship, and providing direction.

2.9.3- Servant leadership and ethical leadership

The third leadership theory that has some similarity with servant leadership is ethical leadership. Brown et al. (2005) defined it as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120).

Ethical leaders seek to do the right thing and conduct their lives and leadership roles in an ethical manner (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership draws on social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and posits that ethical leaders influence followers to engage in ethical behaviors through behavioral modeling and transactional leadership behaviors (e.g., rewarding, communicating, and punishing).

The recent focus on ethical leadership is based on the belief that ethics represent a critical component in effective leadership and that leaders are responsible for creating ethical climates and promoting ethical behavior (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership is a more normative approach that focuses on the question of appropriate behavior in organizations, while stressing the importance of direct involvement by employees, building trust, and, especially, behaving ethically (Brown et al. 2005).

According to Van Dierendonck (2011), ethical leadership shares similarities with servant leadership in its focus on caring for people, integrity, trustworthiness, and serving the common good. However, servant leadership differs in that it more explicitly incorporates stewardship as a critical aspect of effective leadership. This approach entails taking a long-term perspective that considers the needs and interests of all stakeholders.

Leaders who follow ethical leadership style tend to have a more rule-based and prescriptive

approach to determining what is "good." In contrast, servant leaders take a more flexible and context-specific approach, considering both the needs of their followers and the organizational context more explicitly (Eva et al., 2019).

Ethical leadership theory tends to prioritize directing and providing normative guidance to followers, while servant leadership places a greater emphasis on developing the skills and abilities of those being led. The latter centers less on how things should be done given the organization's norms but, rather, on how people want to do things themselves and whether they are able to do so (Van Dierendonck, 2011). And, lastly, ethical leadership theory places emphasis on caring for people and being honest and trustworthy (Brown & Treviño, 2006), it pays relatively less attention to authenticity and providing direction for followers (Eva et al., 2019).

In the next three chapters, we will further explore servant leadership's contribution to the leadership field by empirically studying how it influences outcomes. We will frame our inquiry on social-based theoretical frameworks.

Chapter three:

STUDY 1 - SERVANT LEADERSHIP EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEE

OUTCOMES: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL

INTELLIGENCE AND TRUST IN THE LEADER

STUDY 1 - SERVANT LEADERSHIP EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRUST IN THE LEADER

3.1 Abstract

Purpose. This study aims to explore the relationship between servant leadership and employees' work outcomes, namely: (i) turnover intention; and (ii) affective commitment. For this, this study examines contextual mechanisms in which trust in the leader works as a mediator, and employees' emotional intelligence as a moderator.

Methodology. This study applies a cross-sectional research design to test the research model in the educational sector in Tehran, Iran. Questionnaires were applied using the paper-and-pencil procedure and returned directly to the researcher. The hypotheses were tested via structural equation modelling (SEM) and path modeling techniques, applying *AMOS* (v. 22) and the *PROCES* macro tool (Hayes, 2018).

Findings. Research results provide evidence of the mediating role that employees' trust in the leader plays on the relationships between servant leadership and employees' attitudinal outcomes (commitment and turnover intention). Moreover, employee's emotional intelligence plays a conditional role in this indirect effect on servant leadership.

Research limitations. The research design and the single informant procedure do not allow establishing causality among the study variables. To avoid potential common method variance, future research should validate and extend the present findings through a longitudinal research design, provide additional sources of informants, and include other contextual variables in the research model.

Practical implications. The study findings suggest that servant leaders have a better impact on employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence. This has organizational implications when recruiting, developing, and retaining employees. Organizations can also improve employees' attitudinal outcomes by better selecting and developing managers with a servant leadership style and employees with emotional intelligence.

Originality/value. This study addresses three key gaps in the servant leadership domain: First, the underlying mechanism through which servant leadership leads to attitudinal outcomes such as organizational commitment, that is, turnover intention; second, the role of employee emotional intelligence and trust in the leader as moderator and mediator, respectively; and, third, these relations are studied in Iran, a developing country.

Keywords: Servant leadership, Trust in the leader, Affective commitment, Turnover Intention, Emotional Intelligence, Moderated-mediation model.

3.2 Introduction

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely to become servants themselves?

(Greenleaf, 1970)

Since research has widely acknowledged that unethical issues cause many business failures, scholars have become increasingly interested in ethical and moral approaches to leadership (Lee, Lyubovnikova, Tian & Knight, 2020) in recent years. However, these ethical values are present in previous leadership theories though they have never been as prominent as now in servant leadership theory (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This is because servant leadership varies from other leadership theories at its core, that is, leadership attention is follower-centered in contrast to the traditional leader-centered focus (Laub, 1999; Liden, Wayne, Liao & Meuser, 2014; Sun, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Servant leadership differs from other approaches by giving importance to fulfilling the needs of followers, promoting their participation in the broader community in which the organization operates, and leading them to exhibit servant leadership behaviors as well (Wu et al., 2021). Servant leadership focuses on moral and compassionate actions and emphasizes the advantages for all stakeholders. It places concern for others above consideration for oneself or the organization (Laub, 1999; Liden *et al.*, 2014; Sun, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, some researchers see it as a leadership style that can potentially handle the demands of the modern workplace (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

According to Liden et al. (2014), servant leadership is in its nascent stages of theoretical development. Although a growing body of empirical research suggests that this leadership style leads to favorable behavioral and attitudinal outcomes among followers, relatively little research has been

done on the underlying mechanisms that drive these effects (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2014). Furthermore, since servant leadership engages followers in relational, ethical, and emotional dimensions (Northouse, 2016), this key focus and emphasis on the leader-follower relationship laid the foundation for this study to examine variables such as trust in the leader and emotional intelligence, both of which are significant in establishing a high-quality relationship between leaders and followers (Agote et al., 2016; Bligh, 2017; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Goleman, 1995).

Therefore, in this study, we examine the mediating role of followers' trust in the leader in the relationship between servant leadership and employees' attitudinal work outcomes, namely, organizational affective commitment and turn-over Intention. Furthermore, the main contribution of this study to the servant leadership theoretical framework is examining the conditional role of employee's emotional Intelligence. We frame this study within social exchange theory due to the crucial role it plays among leaders and followers.

3.3 Hypothesis Development

Servant Leadership as a Means of Serving Others and the Community

Greenleaf coined the servant leadership approach in the 1970s in his seminal paper, "The Servant as Leader," in which he emphasized the need for a novel approach to leadership, one that put serving others first and foremost (Greenleaf, 1970). Recently, Eva et al. (2019) have formulated that servant leadership has 3 main characteristics: "an other-oriented approach to leadership; a manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests; and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community" (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

In other words, servant leaders help people develop, strive, and prosper (McMinn, 2001;

Russell & Stone, 2002). It is therefore a leadership style that emphasizes the need for leaders to be attentive to the concerns of their followers and empathize, take care of, and nurture them (Northouse, 2007). According to Greenleaf, the best test of the servant leader is answering these queries: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?” (1970, p. 7)

Avolio and Luthans (2003) propose that servant leadership involves leaders creating opportunities within the organization to foster the growth of their followers. Unlike other leadership styles that prioritize the organization's overall success, a servant leader is genuinely concerned with serving and supporting their followers' development (Greenleaf, 1977). This people-centered approach cultivates strong relationships and promotes a safe environment within the organization. Additionally, employees tend to strongly support leaders who demonstrate a deep commitment and reliability as a servant (Greenleaf, 1998). This creates an environment in which followers are motivated to reach their full potential. The servant leadership approach is based on the premise that the organization can achieve its long-term goals by prioritizing the growth, development, and wellbeing of its followers (Stone et al., 2004).

In addition, building on the work of Greenleaf (1977), many scholars have developed their own conceptual models to measure and explain servant leadership (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Liden, Wayne, Meuser, Hu, Wu & Liao, 2015; Robinson & Williamson, 2014; Sendjaya, 2015; Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Spears (2004) listed ten characteristics that servant leaders embody: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment, and community building. Liden et al. (2008) also provide a conceptual model that stands out for being community focused. This approach includes dimensions such as creating value for the community,

conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, emotional restoration, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically.

Using social exchange theory as a framework, we conceptualize leadership as a reciprocal relationship between managers and workers, employers and employees, and supervisors and supervisees. When leaders make investment in their employees, the latter are likely to react positively to these investments (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). As servant leadership prioritizes the growth and development of followers, followers then feel obliged to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the organization's success and the achievement of its goals (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005).

According to the comprehensive nature of servant leadership, several previous empirical studies have demonstrated the positive effects of servant leadership on multiple organizational outcomes (Eva et al., 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011). It improves employees' engagement (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014), commitment (Zhou & Miao, 2014), performance (Liden et al., 2008), satisfaction (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008), trust (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010), wellbeing (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016), helping behavior (Neubert et al., 2016), turnover intention (Hunter et al., 2013), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Newman et al., 2017).

This research aims to explore the relationship between servant leaders and three specific work outcomes presented alongside the hypotheses in the next section.

Servant Leadership and Trust in the Leader

Trust is understood as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Furthermore, some have also described it as the amount of confidence that a given individual

has in the competence of another and the latter's tendency to act in a fair, ethical, and anticipated manner (Nyhan & Marlowe, 1997).

Various other scholars have conceptualized trust in different ways. For instance, McAllister, (1995) describes trust as a bi-dimensional construct dealing with cognitive trust as competence and responsibility, and affective trust as a feeling of emotional security relying on faith in the interaction. However, in this study we agree with the definition of trust as "faith in and loyalty towards the leader" as argued by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter, (1990, p. 138).

Extant literature reveals that trust in the leader is related to a large series of favorable work outcomes within organizations, such as more information-sharing and cooperative behaviors (García et al., 2017), organizational citizenship behavior (Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012), performance and job satisfaction (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), commitment (Costa, 2003), and less turnover intention (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that researchers and practitioners are interested in identifying the mechanisms through which trust in the leader can be developed as well as those factors which moderate this relationship (e.g. Gillespie & Mann, 2004).

Leaders are called on to play a key role within organizations in determining organizational effectiveness across all levels (e.g., individual, team, and unit). A key component in a leader's ability to be effective in such environments is the degree to which subordinates and co-workers trust that leader (Burke et al., 2007). A recent meta-analysis based on 130 independent studies (Lee et al., 2020) provides significant evidence that servant leadership has incremental predictive validity over other leadership styles and that the link between servant leadership and some positive work behavioral outcomes could be partially explained by trust in the leader, procedural justice, and leader-member exchange (Lee et al., 2020).

Joseph and Winston (2005) assert that trust in the leader is highly related to servant leadership. Servant leaders elicit trust in employees by empowering, accepting, involving, and

empathizing with their followers. Greenleaf (1977) argued that leadership is conferred to leaders who are trusted due to their dependability and exemplification as servants. Servant leaders obtain the employees' trust because they prioritize the employees' interests and needs above those of themselves (Farling et al., 1999). Using a sample of 555 employees, Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010) found that servant leadership is a significant predictor of trust in leaders, as it contributes with accessible relationships, responsible morality, and transforming influence, that is, the key servant leadership behaviors that play a significant role in developing and maintaining the followers' trust in the leader.

The social exchange framework provides the rationale to explain the process through which servant leaders influence their relationships with followers and engender stronger trust among the latter in their leaders. When servant leaders put followers' needs and interests above those of themselves, considering their followers' growth and seeking to benefit them, when their words and deeds coincide, when they engage in moral dialogue with followers, and they instill a sense of purpose and meaning in followers, followers are more likely to reciprocate the trust they are given (Chan & Mak, 2014). Taken together, we argue that servant leadership is related to a high-quality social exchange relationship, which in turn influences subordinates' trust in the leader. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1. Perceived servant leadership among employees is positively related to trust in the leader.

Servant Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as employee desire to remain members of their organizations (Mowday et al., 1979). Organizational commitment influences whether an employee stays at the organization, is retained there, or leaves for another job (turnover).

The three-component model of organizational commitment proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990) is the most well-accepted approach to define the different facets of organizational

commitment (Cohen, 2007). They proposed three conceptually separated dimensions: normative, continuance, and affective commitment. Normative commitment is a feeling of obligation to remain in the organization, built upon the culture and social settings and not the organization per se. Continuance commitment refers to the willingness to stay in an organization due to the costs that are associated with leaving. Lastly, affective commitment occurs when an employee feels emotionally attached and devoted to an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Among these 3 dimensions, affective commitment is known to be the core essence of organizational commitment due to the stronger correlation it has with a wider range of outcomes compared to the other two corresponding components (Mercurio, 2015).

According to Miao et al. (2014), leaders are often personified as the ‘face’ or ‘representative’ of the organization. Also, Zhou and Miao, (2014) state that servant leadership characteristics are equivalent to intrinsic antecedents of affective commitment. Consequently, the leader's behaviors (e.g., fulfilling followers’ needs, providing support and growth) will adjust affective commitment.

There is convergent evidence confirming the effectiveness of servant leaders on inducing organizational commitment among their followers (Liden et al., 2008). The mechanism by which servant leadership exerts this effect on affective commitment can be explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). In this respect and drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), servant leaders, by supporting their followers (helping them develop themselves and their skills), encourage followers to reciprocate with higher levels of affective commitment; this occurs by followers increasing their attachment and emotional dedication to the leader, and, subsequently to the organization (Zhou & Miao, 2014). Thus, we hypothesize:

H2. Perceived servant leadership among employees is positively related to affective commitment.

Servant Leadership and Turnover Intention

Turnover intention refers to the employees' subjective estimation regarding the probability of their leaving an organization in the near future (Mowday et al., 1983). A meta-analysis on turnover intention (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000) demonstrated that employees' decisions to leave their organizations were sparked by several determinants such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and leadership style.

Prior studies (Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009) also argue that leadership style in certain situations is a main factor in determining the employee's intention to leave. Moreover, many studies have examined the effects of leadership style on employee turnover and provide evidence that servant leadership is negatively associated with employees' turnover intention (e.g., Deconinck & Deconinck, 2017; Dutta & Khatri, 2017; Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016).

When this servant leadership does not exist, employees are more likely to leave the organization (Hunter et al., 2013). Thus, we expect to corroborate that servant leadership will have a negative association with turnover intention, such that:

***H3.** Perceived servant leadership among employees is negatively associated with employees' turnover intention.*

The Mediation Role of Trust in the Leader between Servant Leadership and Outcomes

Social exchange theory views the social behavior of individuals as a result of exchanges in both economic and social outcomes (Lambe, Wittmann & Spekman, 2001). According to this theory, a relationship which provides more gains than losses will produce mutual trust (Blau, 1964). The interaction and exchange process between the servant leader and subordinates is central for building their relationship (Liden et al., 2008).

Trust in the Leader and Organizational Commitment. Employee trust in the leader could foster a basic emotional link between employees and their work context (Rajah, Song & Arvey, 2011). In an atmosphere of positive emotions, employees are driven by this positive effect (Barsade, 2002). Accordingly, they may identify with and attach to their organization more easily, thus showing higher affective commitment. Previous research provides support for this. For example, both Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) and Burke et al.'s (2007) studies demonstrate that employee trust in their leaders is positively related to their affective commitment towards the organization.

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) also noticed that those who exhibit trust in the organization will reciprocate in the form of the desired behavior. Mayer and Gavin (2005) demonstrated that employees who feel that their leader demonstrates care and consideration for them will reciprocate back to the organization. One could suggest that commitment towards the organization could constitute such desired behavior. Nicholson and Johns (1985) posit that employees with high organizational trust also have strong work ethics and, therefore, have strong organizational commitment. Other studies have found that trust has a strong positive impact on affective commitment (Xiong, Lin, Li & Wang, 2016) and, consequently, a significant positive impact on organizational commitment.

Drawing on the emotional contagion perspective (Schoenewolf, 1990), it is reasonable to argue that employees' trust in their leader will be positively related to their affective commitment to the servant leader. Emotional contagion is "a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotional states and behavioral attitudes" (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50). As a dynamic process, emotional contagion has subtle but important ripple effects in groups and organizations (Barsade, 2002).

Thus, when employees trust in their leader, the likelihood that it translates into

commitment is high. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4. Trust in the leader is positively associated with organizational commitment.

Trust in the Leader and Turnover Intention. Undesired turnover occurs when an employee that is productive and beneficial to the organization chooses to voluntarily leave. This type of turnover can have huge financial implications for the organization due to the cost of recruiting and training employee replacements, lost productivity, and the loss of the unique knowledge and skills held by the employee leaving (Burke et al., 2007). Trust in the leader is closely related to employee retention. According to a survey conducted on 655 employees to evaluate what factors might influence employee intentions to stay with employers, trust was the most important element to encourage employee willingness to stay with their employers (HR Focus, 2001).

According to some scholars (Burke et al., 2007), employee trust in their leaders is more important than organizational trust, as employees feel that it is the leader who represents the entire organization (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). Dirks and Ferrin (2002) indicate that lower levels of trust in leaders result in increased employee turnover, as employees with lower levels of trust in their leaders perceive that their leaders lack integrity, fairness, honesty, and competence. Davis et al. (2000) argue that when supervisors create a trusting environment within their team, employees feel safer and are more loyal to the organization (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer & Tan, 2000). Accordingly, when employees do not feel like their supervisor is looking out for their best interests and is likely to exploit any vulnerability, the likelihood that the employees will leave the organization may be high. Thus, we hypothesize:

H5. Trust in the leader is negatively associated with turnover intention.

Trust in the Leader as a Mediator. Servant leaders build trust by prioritizing their followers' goals and desires over their own self-interest, demonstrating their focus on the greater good. In risky situations, followers feel that they can rely on their leader to prioritize their welfare over organizational objectives (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). These leaders can also generate a climate in which followers feel valued, listened to, and invested in and reciprocate by having trust in their leader.

Trust in the leader has, therefore, been posited as a key mechanism to explain the influence servant leaders have on follower outcomes (e.g., Joseph & Winston, 2005; Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng, 2011) and on creating a safe psychological climate, demonstrating the positive consequences of servant leaders (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Previous research also provides empirical evidence that trust in the leader mediates the effects of leadership on various work-related outcomes such as job performance (Zhu, Newman, Miao & Hooke, 2013) and employee citizenship (Rubin, Bommer & Bachrach, 2010).

To further explore the mediating role of trust in the leader between servant leadership and two outcomes, i.e., employees' organizational commitment and turnover intention, we hypothesize:

H6. *Trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and commitment.*

H7. *Trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and turnover.*

The Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence between Servant Leadership and Trust in the Leader

Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) defined emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's own thinking and actions." Accordingly, emotional intelligence implies having abilities such as perceiving and understanding

emotions, managing, and using them, but also having the ability to combine intelligence, empathy, and emotions to enrich interpersonal dynamics (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008).

The science journalist, Daniel Goleman, popularized the perception and expression of emotion as a domain of intelligence (Goleman, 1995). His emotional competence framework represents emotional intelligence as a two-faceted ability: how we manage ourselves (personal competence) and how we manage our relationships (social competence). Appropriately, emotional intelligence has been promoted as a core variable that accelerates social interactions and relationships (Miao et al., 2017).

Not only have psychologists paid attention to emotional intelligence as an emerging topic, but scholars in the leadership and management domains have also begun to advocate for emotional intelligence's critical contribution to organizational performance (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). In this sense, emotional intelligence contributes to developing strong and positive relationships with co-workers and perform more efficiently.

Emotional intelligence strengthens employees' performance by offering them emotional support and resources which may help them succeed in their roles (Seibert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001). Furthermore, emotionally intelligent employees have better reserves to deal with stressful situations and demanding tasks, allowing them to excel in those situations (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall & Salovey, 2006). Law et al. (2004) found that emotional intelligence was the best predictor of job performance among IT specialists in a computer company in China (Law, Wong & Song, 2004).

Barabuto et al. (2014) carried out one of the first studies to examine the role of emotional intelligence as an antecedent to servant leadership, providing empirical evidence about the effectiveness of emotional intelligence from the perspective of both the leaders and the subordinates. They found that emotional intelligence may only predict a leader's tendency to accept the servant leadership approach and not their actual behavior. Namely, it is a good predictor of the servant-

leader's approach to leadership but it may not be a good predictor of servant-leader behaviors as assessed by the leader's followers (Barbuto, Gottfredson & Searle, 2014). In opposition to Barbuto et al. (2014), Du Plessis et al. (2015) stated that subordinates who rated their leader as having a high level of emotional intelligence also rated their leader as embodying a high level of servant leadership.

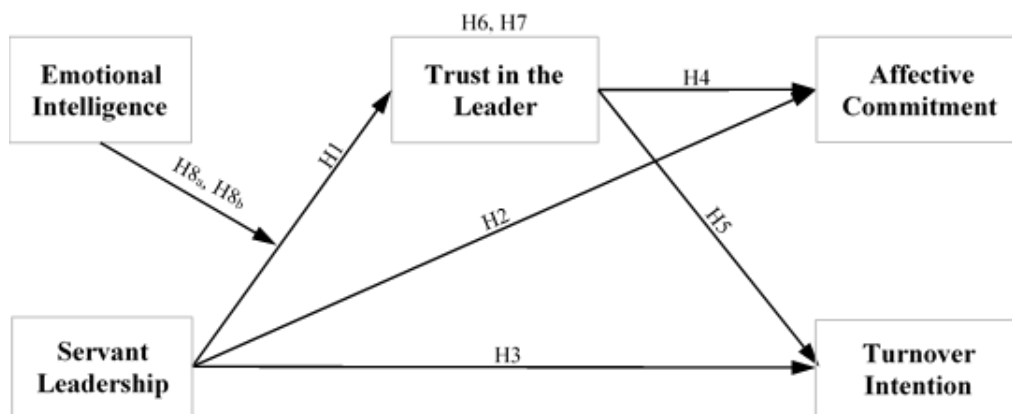
Servant leadership is fundamentally engaged with the leader-follower relationship (Greenleaf, 1977; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). The follower-oriented mindset of servant leaders helps cultivate a mutual and productive relationship between the leader and followers, by which followers, in return, feel a responsibility to reciprocate (Zou, Tian & Liu, 2015).

As described, these interpersonal relationships and the reciprocal exchanges between the leader and the subordinates can be framed within social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Building on this theory some scholars suggest that leaders develop a relationship and exchange with each subordinate individually (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Likewise, Liden et al. (1986) suggest that certain supervisor and subordinate characteristics play a critical role in developing their reciprocal relationship.

Our study specifically focuses on this employee perspective, considering emotional intelligence as an intervening variable in the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader. We want to shed light on the conditional mechanism by examining whether employees' high level of emotional intelligence strengthens this relationship. Thus, we propose the following conditional mediated-moderate hypothesis:

***H8.** Employees' emotional intelligence moderates the positive relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader such that, when employee emotional intelligence is high, the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is positive and strong (H8a); contrarily, when employee emotional intelligence is low, this relationship is weakened (H8b).*

Figure 3.1- Conceptual model of the conditional moderated-mediation model



3.4 Methods

Procedure

Data collection was performed using the paper-and-pencil questionnaire procedure. This field work took place in December 2021, distributing 220 questionnaires to employees on-site within their organizations together with a letter of presentation that also worked as a consent letter. Respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their survey responses would be anonymous and confidential. After two days, a total of 182 responses were received. Of these, 154 responses were usable. The overall response rate was 82.72% (182 questionnaires returned out of 220) or 70 % (after removing incomplete answers).

Sample

Survey participants comprised 154 employees working in the educational sector in Tehran, Iran, either in administrative or teaching positions. 86% of participants were male, and 13 % were female (1% did not provide information about their gender). 13% of respondents were between 18 and 27 years old; 27% between 28 and 37; 33% between 38 and 47; and 23% between 48 and 57.

The participants' educational levels were as follows: 12 participants (8%) held a high school diploma degree; 64 participants (41%) a Bachelor's degree; 71 participants (nearly half of total respondents at 46%) a Master's degree (46%); and only 7 (4%) a PhD.

Measures

To assess the scales to test the research model, we used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Servant Leadership was measured through the 7-item servant leadership scale developed by Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) and validated as a short version by Liden, Wayne, Meuser, Hu, Wu and Liao (2015). Example items included: "I would seek help from my manager if we had a personal problem" and "My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community." Factor loading ranged between 0.589 to 0.755. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.843.

Emotional Intelligence. To assess emotional intelligence, we used 16 items from the scale developed by Wong and Law (2002). Sample items were: "I have good a understanding of the emotions of people around me" and "I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them." Factor loadings ranged between 0.55 to 0.90. We dropped some items with low factor loadings from this scale, because they caused a low threshold in discriminant analysis results. The final Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.880.

Trust in the leader. To measure trust in the leader we used the 6-item scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990). An example statement was: "I feel quite confident that my leader will always try to treat me fairly." Factor loading ranged between 0.630 to 0.871. We dropped one item from this scale due to its low factor loading that caused a low threshold in discriminant analysis results. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.865.

Affective Commitment. To measure affective commitment, we used the 6-item sub-scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). An example item was: “I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own.” Factor loading ranged between 0.556 to 0.777. We dropped one item due to its low factor loading. The final Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.819.

Turnover Intention. To measure turnover intention, we used the 4-item scale created by Kelloway, Gottlieb and Barham (1999). Sample items were: “I am thinking about leaving this organization” and “I intend to ask people about new job opportunities.” Factor loading ranged between 0.612 to 0.871, and Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.840.

Control Variables. We asked employees to report some demographic data which we used as control variables: their gender (1= Male, 2= Female) and age (operationalize as 1 = 18 to 27 years old; 2 = 28 to 37 years old, 3 = 38 to 47 years old, 4 = 48 to 57 years old, and 5 = 58 or more years old).

Statistical Analysis Strategy

After the field work to collect data, we conducted some preliminary analyses to check the psychometric properties of the scales used to test the hypothesized model (i.e., the internal reliability and consistency of the scales), as well as a series of CFAs with SPSS and the AMOS statistical package (v.27).

Then, we carried out correlational analyses to review the co-variation of the study variables. The next step was conducting path modeling techniques to test the hypotheses. We specifically applied structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques (AMOS 22) to examine all the research hypotheses, including the indirect effects of servant leadership on outcomes via trust in the leader (H1 to H7) and the moderating effects of emotional intelligence (H8). Furthermore, in addition to SEM techniques with SPSS and AMOS (v.27), we also used the PROCES macro tool (Hayes, 2018), which is

an ordinary least squares (OLS) logistic regression path analysis modeling strategy. This macro allows estimating the conditional indirect effect in moderated mediation models with a single moderator (H8).

Measurement Model. Due to self-reported measures, we controlled for potential common method variance. We used Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003) to identify any possible effects. Accordingly, if there is common method variance, a single-factor confirmatory factor analysis model will provide better-fit indices, accounting for most of the covariance among all of the studied variables.

The hypothesized moderated-mediation model (Figure 3.1) includes servant leadership, as well as trust in leadership and the two outcomes (turnover intention and commitment). As can be seen in Table 3.1 below, models with four factors yielded a good fit for the data [$\chi^2(165) = 337.73, p < .000, \chi^2/df = 2.047, CFI = .539, RMSEA = .083$]. While a single-factor model did not provide good-fit indices: [$\chi^2(189) = 917.99, p < .000, \chi^2/df = 4.857, CFI = .539, RMSEA = .159$]. These results corroborate that they are four distinct constructs.

Table 3.1- Harman’s single-factor test

| | χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMS EA | TLI |
|--------------------------------|----------|-------|------|-------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 1 factor (Turnover) | 482.76 | (104) | .000 | 4.642 | 0.678 | 0.154 | 0.629 |
| 3 factors (Turnover) | 198.12 | (101) | .000 | 1.962 | 0.917 | 0.079 | 0.902 |
| 1 factor (Commitment) | 573.31 | (119) | .000 | 4.818 | 0.638 | 0.158 | 0.587 |
| 3 factors (Commitment) | 303.69 | (116) | .000 | 2.618 | 0.851 | 0.103 | 0.825 |
| 1 factor (Turnover & Commit.) | 917.99 | (189) | .000 | 4.857 | 0.539 | 0.159 | 0.480 |
| 4 factors (Turnover & Commit.) | 337.73 | (165) | .000 | 2.047 | 0.866 | 0.086 | 0.847 |

Note. χ^2 = Chi squared; (df) = (degrees of freedom); $\chi^2/(df)$ = ratio Chi squared by degrees of freedom; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

Table 3.2 below presents the construct reliability of the study variables, as well as the model's convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 3.2- Measurement model

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> | <i>MSV</i> | <i>ASV</i> |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. Servant Leadership | 0.85 | 0.44 | 0.71 | 0.25 |
| 2. Trust in the leader | 0.88 | 0.59 | 0.71 | 0.28 |
| 3. Commitment | 0.82 | 0.49 | 0.22 | 0.10 |
| 4. Turnover | 0.85 | 0.58 | 0.22 | 0.10 |

Note. *CR* = Construct Reliability; *AVE* = Average Variance Extracted; *MSV* = Maximum Shared Variance; *ASV* = Average Shared Variance.

The composite reliability (CR) scores were equal to or higher than 0.80 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores were higher than 0.44 for all variables included in the moderated-mediation model. AVE values were greater than the variance shared with the remaining constructs (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009), thus suggesting moderate support for convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2009). The data also confirmed discriminant validity, with all the average shared variance (ASV) scores below the AVE (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, 2010).

3.5 Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 3.3 below shows the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among study variables. Servant leadership is significantly correlated with trust in the leader and negatively with employees' turnover intention ($r = 0.716, p = .01$; $r = -0.144, p = .07$). Trust positively correlates with emotional intelligence ($r = 0.232, p < .01$) and commitment ($r = 0.267, p < .01$) and negatively with turnover intention ($r = -0.251, p < .01$). In addition, emotional intelligence is positively correlated with

commitment ($r = 0.295, p < .01$) and is not correlated with turnover intention ($r = 0.126, p < .1$). Also, turnover intention is negatively associated with commitment ($r = -0.431, p < .01$).

Table 3.3- Mean, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables (N=156)

| | Mean (SD) | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
|---------------------------|-----------|------|--------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|
| 1. Gender | 1.14 | 0.35 | -- | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 2.68 | 0.98 | 0.060 | -- | | | | | |
| 3. Servant Leadership | 3.58 | 0.71 | 0.097 | -0.002 | (0.843) | | | | |
| 4. Emotional Intelligence | 3.84 | 0.52 | 0.072 | -0.029 | 0.218** | (0.880) | | | |
| 5. Trust | 3.96 | 0.79 | 0.073 | 0.051 | 0.716** | 0.232** | (0.865) | | |
| 6. Commitment | 3.88 | 0.74 | 0.025 | 0.033 | 0.104 | 0.295** | 0.267** | (0.819) | |
| 7. Turnover intention | 2.61 | 0.95 | -0.038 | -0.210** | -0.144† | -0.126 | -0.251** | -0.431** | (0.840) |

Note. Significant at *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .1$; Gender 1= Male 2= Female; Age 1= [18 to 27 years old]; 2= [28 to 37 years old]; 3= [38 to 47 years old]; 4= [48 to 57 years old]; 5= [58 years old and above]. Scales' Cronbach alpha are shown in the diagonal.

Among control variables, only age has a significant negative correlation with turnover intention ($r = -0.210, p < .01$). However, we decided to control for both control variables in our subsequent analysis.

The Direct Effects of Servant Leadership on Outcomes

Hypotheses 1 to 3 anticipated the direct effect of servant leadership on outcomes. Specifically, the first hypothesis predicted a positive association between perceived servant leadership among employees and their trust in the leader (M) (first path of the mediation). As can be seen in Table 3.4, servant leadership is significantly associated with trust in the leader ($\beta = 0.40, p < .01$). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval is entirely above zero (0.48 to 0.69). Thus, servant leadership positively and significantly affects trust in the leader, corroborating hypothesis 1.

The second hypothesis anticipated that servant leadership (X) was positively associated with commitment (Y). As shown in Table 3.4, employees' perception of servant leadership was not significantly associated with commitment ($\beta = -0.21, p = .01$). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the direct effect, based on 50,000 bootstrap samples, was not above zero (-0.42 to 0.01). Therefore, the direct effect between X and Y is not significant. Consequently, results do not corroborate the direct effect presented in hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 posits that servant leadership (X) is negatively associated with turnover intention (Y). As can be seen in Table 3.4, employees' perception of servant leadership is not significantly associated with turnover ($\beta = -0.08, p = ns.$). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the direct effect, based on 50,000 bootstrap samples, was not below zero (-0.16 to 0.53). Therefore, the direct effect between X and Y is not significant. Consequently, the results do not corroborate the direct effect of hypothesis 3.

Hypotheses four and five predicted the second path of the indirect effect. Specifically, hypothesis 4 anticipated that trust in the leader (M) is positively associated with commitment (Y). Results in Table 3.4 provide evidence that trust in the leader is significant and positively associated with commitment ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001$). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval was also entirely above zero (0.12 to 0.54), thus, corroborating hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that trust in the leader (M) is negatively associated with turnover intention (Y). Results in Table 3.4 provide evidence that trust in the leader is significant and negatively associated with turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.34, p < .000$). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval was also entirely below zero (-0.56 to -0.15), thus, corroborating hypothesis 5.

Table 3.4- Moderated mediation structural equation modelling results: Emotional Intelligence

| Outcomes: | Trust in Leadership (M) | | Commitment (Y) | | Turnover (Y) | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|---------|-------|--------|
| | Unstandardized path (SE) | β | Unstandardized path (SE) | β | Unstandardized path (SE) | β | | |
| Predictors | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | ---- | -- | 0.07 (0.18) | 0.03 | -0.03 (0.21) | -0.01 | | |
| Age | ---- | -- | 0.01 (0.07) | 0.01 | -0.19* (0.07) | -0.20 | | |
| Trust in the leader | ---- | -- | 0.38*** (0.12) | 0.36 | -0.34** (0.13) | -0.28 | | |
| Servant Leadership (SL) | 0.40** (0.15) | 0.36 | -0.21 (0.13) | -0.18 | -0.08 (0.15) | -0.06 | | |
| Emotional Intelligence | -0.23** (0.08) | -0.12 | ---- | -- | ---- | -- | | |
| SL x Emotional Intelligence | 0.09** (0.03) | -0.45 | ---- | -- | ---- | -- | | |
| | R^2 | 0.518 | | 0.071 | | 0.098 | | |
| Fit indexes of the moderated mediated model | | | | | | | | |
| | χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMSEA | TLI | SRMR |
| | 52.689 | (36) | 0.036 | 1.464 | 0.984 | 0.055 | 0.976 | 0.0706 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. β = standardized path coefficients; SE = standard error; $\chi^2/(df)$ = Chi squared (degrees of freedom); GFI = Goodness-of-fit index; CFI = Comparative-fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker–Lewis’s index; SRMR = Standardized root mean-square residual. X = Antecedent variable; M = Mediator; Y = Dependent.

The Mediating Role of Trust in the leader

Hypotheses six and seven predicted the mediation role of trust in the leader. Specifically, hypothesis 6 postulates that servant leadership (X) has an indirect effect on commitment (Y) through trust in the leader (M). As shown in Table 3.5, the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of X on Y is significant (ab= 0.55), as it was entirely above zero (0.15 to 1.25). Therefore, we can conclude that employees’ perception of servant leadership indirectly affects commitment through trust in the leader. Thus, results support hypothesis 6 in predicting trust in the leader’s mediation role.

Table 3.5- Mediation results: Indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on outcomes (Y) via trust in the leader (M)

| Indirect effect | | Estimate (SE) | LLCI | ULCI | | | |
|---|-------|---------------|-------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Servant leadership → Trust in the leader → Commitment | | 0.55* (0.28) | 0.15 | 1.25 | | | |
| Servant leadership → Trust in the leader → Turnover | | -0.61* (0.39) | - 1.55 | - 0.04 | | | |
| Fit indexes of the full mediated model | | | | | | | |
| χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMSEA | TLI | SRMR |
| 391.097 | (183) | .000 | 2.137 | 0.866 | 0.086 | 0.847 | 0.787 |

Note. Significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ SE = standard error; $\chi^2 / (df)$ = Chi squared (degrees of freedom); GFI = Goodness of fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; LLCI = Lower bounds CI; ULCI = Upper bounds CI; CI = Confidence interval. CIs not containing zero are interpreted as significant. Results are based on 50,000 bootstrap samples.

Hypothesis 7 predicted the indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on turnover intention (Y) through trust in the leader (M). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of X on Y was significant (ab= -0.61), as it was entirely above zero (-1.55 to -0.04). Therefore, we can conclude that employees’ perception of servant leadership indirectly and negatively affects turnover intention through trust in the leader. Thus, results corroborate hypothesis 7 in predicting trust in the leader’s mediation role.

The Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence

Finally, hypothesis 8 anticipated the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the a-path of the moderated mediation model. It posits that employees’ emotional intelligence moderates the positive relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader, such that when employees’

emotional intelligence is high, the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is positive and strong; contrarily, when employees' emotional intelligence is low, this relationship is weakened.

As can be appreciated in Table 3.4, the interaction effect is significant ($\beta = -0.09$, $p < .01$). Moreover, the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the moderation interaction effect is significant and entirely below zero (0.01 to 0,19).

To further test this hypothesis that captures the complexity of the overall conditional model, we used the PROCES macro (model 7) to calculate the moderate mediation ratio and to also provide evidence of the conditional indirect effect at the emotional intelligence moderator levels.

Specifically, the full moderated-mediation index for the turnover intention outcome was significant (Index= 0.123; SE= 0.07; [CI = 0.006 to 0.278]); it was also significant for affective commitment (Index= -0.135; SE= 0.07; [CI = -0.278 to -0.011]).

Moreover, we analyzed the conditional indirect effect of servant leadership on outcomes at three levels of the emotional intelligence moderator. The 95% bootstrap confidence intervals indicate the indirect and negative effect of servant leadership on turnover intention through trust in the leader and the positive effect on employees' affective commitment. In both cases, the 95% confidence interval did not contain zero.

As shown in Table 3.6, the indirect effect of servant leadership on turnover intention (H8) via trust in the leader was significant, and the effect on turnover intention was strong and negative when employees' emotional intelligence was high (+1SD) (Effect= -0.222, [CI= -0.39 to -0.08]). The indirect effect on affective commitment was significant and positive. However, when employees' emotional intelligence was low (-SD), the effect was high compared to the other condition's high and mean values (Effect= 0.381 [CI= 0.18 to 0.60]).

Table 3.6- Conditional indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on outcomes (Y) via trust in the leader (M) at the moderator emotional intelligence (W) level

| Dependent: <i>Turnover intention</i> | Moderator <i>(Emotional Intelligence)</i> | Effect | Boot SE | (Boot LL – Boot UL) | |
|--|---|--------|---------|---------------------|---------------|
| Mediator (<i>Trust in the leader</i>) | -SD | -0.349 | 0.13 | (-0.61 to -0.11) | |
| | Mean | -0.285 | 0.10 | (-0.49 to -0.10) | |
| | +SD | -0.222 | 0.08 | (-0.39 to -0.08) | |
| Index of moderated mediation: | | Index | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
| | | EI | 0.123 | 0.070 | 0.278 |
| Dependent: <i>Affective commitment</i> | Moderator <i>(Emotional Intelligence)</i> | Effect | Boot SE | (Boot LL – Boot UL) | |
| Mediator (<i>Trust in the leader</i>) | -SD | 0.381 | 0.11 | (0.18 to 0.60) | |
| | Mean | 0.311 | 0.08 | (0.15 to 0.48) | |
| | +SD | 0.242 | 0.07 | (0.12 to 0.39) | |
| Index of moderated mediation: | | Index | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
| | | EI | -0.135 | 0.069 | -0.278 -0.011 |

Note. N = 154 employees. Process macro (model 7), 50,000 bootstrap samples; 95% level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output.

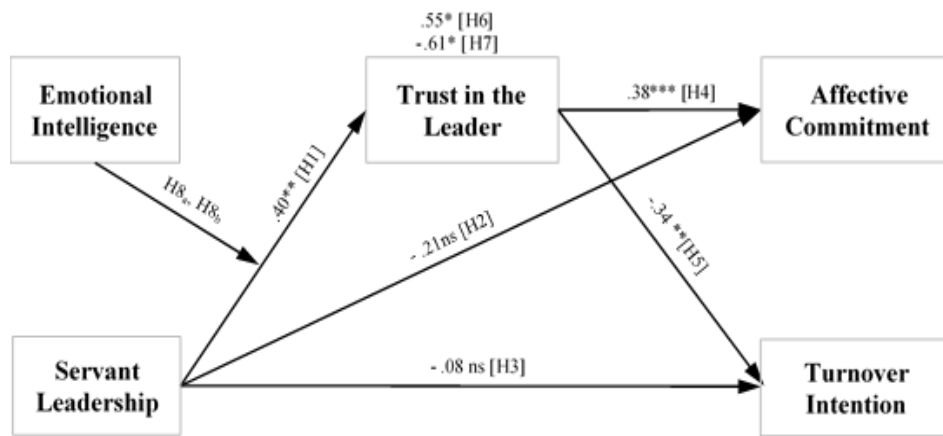
Finally, we also tested the pairwise contrasts between conditional indirect effects for both outcomes that were all significant, thus corroborating hypothesis 8.

These results are in the expected direction but contrary to our predictions in terms of affective commitment; we expected that greater employee emotional intelligence in interaction with trust in the leader would translate into high affective commitment. However, these findings show that emotional intelligence interacts with servant leadership to explain the variance of the trust in the leader variable, which, in turn, has a positive effect on commitment and a negative effect on turnover intention (see Table 3.6 for details).

Overall, these findings provide evidence of the mediating role that employee trust in the leader plays in the relationship between servant leadership and employees' attitudinal work outcomes (commitment and turnover Intention). Moreover, employees' emotional intelligence plays a conditional role in the indirect effect that servant leadership has. (See next figure 3.2 with

summary results)

Figure 3.2. Results of the conditional moderated-mediation model (Study-1)



Note. Unstandardized path coefficients

3.6 Discussion

This study examined the effects of servant leadership on employees' perceptions and attitudes towards the organization, specifically, servant leadership's relationship with trust in the leader as a mediator, with turnover intention and affective commitment as dependent variables. We also shed light on how employees' emotional intelligence plays a moderating intervening role in the model.

Our findings corroborated that employees' perception of servant leadership has a significant effect on their trust in the leader (H1) but no direct effect on turnover intention (H2) and/or organizational commitment (H3). We also hypothesized about the specific mechanism through which servant leadership translates its influence in predicting the outcomes (turnover intention and organizational commitment) and whether trust in the leader mediates these relationships between servant leadership and turnover intention (H6) and between servant leadership and commitment

(H7).

Although the direct effect of servant leadership with the dependent variables was not corroborated, our findings provide evidence about the indirect effect through trust in the leader in predicting employees' turnover intention and organizational commitment. In this sense, and consistent with previous research (Costa, 2003; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016), the second path of mediation is also corroborated (H4 and H5). Therefore, we can infer that servant leadership channelizes its effect on employee turnover intention and affective commitment based on the level of trust in their leaders.

Finally, by looking at employees' emotional intelligence as a moderating variable, this study contributes to uncover a previously unknown role for this variable and provides a fine-grain analysis of the conditions underlying servant leadership's influence. Indeed, employees' emotional intelligence moderates the positive relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader such that, when employee emotional intelligence is high, the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is positive and strong; by contrast, when employee emotional intelligence is low, this relationship is weakened in predicting turnover intention (H8a) and affective commitment (H8b). These findings thus provide support for both conditional mechanisms.

3.7 Theoretical Implications

To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first to investigate employees' emotional intelligence as a moderating variable. It also explains the conditions under which the influence of servant leadership on employees translates into organizational outcomes: the important intervention of trust in the leader. Therefore, this study contributes to our understanding in the organizational context of how servant leadership translates its influence on employees' attitudinal work outcomes

through trust in the leader and with employees' emotional intelligence intervention.

Grounded in social exchange theory which emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between leader and follower (Blau, 1964), we found that followers with high emotional intelligence reciprocate the supportive and positive behavior of their leaders by showing greater trust in their leader and job commitment and lower intention to quit the organization. On the other hand, a follower with high emotional intelligence but low perception of servant leadership exhibits less trust in their leader.

Moreover, in line with theory and previous studies (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010), trust in the leader mediates servant leadership's negative relationship with turnover intention and the positive relationship with organizational commitment through trust in the leader. This implies that leaders with a servant leadership style should pay attention and ensure they gain the trust of their followers.

3.8 Practical Implications

This empirical study has yielded interesting results and provided practical implications for organizations that want to successfully influence their employees and enhance their work outcomes. Servant leaders can, first, build a solid trust with employees; second, through this gained trust in leadership, persuade employees to remain in the organization (lowering their turnover intention); and, third, positively affect their commitment to the organization.

Our findings are relevant for organizations which recognize the critical role that management plays in their success. In this way, an organization can attempt to hire and invest in training and developing leaders with the servant leadership managerial style, that is, those who are ethically competent and tend to behave as servant leaders. Organizations can also improve the leaders' moral competence by recognizing and training the values involved and enhancing servant leaders' behaviors

among line managers.

Also, our study contributes to advancing the emotional intelligence domain by providing empirical evidence of emotional intelligence's contribution to developing positive attitudes towards the organization and its managers. Despite the debate on the topic, previous studies have shown that the likelihood of emotional intelligence being present among employees is not always high but that it can be successfully developed through training (Chrusciel, 2006; Jonker, 2009; Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007).

Therefore, to achieve better organizational results, it is important for companies to attract and select employees with emotional intelligence competences (or at least help them develop these). This would reinforce servant leadership's effects on employee attitudes and ultimately improve organizational achievements.

3.9 Limitations and Future Research

This research has certain limitations, however. First, we relied on self-reported measures, which might raise the possibility of common method variance and inflate the coefficients (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Second, this data does not distinguish between managers' and employees' positions. Their approaches can be different in terms of attitudes towards the organization (Petty, McGee & Cavender, 1984). Future research should incorporate different sources of information. Third, the results were generated using a cross-sectional research design that cannot allow establishing causality. To overcome this limitation, future research should test the hypothesized model for more robust findings, using a longitudinal or experimental research design and replicating it in other contexts (e.g., other industries and countries).

3.10 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to contribute to and extend the servant leadership field by showing its effects on followers and organizational outcomes. It also aimed to shed light on the mediating mechanism of employee trust in the leader, through which servant leadership impacts on employees' turnover intention and affective commitment. Furthermore, the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is conditioned by employees' emotional intelligence which strengthens this equation.

CHAPTER FOUR:

STUDY 2 - FOSTERING EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION THROUGH

PERSON-SUPERVISOR FIT: THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

AND EMPLOYEE CORE SELF-EVALUATIONS

STUDY 2: FOSTERING EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION THROUGH PERSON- SUPERVISOR FIT: THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE CORE SELF-EVALUATIONS

4.1 Abstract

Purpose. The aim of this study is to provide insights into the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction, examining the indirect and intervening mechanisms in which person-supervisor fit plays a mediating role and employee core self-evaluations a moderating part. This research model is framed within social exchange theory.

Methodology. Field work was carried out using the paper-and-pencil procedure to foster employee participation and ensure the confidentiality of their responses. The sample includes 388 employees from a home electrical appliance manufacturer in a Middle East country.

Findings. The path and moderation results obtained using structural equation modeling (SEM) support the mediating role of employee perception of the person-supervisor fit on the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. Moreover, employee core self-evaluations play a conditional role in this indirect effect of servant leadership.

Research limitations. Self-reported measures and a single informant strategy do not avoid the possibility of common method variance constraints (although the study controls for the latter). A more complex research design would potentially provide more robust findings. Future research should replicate and extend these findings through longitudinal or experimental research designs, as well as in other organizational and cultural contexts.

Practical implications. This study suggests that servant leaders have a more favorable impact on employees with higher core self-evaluations. This has implications for organizations' talent attraction and retention policies and their ability to improve employee job satisfaction by selecting and developing servant leaders to encourage a better fit with their employees, as well as by recruiting

employees with high core self-evaluation traits.

Originality/value. This study attempts to address three key gaps in servant leadership literature: First, to provide a theoretical foundation for the effects of servant leadership and to provide an additional empirical contribution to demonstrate that the servant leadership approach leads to greater employee job satisfaction; second, to understand the leader-outcomes relationship context and to shed light on the underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms of person-supervisor fit and employee core self-evaluations, respectively; and, third, to study these relations in a non-Western cultural context.

Keywords: Servant leadership, Person-supervisor fit, Job satisfaction, Core self-evaluation trait, Moderation-mediation model.

4.2 Introduction

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?

(Greenleaf, 1977)

As many researchers have demonstrated, the use of appropriate leadership styles and behavior encourages a better fit between organizations and their employees (Babakus et al., 2010; Vondey, 2010). As individuals, leaders can stimulate and improve the workplace environment and promote their followers' perceived fit, which in turn leads to favorable job outcomes (Klaic et al., 2018).

Numerous organizations worldwide have integrated servant leadership principles into their management practices and organizational cultures. According to Parris and Peachey (2013), more than 20% of the top 100 companies listed in *Fortune* magazine, such as Southwest Airlines and Starbucks, have sought advice from the Greenleaf Center on implementing servant leadership methods. It's worth noting that not all companies that practice servant leadership label themselves as such, and the extent to which they embody the principles can vary.

In his book, "Work rules!: Insights from inside google that will transform how you live and lead", Laszlo Bock, former SVP of People Operations at Google, discusses Google's approach to leadership and emphasizes serving and supporting employees. Bock (2015) describes how Google prioritizes creating a workplace environment where employees can do their best work, and how it achieves this through practices such as empowering its employees to make decisions and providing them with opportunities for growth and development. These are all key servant leadership tenets (Bock, 2015).

Servant leadership mainly focuses on followers' psychological demands as a goal in and of itself (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014). Servant leadership is about achieving compatibility with

followers, prioritizing their goals and values, and nurturing a culture of servanthood (Eva et al., 2019). Research results indicate that remarkable outcomes can be achieved when leaders do make the effort to identify the unique ways necessary to achieve each follower's full potential (Liden et al., 2008; Northouse, 2021; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Doing this represents a challenge that managers attempting to force compliance through command-and-control tactics do not face. The conventional leading-by-telling-and-controlling method is much less challenging compared to practicing servant leadership, which necessitates skills such as active listening, empathy, mentoring, guidance, and emotional support. Servant leaders forge individualized relationships with every follower, enabling them to inspire the best in each employee by caring for them tailored to each follower's specific needs (Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014).

Thus, it is important to identify the challenges that servant leadership faces. If servant leaders put the needs of all the organization's members ahead of their own, they may experience stress and eventual burnout. Additionally, servant leaders may risk being manipulated by more astute followers who could take advantage of those leaders for their own personal benefit, resulting in an overwhelming emotional and logistical burden for the leaders (Whetstone, 2002). Servant leaders' limited time, energy, and financial resources are demanded by all stakeholders, and they may not be able to satisfy everyone (Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014).

Despite consistent evidence supporting the effectiveness of servant leadership in benefiting both individuals (Hoch et al., 2018) and organizations (Peterson et al., 2012), it is not clear to what extent the differences in followers' traits might affect servant leadership's effectiveness. Do all employees appreciate and benefit from a servant leader's efforts to the same extent? Does servant leadership impact each follower in a similar way? Does selecting and developing the right employees enhance employees' perceived person-supervisor fit? Does selecting the right employees help address some of the challenges that servant leaders face?

Meuser et al. (2011) provide one example of previous research studying how followers' views and responses to servant leadership can significantly impact how employees perceive a servant leader's actions. Similarly, Sun et al. (2019) suggested that not all employees may feel the same when working with servant leaders, and It is important for the leader to realize that his/her actions may be perceived differently by individual employees.

In their study drawing on social learning theory, Wu et al. (2021) argue that follower dispositional self-interest is a boundary condition affecting the transference of managers' servant leadership to followers' engagement in serving behaviors; accordingly, the underlying psychological mechanism is followers' serving self-efficacy. Wu et al. (2021) encourage further research on the processes through which servant leadership relates to outcomes, as well as gaining greater insights on the leader and follower characteristics that may impact these processes (Eva et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2021).

As noted by Liden et al. (2014), servant leadership is still at an early stage of theoretical development. Accordingly, extending prior research, we contend that the effort that servant leaders make to serve each follower's individual needs results in a proper identification between the leaders and their followers and creates a robust bond among them. This implies that servant leadership is reciprocally related to the fit between leaders and followers.

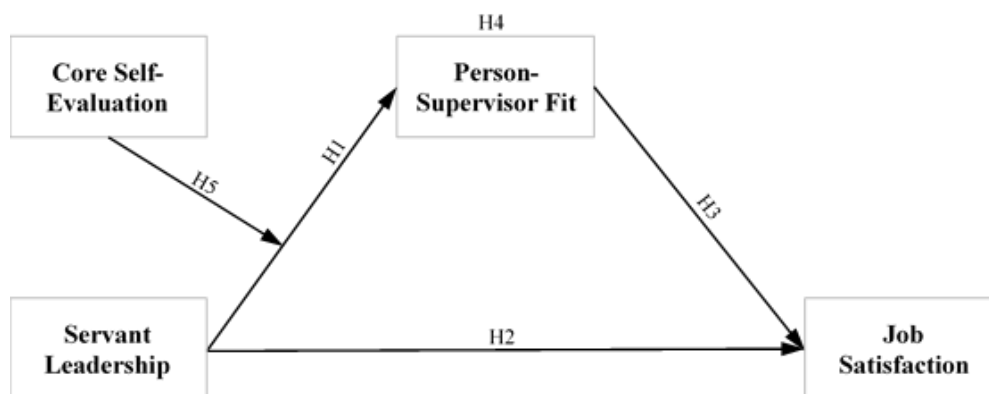
One purpose of this current study, then, is to directly examine the extent to which leaders' servant leadership behaviors are related to followers' perceived person-supervisor fit. We propose that the person-supervisor fit is an appropriate contextual variable to explain how servant leadership leads to job satisfaction. Thus, we aim to shed light on the underlying mechanism of how servant leadership is associated with job satisfaction through the mediation effect of person-supervisor fit. In addition to testing this main effect, another key goal is to empirically evaluate the moderating role of followers' core self-evaluations (CSE) and the degree to which they perceive fit with their servant

leaders to consequently feel more satisfied with their jobs.

We want to test if followers with high CSEs react more favorably to empowerment opportunities and more readily benefit from the servant leaders' attempts to help their subordinates grow and succeed. By understanding these boundary conditions, we will be able to create a holistic view of the optimal employee traits with which servant leadership behavior can maximize the fit between leaders and employees. This will provide a template for how organizations can best operationalize their practices to obtain the benefits of servant leadership.

Figure 4.1 shows the hypothesized moderated mediation model in which person-supervisor fit mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction depending on the different levels of employee CSEs.

Figure 4.1- Conceptual model of the conditional moderated-mediation model



4.3 Hypotheses Development

Servant Leadership and Person-Supervisor Fit

As Caplan (1987, p. 248) states, “organizations and their members have a fundamental stake in how well characteristics of the person and the environment of the organization fit one another.”

Organizations make a considerable effort to recruit and select employees who are the best fit for their work environment, and similarly, employees strive to establish congruence with their organizational environment (Astakhova, 2016).

The concept of fit between employees and their work environment has gained a lot of attention from scholars and organizations due to its numerous benefits. Employees have a strong desire to feel compatible with their work environment (e.g., Schneider, 2001). They tend to seek out and value jobs and organizations that are a good fit for them and, conversely, they tend to leave positions or companies that do not fit them.

The concept of fit refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their personal characteristics, such as personality and values, to be similar to those of their work environment (e.g., Kristof-brown et al., 2005; Schneider, 2001). A high degree of fit is generally perceived as a positive resource, leading to a range of desirable outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (e.g., Kristof-brown et al., 2005; Lee, & Lee, 2006). By contrast, a low degree of fit can be a stressor and lead to negative attitudes and behaviors at work, such as turnover intention (Astakhova, 2016; Van Vianen, 2000; Zhang et al., 2017). These findings highlight the crucial role that fit plays in the workplace, leading to a need for both researchers and organizations to better understand the association between fit and outcomes.

Person-environment fit includes different aspects such as person-job fit, person-supervisor fit, person-group fit, and person-organization fit (Kristof-brown et al., 2005). In this study, we focus on person-supervisor fit. Person-supervisor fit reveals how employees' characteristics and goals are compatible with those of their superiors (Hamstra et al., 2019). Person-supervisor fit is a relatively new, emerging and independent type of fit in today's workplace (Guay et al., 2019). The fit between leaders and followers is significant for several reasons, including leaders as representatives of the organizations, facilitating employee integration and adaptation within the organization and specific

work group and offering their subordinates' growth prospects (Guay et al., 2019).

Servant leadership, understood as cultivating the servanthood culture and prioritizing followers' goals and values (Eva et al., 2019), allows the present study to consider that servant leadership could be a prelude to establishing compatibility between the supervisor and subordinates. Furthermore, based on Kristof-brown et al. (2005) and Schoon (2008) the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit can be seen to impact the following three aspects:

a) Supervisor-subordinate value congruence and servant leadership. According to Eva et al. (2019), the servant leader takes an interest in understanding each follower's background, core values, beliefs, assumptions, and idiosyncratic behaviors. In this same vein, Weiss (1978) found that people align their values with their leader's values if they perceive their superior to be competent. We contend that servant leaders being concerned with the follower's values and paying attention to their demands makes followers perceive that their supervisor's values are aligned with their own.

b) Supervisor-subordinate personality similarity and servant leadership. Although the personality is intrinsically independent, based on the altruistic orientations behind the servant leadership framework, which are likely to influence both the followers' perceptions of servant leadership and their willingness to imitate and reciprocate leader's behavior (Hunter et al., 2013), we contend that followers would like to emulate their leaders and become servants themselves by adopting the same behavioral characteristics as their direct leaders.

c) Supervisor-subordinate goal congruence and servant leadership. Servant leaders make followers more likely to prioritize the needs of others above their own and demonstrate the atmosphere of servanthood (Greenleaf, 1970). Clearly, by accentuating the followers' needs and goals, servant leaders will be able to establish a mutual and congruent goal and approach with their subordinates (Hsiao et al., 2015).

Even though there is a shortage of empirical research examining the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit, this study aims to expand extant knowledge regarding the potential associations between these two. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1. Employee perceptions about servant leadership are positively related to their perceptions of person-supervisor fit.

Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Can servant leadership anticipate employees' job satisfaction? Job satisfaction still provides "one of the most useful pieces of information an organization can have about its employees" (Harrison et al., 2006, p. 320). Therefore, assessing their level of job satisfaction is still a vital research topic within the organizational behavioral field (Jones & George, 2008; Whitman et al., 2010).

Job satisfaction, defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state from the appraisal of one's job or experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1297), reflects employees' attitudes, thoughts and feelings towards their job conditions (actual work, direct leaders, and fellow employees) and job results (job security and wages) (Cerit, 2009). When employees are satisfied with their jobs, they demonstrate positive work behaviors such as low turnover, higher productivity, low absenteeism, and higher performance (Meyer et al., 2004).

Research on servant leadership provides evidence about the positive relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction (e.g.; Cerit, 2009; Eva et al., 2013; Hebert, 2003; Jenkins, & Stewart, 2008; Mayer et al., 2008). For instance, one empirical study found that servant leaders play an important role in satisfying followers' needs and eventually advancing their job satisfaction (Mayer et al., 2008). Another found that servant leaders improved job satisfaction among nursing staff (Jenkins & Stewart, 2008).

Taking this previous evidence into consideration, we want to corroborate that servant leadership is in fact positively related to job satisfaction. Therefore:

H2. Employee perceptions about servant leadership are positively related to their job satisfaction.

The Mediating Role of Person-Supervisor Fit

The fast growth and constantly changing nature of businesses have given birth to many challenges in terms of managing people within organizations. Retaining employees is one of the major trials, and ensuring their job satisfaction has become a top priority for HR managers (McKay et al., 2007; Ramlall, 2004). Previous servant leadership research provides evidence pointing to the positive relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction (Eva et al., 2013; Hebert, 2003; Laub, 1999; Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014; McNeff & Irving, 2017). Other studies also advocate that servant leadership can create a healthy environment in which employees can properly feel the congruence with their work context and the leaders themselves (Chan & Mak, 2014; Mayer et al., 2008; McNeff & Irving, 2017).

Moreover, person-supervisor fit leads to favorable outcomes, positively impacting turnover intention (Ostroff et al., 2005; Van Vianen, 2000), job satisfaction (Lee & Lee, 2006; Ostroff et al., 2005), and OCB (Huang & Lun, 2006). Klaic et al. (2018) examined the mediation role of person-supervisor fit in the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, reporting that higher perceived person-supervisor fit is positively associated to higher job satisfaction levels. Additionally, Lee and Lee (2006) studied the relative importance of both person-supervisor fit and person-group fit in explaining job satisfaction and observed that person-supervisor fit significantly predicted job satisfaction. Research by Chuang et al. (2016) showed that employees who feel a high

degree of fit with their supervisors were also satisfied with their jobs.

To the best of our knowledge, however, there is still a lack of research examining the effects of servant leadership on person-supervisor fit. This study aims to gain greater insights on how servant leadership impacts employees' job satisfaction through person-supervisor fit. We expect that person-supervisor fit plays a mediator role in the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

H3. Employee perceptions of person-supervisor fit are positively associated with their *job satisfaction*.

H4. Employee perceptions of person-supervisor fit mediate the relationship between servant leadership and their job satisfaction.

The Moderating Role of Core Self-evaluations

Over the last few decades, an increasing number of scholars have focused on the study of CSEs, a comprehensive personality trait developed and defined by Judge et al. (1997). The core self-evaluation notion refers to a broad and latent personality trait that pertains to individuals' unconscious beliefs about themselves. High CSEs result in feelings of effectiveness, confidence, and a sense of control over one's surroundings, whereas lower levels lead to underestimating oneself, a lack of confidence, and an inability to manage one's environment (Judge & Bono, 2001a).

According to Chang et al. (2012), employees who have high CSEs tend to focus more on the positive aspects of their surroundings, which can have an indirect effect on their attitudes and achievements. Several studies have linked CSEs with important work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2014), job performance (Judge et al., 2003, 2005; Judge

& Bono, 2001b; Kacmar et al., 2009) organizational commitment (Stumpp et al., 2009), and OCB (Avey et al., 2010). The CSE concept includes four specific personality traits:

a) **Self-esteem**. This refers to the general evaluation individuals have of themselves as people (Harter, 1990). Locke et al. (1996, p. 21) noted that “a person with high self-esteem will view a challenging job as a deserved opportunity which he can master and benefit from, whereas a person with low self-esteem is more likely to view it as an undeserved opportunity or a chance to fail.” In fact, research suggests that individuals with high self-esteem maintain their optimism when facing potential failures, which makes future success (and, thus, future satisfaction) more likely (Dodgson & Wood, 1998).

b) **Generalized self-efficacy**. refers to a person's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks or activities in a particular situation (Bandura, 1986). Judge et al. (1997) suggest that overall self-efficacy can influence job satisfaction by means of its association with practical success on the job. Since, people with high self-efficacy tend to manage difficulties more efficiently and persevere despite failure (Gist & Mitchell, 1992), they are more likely to achieve desired outcomes and, consequently, satisfaction from their jobs.

c) **Neuroticism**. This characteristic pertains to how people assess their levels of insecurity, guilt, and anxiety (Costa & McCrae, 1988). McCrae and Costa (1991) observed that neuroticism is linked to reduced well-being since individuals with high neuroticism scores are inclined to experience negative emotions. Negative emotions, in turn, is negatively related to job satisfaction (Brief, 1998; Spector, 1997).

d) **Locus of control**. This is the belief individuals have regarding how their life events depend on their own behavior and decisions (Rotter, 1966). Spector, (1982) suggested that individuals with an internal locus of control should be more satisfied with their jobs because they are less likely to stay in an unsatisfying job and are more likely to be successful in organizations. Research has shown

that when individuals with an internal locus of control face discrepancies between acceptable standards of performance and their actual performance, they tend to increase their efforts to match their performance to the standards (Weiss & Sherman, 1973).

Some studies have also examined the role CSEs play as an antecedent of servant leadership. Liden et al. (2014) suggest reasons why the CSE trait has to be positively related to servant leadership, specifically due to: the belief in people's own ability to exert environmental influence; the focus on the positive side of life; the adoption of altruistic behaviors; and the reduced likelihood of seeking approval when given the opportunity to fill leadership roles. All these reasons potentially indicate a direct and positive relationship between CSE and servant leadership behavior (Liden et al., 2014).

Building on the CSE explanation, this research aims to further explore the function of servant leadership from the employees' perspective by investigating the contribution CSE has. This will help understand which types of employees are better suited to work with servant leaders and to empirically examine the moderating role of followers' CSEs on the degree to which they perceive fit with their servant leaders. Thus, we hypothesize:

H5. Core self-evaluations (CSEs) moderate the positive relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit, such that, when CSE is high, the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is positive and strong; conversely, when CSE is low, this relationship is weakened.

4.4 Methods

Procedure

Data collection was performed using the paper-and-pencil procedure. The researcher carried out fieldwork in December 2021, distributing 440 hardcopy questionnaires to employees on-site, together with a presentation letter explaining the study which also served as a consent letter.

Respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. A total of 425 responses were received. Of these, 388 were usable. The overall response rate was 86% (388 usable questionnaires out of 442 that were initially distributed).

Sample

Participants included 388 employees from a large home electrical appliance manufacturer in Isfahan, Iran. We only surveyed the staff, technical, and middle management positions. The majority of participants were male (78%), while the remaining respondents were female (22%). In terms of age distribution, 13% were between 18 and 27 years old; 60% between 28 and 37; 23% between 38 and 47; and 4% were over 48. With regards to education level, 6% of participants held a high school diploma degree; 52% a Bachelor's degree, accounting for above half of the total respondents; 39% a Master's degree; and 3% a Ph.D.

Measures

To assess all the study variables, a 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (totally disagree or extremely low) to 5 (totally agree or extremely high).

Servant Leadership. This was measured using the 7-item *Servant Leadership* scale developed by Liden et al. (2008) and later validated as a short version by Liden et al. (2015). Example items included: "I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem" and "My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community." Factor loading ranged between 0.589 to 0.769, and Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.853.

Person-supervisor Fit. Person-supervisor fit was measured using a 3-item scale developed by Cable and DeRue (2002). Example items were: "My personal values match my supervisor's values" and

“The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my supervisor values.” Factor loading ranged between 0.802 to 0.880. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.871.

Core Self-evaluation (CSE). To assess the core self-evaluation trait, 5 items from the scale developed by Judge et al. (2003) were used. Sample items included: “I am confident I get the success I deserve in life” and “I am capable of coping with most of my problems.” Factor loading ranged between 0.497 to 0.608. We dropped three items with low factor loadings from this scale because they had a low threshold in discriminant analysis results. Cronbach’s alpha for the shorter scale used was 0.721.

Job Satisfaction. We assessed job satisfaction with six items developed by Tsui et al. (1992). Sample items were: “How satisfied are you with the nature of the work you perform?” and “How satisfied are you with the person who supervises you?” Factor loading ranged between 0.514 to 0.788. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.793.

Control variables. Employees were asked to report some demographic information, which served as control variables, specifically: gender (1= Male, 2= Female) and age (where 1 = 18 to 27 years old, 2 = 28 to 37 years old, 3 = 38 to 47 years old, 4 = 48 to 57 years old, 5 = 58 or more years). The educational level was assessed with 1 = High school diploma; 2 = Bachelor’s degree; 3 = Master’s degree; and 4 = Ph.D.

Statistical Analysis Strategy

After collecting data, we conducted preliminary analyses to check the psychometric properties of the scales used for the hypothesized model (i.e., the internal reliability and consistency of the scales). We also carried out a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using SPSS and AMOS statistical package (v.27). Furthermore, we conducted correlational and regression analyses to review

the co-variation of study variables.

We conducted path modeling to test our hypotheses, applying structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques (AMOS 22) to examine all the research hypotheses in our study, including the indirect effects of servant leadership on job satisfaction via person-supervisor fit and the moderating effects of CSEs. Additionally, we further tested the conditional model using the PROCES macro tool, which is an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) logistic regression path analysis modeling technique. This macro developed by Hayes (2013) allows estimating conditional indirect effects on moderated mediation models.

Measurement model. Due to the use of self-reported measures, we also controlled for potential common method variance. We used Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to identify any possible effects. Accordingly, if common method variance exists, a single-factor confirmatory factor analysis model will provide better-fit indices, accounting for most of the covariance among all the studied variables.

Table 4.1- Harman’s single-factor test

| | χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMSEA | TLI | SRMR |
|-----------|----------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 factor | 591.72 | (104) | 0.000 | 5.690 | 0.798 | 0.118 | 0.736 | 0.000 |
| 3 factors | 414.27 | (101) | 0.000 | 4.102 | 0.892 | 0.090 | 0.872 | 0.071 |
| 1 factor | 1317.15 | (252) | 0.000 | 4.642 | 0.694 | 0.105 | 0.665 | 0.101 |
| 4 factors | 709.77 | (246) | 0.000 | 2.047 | 0.867 | 0.070 | 0.851 | 0.070 |

Note. χ^2 = Chi squared; (df) = (degrees of freedom); χ^2/df = ratio Chi squared by degrees of freedom; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

The hypothesized mediated model (Figure 4.1, p. 110) includes servant leadership and person-

supervisor fit, as well as CSE and job satisfaction. As can be seen in Table 4.1, models with four factors yielded a good fit for the data [$\chi^2(246) = 709.769, p < 0.000, \chi^2/df = 2.047, CFI = 0.867, RMSEA = 0.070$], while a single-factor model did not [$\chi^2(252) = 1317.152, p < 0.000, \chi^2/df = 4.642, CFI = 0.694, RMSEA = .105$]. These results corroborate the fact that they are four distinct constructs.

Table 4.2 below presents the study variables' construct reliability, as well as the model's convergent and discriminant validity. Although the average variance extracted (AVE) is less than 0.5 for two of the variables, the composite reliability (CR) scores are 0.8 (or more) for all study variables (Henseler et al., 2009), thus supporting the constructs' convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The data also confirmed discriminant validity, with all the average shared variance (ASV) scores below the AVE (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 4.2- Measurement model

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> | <i>MSV</i> | <i>ASV</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. Servant leadership | 0.86 | 0.46 | 0.67 | 0.44 |
| 2. Person-supervisor fit | 0.87 | 0.70 | 0.67 | 0.36 |
| 4. Job satisfaction | 0.80 | 0.40 | 0.58 | 0.36 |

Note. CR = Construct Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

MSV = Maximum Shared Variance; ASV = Average Shared Variance.

4.5 Results

Descriptive analysis

Table 4.3 below details the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the study variables. Servant leadership correlated positively with person-supervisor fit, CSE, and job satisfaction ($r = 0.717, p < .01; r = 0.165, p < .01; r = -0.623, p < .01$). Person-supervisor fit correlated positively with CSE and job satisfaction ($r = 0.116, p < .05; r = 0.526, p < .01$). In addition, CSE also correlated

positively with job satisfaction ($r = 0.26, p < .01$). None of the control variables (gender, age, and education) had a significant correlation with the latent variables, but we decided to control them in subsequent analyses.

Table 4.3- Mean, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables (N=388)

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|----------|--------|--------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Gender | 1.22 | 0.41 | -- | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 2.18 | 0.69 | -0.155** | -- | | | | |
| 3. Education | 2.39 | 0.64 | 0.116 * | -0.069 | -- | | | |
| 4. Servant leadership | 3.20 | 0.80 | 0.095 | -0.074 | -0.056 | -- | | |
| 5. Person-supervision Fit | 3.17 | 0.90 | 0.052 | -0.038 | 0.022 | 0.717** | -- | |
| 6. Core self-evaluation | 3.87 | 0.54 | 0.038 | 0.015 | 0.030 | 0.165** | 0.116 * | -- |
| 7. Job satisfaction | 3.18 | 0.72 | 0.073 | 0.015 | -0.013 | 0.623** | 0.526** | 0.26** |

Note. N= 388. Significant at ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed); * $p < .05$ (2-tailed). Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

Age: 1 = [18 to 27 years old], 2 = [28 to 37 years old], 3 = [38 to 47 years old], 4 = [48 to 57 years old], 5 = [58 years old and above]. Education: 1 = High school diploma, 2 = Bachelor's degree, 3 = Master's degree, 4 = Ph.D.

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1 predicts that employee perceptions about servant leadership are positively related to their perceptions about person-supervisor fit (M) (first path of the mediation). As reported in Table 4.4 above, servant leadership is significantly associated with person-supervisor fit ($\beta = 0.642, p < 0.001$). The bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (95%) is entirely above zero (0.501 to 0.810). Thus, servant leadership is significantly related to person-supervisor fit, corroborating hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 states that employee perceptions of servant leadership perception is positively related to their job satisfaction. As Table 4.4 indicates, their perception of servant leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.115, p < .01$). The bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval

(95%) for the direct effect based on 50,000 bootstrap samples is entirely above zero (0.032 to 0.219).

Thus, servant leadership positively and significantly affects job satisfaction, corroborating hypothesis 2.

Table 4.4- Moderated structural equation modelling results

| Outcomes: | Person-Supervisor Fit (<i>M</i>) | | Job Satisfaction (<i>Y</i>) | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| | Unstandardized path (<i>SE</i>) | β | Unstandardized path (<i>SE</i>) | β | | | |
| <i>Predictors:</i> | | | | | | | |
| Gender | ---- | --- | 0.080 (0.06) | 0.062 | | | |
| Age | ---- | --- | -0.048 (0.04) | 0.061 | | | |
| Education | ---- | --- | 0.002 (0.04) | 0.002 | | | |
| Servant leadership (SL) | 0.642*** (0.08) | 0.592 | 0.115** (0.04) | 0.156 | | | |
| Person-supervisor fit (<i>M</i>) | ---- | --- | 0.343*** (0.05) | 0.506 | | | |
| Core self-evaluation (CSE) | -0.339*** (0.05) | -0.225 | ---- | --- | | | |
| <i>Interaction:</i> | | | | | | | |
| SL x CSE | 0.068*** (0.01) | 0.325 | ---- | --- | | | |
| | R² | 0.677 | | 0.421 | | | |
| Indirect effect: | | | Estimate (SE) | LLCI | ULCI | | |
| <i>Servant leadership</i> → <i>Person-supervisor Fit</i> → <i>Job Satisfaction</i> | | | 0.220*** (0.05) | 0.134 | 0.340 | | |
| Fit indices of the moderated-mediation model: | | | | | | | |
| χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMSEA | TLI | SRMR |
| 1008.160 | (368) | 0.00 | 2.739 | 0.882 | 0.067 | 0.870 | 0.083 |

Note. Significant at ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. *X* = Antecedent variable; *M* = Mediator; *Y* = Dependent. β = standardized path coefficients; *SE* = standard error; *LLCI* = Lower bounds CI; *ULCI* = Upper bounds CI; *CI* = Confidence interval. $\chi^2 / (df)$ = Chi squared (degrees of freedom); GFI = Goodness of fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; *TLI* = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = Standardized root mean-square residual. Results are based on 50,000 bootstrap samples.

Hypothesis 3 predicts the second path of the indirect effect, that is, employee perceptions of person-supervisor fit is positively associated with their job satisfaction. Results in Table 4.4 provide evidence that employee perceptions of person-supervisor fit are significantly associated with their job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.343$, $p < 0.001$). The bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (95%) is also entirely above zero (0.216 to 0.497). Thus, the perceived person-supervisor fit positively and significantly affects employee job satisfaction, corroborating hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that employee perceptions of person-supervisor fit mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. As shown in Table 4.4, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (95%) for the indirect effect of X on Y is significant ($ab = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), as it is entirely above zero (0.134 to 0.340). Therefore, we can conclude that employee perceptions of servant leadership indirectly affect job satisfaction through person-supervisor fit. Thus, these results support hypothesis 4 in predicting person-supervisor fit's mediating role.

The moderating effect of CSEs

Finally, hypothesis 5 anticipates the moderating role of CSE in the first path in the moderated mediation model. Employees' CSEs moderate the positive relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit, such that, when CSEs are high, the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is positive and strong. Contrarily, when they are low, this relationship is weakened. As can be seen in Table 4.4, the interaction effect is significant ($\beta = 0.068$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (95%) for the interaction (moderation) effect is significant and entirely above zero (0.036 to 0.096).

To further test this hypothesis that captures the complexity of the overall conditional model, we also used the PROCES macro (model # 7) to calculate the moderate mediation ratio and to also

provide evidence of the conditional indirect effect at the CSE moderator levels (Hayes 2018). The full moderated mediation index for job satisfaction is significant (Index= 0.023; SE= 0.013; [CI = 0.004 to 0.054]).

Additionally, we analyzed the conditional indirect effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction at three CSE moderator levels. The bootstrap confidence intervals (95%) indicate that the indirect and positive effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction through person-supervisor fit is significant, as the 95% of confidence interval did not contain zero. As shown in Table 4.5 below, the indirect effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction (H5) via person-supervisor fit was significant and the effect on job satisfaction is strong and positive when CSEs are high (+SD). When they are low (-SD), this effect is smaller, although still significant. These findings show that CSEs interact with servant leadership to explain the variance of the person-supervisor fit, which, in turn, has a positive effect on employees' job satisfaction.

Table 4.5- Conditional Indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on job satisfaction (Y) via person-supervisor fit (M) at levels of moderator core self-evaluation (W)

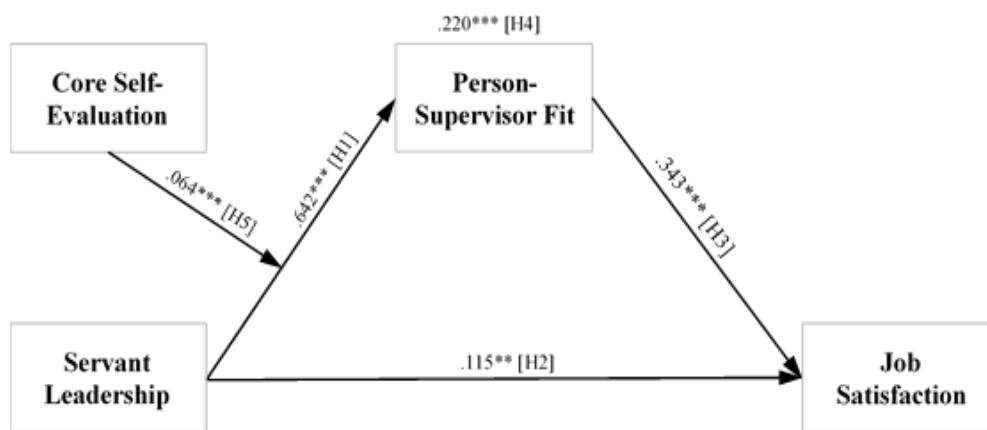
| <i>Servant leadership (X) → Person-supervisor fit (M)</i> | | | |
|---|--------|---------|---------------------|
| Moderator (Core self-evaluation) | Effect | Boot SE | (Boot LL – Boot UL) |
| -SD | 0.089 | 0.03 | (0.03 – 0.15) |
| Mean | 0.102 | 0.04 | (0.03 – 0.17) |
| +SD | 0.114 | 0.04 | (0.03 – 0.20) |

Note. N = 388 employees. X = Antecedent variable; M = Mediator; Boot SE = Standard error; Boot LLCI = Lower bounds CI; Boot ULCI = Upper bounds CI; CI = Confidence interval. Results are based on 50,000 bootstrap samples. 95% level of confidence for all CI in output. PROCESS macro (model 7)

Finally, we also tested the pairwise contrasts between conditional indirect effects for job satisfaction. These were also significant, thus corroborating hypothesis 5.

Overall, this study's findings provide evidence of the mediating role that employee perceptions of person-supervisor fit have on the relationships between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. These results also support the conditional role played by employee CSEs on this indirect effect. (See next figure 4.2 with summary results)

Figure 4.2 Results of the conditional moderated-mediation model (Study-2).



Note. Unstandardized path coefficients

4.6 Discussion

This study aimed to test a moderated mediation model of servant leadership through person-supervisor fit and the underlying processes through which it is associated with employee job satisfaction. Consistent with our hypotheses, the results corroborate that having a high perception of servant leadership translates into a positive perception of the fit between employees and their supervisors, which consequently affects their level of job satisfaction (H1, H2 & H3). Furthermore, we

corroborate the specific mechanism through which servant leadership improves employee job satisfaction, namely, the mediation role of person-supervisor fit (H4) and the conditional impact of employee CSEs on this indirect effect (H5).

According to Liden et al. (2014), servant leadership is particularly effective in promoting self-esteem and self-efficacy among followers. This is achieved by servant leaders displaying genuine concern for their followers' needs, giving them support and credit and empowering them to use and develop their talents and skills. By doing so, servant leaders convey confidence in their followers, demonstrating that they are worthy and capable individuals (Greenleaf, 1977). This creates opportunities for followers to solve work problems independently and successfully, leading to a sense of accomplishment and success. This, in turn, can contribute to a sense of control and influence over outcomes (i.e., locus of control) and allows followers to feel more confident and secure in challenging situations. (i.e., emotional stability).

These findings are also consistent with previous studies in which servant leadership was positively associated with job satisfaction (Chan & Mak, 2014; Donia et al., 2016; Mayer et al., 2008). Consistent with the core essence of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), when servant leaders establish a well-built relationship with their subordinates, they are more likely to share the same values, goals, or even other similar attributes. Thus, when employees are more in tune with their supervisors, the likelihood that they are more satisfied with their job is high.

Adding the moderating role of CSEs, these results are particularly compelling (Chang et al., 2012; Judge et al., 2005; Kacmar et al., 2009). Correspondingly, the primary focus is on servant leadership. Organizations embracing servant leadership and having employees with high CSEs will result in employees feeling a greater fit with their supervisor and, consequently, more satisfied with their jobs.

4.7 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to our understanding of the role servant leadership plays in improving the fit between supervisors and employees. It also illustrates that the fit between supervisor and subordinates enhances employee job satisfaction. Social exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017) frames the proposed research model, as it emphasizes the reciprocal exchange between the leader and followers, the supervisor, and employees.

Furthermore, among the different personality traits, CSEs have been found to be one of the key determinants of individuals' attitudes and behaviors and, accordingly, of employees in the workplace (Bono & Judge, 2003). Subordinates with high CSEs have significantly better perceptions of the servant leader's behavior which will, in turn, accentuate the effectiveness of servant leadership on employee job satisfaction, as they perceive greater fit with their supervisors.

4.8 Practical Implications

This study has practical implications for organizations that want to influence their employees successfully and, thus, achieve better outcomes. Organizations might be more influential if they hire leaders who tend to be servant leaders and are ethically competent. Organizations could also improve leaders' competence by training and enhancing servant leadership behaviors among all their managers and supervisors.

Another practical implication of this study is that employees with high CSEs have higher value congruence with their supervisors and managers when the latter adopt a servant leadership style, with the resulting positive effect on job satisfaction. Accordingly, in order to increase the fit between managers and subordinates, organizations should provide servant leadership mentorship and training programs and also select employees with high CSE traits.

4.9 Limitations and future research

This research is not without limitations which might provide insights for future studies. We relied on self-reported measures, which might raise the possibility of common method variance and inflate the coefficients (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We conducted Harman's single-factor test to assess this variance. Results of the CFAs suggest that such inflation was minimal. Furthermore, measurement model ratios also provide evidence of good model fit. Future research could collect data from multiples sources (e.g., adopt a supervisor-employee dyadic study design) to cross-validate these findings.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional research design, which impedes any causal inference. Future research would benefit by using a longitudinal or an experimental design to avoid this limitation. Also, current findings may be country or context-specific. Future research should attempt to replicate this study in other organizational and/or cultural contexts.

Finally, future research could also consider examining other outcomes and predictors of followers' positive reciprocal contribution and the role that servant leadership style plays in this social exchange process.

4.10 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to extend the servant leadership domain by revealing its effects on followers and organizational outcomes. The results shed light on the mediating mechanism of person-supervisor fit in the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. Furthermore, the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is conditioned by employees' CSEs. These findings imply that leadership style has an impact on employee perceptions of the person-supervisor fit. This, in turn, affects employees' subsequent job satisfaction, which is conditioned by employee CSEs that strengthen this equation.

Chapter Five:

STUDY 3 - SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES WORK

OUTCOMES: THE SERIAL MEDIATION OF EMPLOYEES JOB

SATISFACTION AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

STUDY 3 - SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES WORK OUTCOMES: THE SERIAL MEDIATION OF EMPLOYEES JOB SATISFACTION AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

5.1 Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to study the effects of servant leadership in organizational settings. We provide empirical evidence about the role that the serial mediation of job satisfaction and affective commitment play in the relation between servant leadership (independent variable) and turnover intention (dependent variable).

Methodology – We distributed a web-based questionnaire among 840 employees in different Iranian SMEs. We gathered data from 280 employees total, from only 227 respondents were retained. We tested the hypothesized model using a structural equation modeling (SEM) statistical strategy with SPSS (v. 27) and the Amos package (v. 25).

Finding – Servant leadership is a significant predictor of employee job satisfaction, affective commitment, and low turnover intention. This study shows that employee job satisfaction together with affective commitment mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee's low turnover intention.

Research limitations – There are several limitations. The first is the use of a cross-sectional research design which does not allow inferring causality among study variables. The single informant method and the self-reporting nature of the measures can also create common method variance limitations. Future research should also include other contextual explanatory variables from both leaders and employees.

Practical implications – This study’s findings provide further support for the significance of servant leadership’s benefits and its role in enhancing employees’ work outcomes.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to knowledge on the well-established relationships between servant leadership, employee satisfaction, affective commitment, and turnover. It also provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect organizations and employees in a new context, namely, different economic sectors and SMEs in Iran.

Keywords – Servant Leadership, Job Satisfaction, Affective Commitment, Turnover intention

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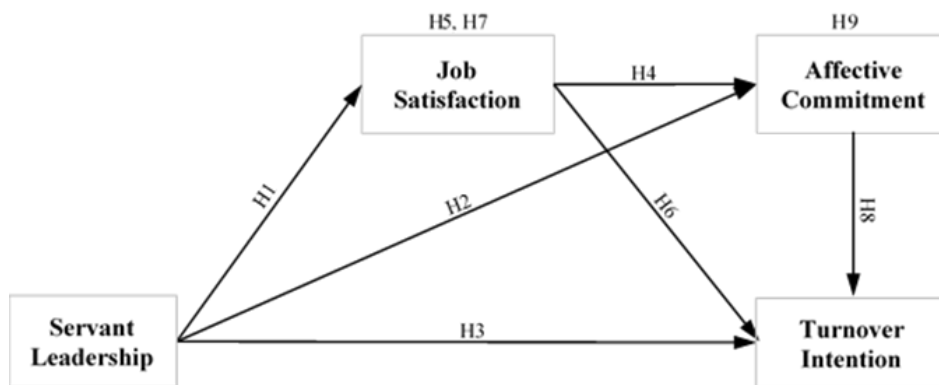
5.2 Introduction

New developments in the leadership field do not solely center around the leader but, rather, encompass other factors such as those leaders' followers, peers, managers, work environments, organizational contexts, and cultures (Avolio et al., 2009; Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Leadership studies have widely recognized the role of leaders in cultivating their employees' potential and fostering their work outcomes (Hoch et al., 2018; Northouse, 2021). Servant leadership, among other leadership theories, offers a focus "on developing employees to their fullest potential in the areas of task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership capabilities" (Liden et al., 2008, p. 162). Empirical servant leadership studies provide evidence of the effects on a wide range of workplace outcomes (Eva et al., 2019; Hoch et al., 2018; Hu & Liden, 2011; Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Greenleaf (1970), in his conceptualization of leadership, answers the questions of what servant leadership is and, to some extent, who servant leaders are; however, the questions of how, when, where, and why servant leadership impacts workplace outcomes still require more accurate answers (Huning et al., 2020). In this same vein, Wu et al. (2021), encourage additional research into the processes through which servant leadership relates to outcomes, exploring mediating and moderating variables. Eva et al. (2019) also advocate for more sophisticated approaches that take into consideration the complex relationships of servant leadership and outcome variables, exploring boundary conditions, mediators, and moderators. That is to say, the need to fully understand the underlying mechanisms by which servant leadership is transmitted and affects organizational outcomes still requires further exploration.

This study aims to help bridge this gap by focusing on the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between perceived servant leadership and employee’s work outcomes. In other words, this study serves to explore whether an increase in employee satisfaction, achieved through the leader’s servant leadership style, results in more favorable employee work outcomes, namely, greater organizational commitment and less turnover intention (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1- Hypothesized model - The dual mediation role of job satisfaction and affective commitment in the relationship between servant leadership and employee turnover intention.



In doing so, we seek to make the following contributions: First, we would like to provide a theoretical foundation which explains the effects of servant leadership and provides additional empirical contributions to the servant leadership field. Second, and perhaps more importantly, we seek to establish job satisfaction as an underlying mechanism that transmits the positive effects of servant leadership to employees’ commitment and turnover intention. Third, we provide empirical evidence about serial mediation through which servant leadership affects employee retention (an indirect effect through job satisfaction and organizational commitment). Finally, this study also contributes to the literature by investigating the effects of servant leadership on individual work outcomes in a non-Western cultural context.

5.3 Hypotheses Development

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) proposed a unique style of leadership, known as servant leadership, which opened up a new avenue of research in leadership literature. This approach emphasized the importance of prioritizing the needs of others, while also promoting qualities such as, communicating effectively with followers, assisting them in reaching their full potential (Liden et al., 2008), adopting an attitude of authenticity and humility (Van Dierendonck, 2011), encouraging the well-being of the broader community and its stakeholders (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leaders contribution to these qualities in turn encourages positive attitudes and behavioral outcomes among employees (Lemoine et al., 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011), by forming social exchange relationships with their followers (Liden et al., 2008).

Social exchange theory posits that a social exchange involves a series of contingent and interdependent interactions between two parties, where one party provides something, and the other feels obliged to reciprocate (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In the context of the workplace, employees recognize their supervisors as representatives of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010) and respond to servant leadership by demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviors towards the organization (Lemoine et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2008; Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014).

To this end, we frame this study to further explore the relationship between servant leadership and work outcomes namely, Job satisfaction, affective commitment, and Turnover intention through the social exchange theory lens (Blau, 1964).

Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

According to Harrison et al. (2006), job satisfaction is one of the most valuable pieces of information an organization can obtain about its employees. Therefore, assessing job satisfaction is

still an essential research topic in the organizational behavioral field (Whitman et al., 2010). Job satisfaction is defined as the positive feelings and attitudes that employees have towards their jobs (Armstrong, 2006), arising when the work aspects and requirements of those performing the job are in harmony (Davis, 1981). Armstrong (2006) suggests that the level of job satisfaction depends on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, supervision quality, social relationships with coworkers, and job success or failure. Job satisfaction's importance lies in its ability to prevent unfavorable consequences such as decreased loyalty and increased absenteeism (Aziri, 2011).

Scholars have found that the leader's behaviors have a significant impact on job satisfaction (Chan & Mak, 2014). The association between leadership style and job satisfaction has been well-established (Hu et al., 2010; Mayer et al., 2008). Servant leaders value their subordinates by providing them support and creating a work environment that enables them to achieve their full potential. By prioritizing their subordinates' needs over their own, servant leaders create conditions that result in greater job satisfaction among employees (Donia et al., 2016; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Mayer et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Therefore, based on this rationale, we hypothesize that servant leadership has a positive impact on employees' job satisfaction:

H1. Servant leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction.

Servant Leadership and Affective Commitment

Scholars have paid significant attention in recent decades to organizational commitment (e.g. Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mowday et al., 1979). Porter et al. (1974) defined organizational commitment as "a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values; [a] willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and [b] definite desire to maintain organizational membership" (Porter et al., 1974, p. 604). Committed employees are willing to go beyond their job descriptions and make personal contributions, and they have a strong desire to continue working for

the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Mayer and Allen identified three dimensions of organizational commitment: affective, normative, and continuous (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment is based on an individual's emotional attachment, while normative commitment is based on a feeling of moral obligation to stay with the organization; continuous commitment is based on economic incentives to stay. Among these three dimensions, researchers have paid the most attention to affective commitment due to its relevance in determining employees' psychological behavior in organizational settings (e.g. Jackson et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2008; Ling et al., 2017; Parris & Peachey, 2013). This study will concentrate only on this affective commitment dimension.

Scholars have examined the practical and theoretical implications of affective commitment extensively (Meyer et al., 2002; Stazyk et al., 2011), demonstrating its strong correlations with critical organizational outcomes, including attendance, turnover (Mowday et al., 1982), performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Walumbwa et al., 2010), as well as negative individual outcomes such as stress and work-family conflict (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

The literature has emphasized that servant leadership aims to promote the comprehensive development of followers (Beck, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2008) and that it should primarily enhance affective commitment. According to Liden et al. (2008) and Page and Wong (2000), servant leaders offer support to their followers (emotional healing dimension), provide opportunities for them to learn new skills (helping subordinates grow and succeed dimension), encourage their self-development, and involve them in decision-making and problem-solving (empowering dimension), all of which should lead to stronger emotional bonds between the followers and the organization. Since leaders are seen as representatives of the organization by their subordinates (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Erdogan et al., 2004), employees are more likely to develop emotional attachment to the organization because of these experiences, leading to a higher level of affective commitment. Therefore, we

hypothesize:

H2. Servant leadership is positively related to employee's affective commitment.

Servant Leadership and Turnover Intention

Voluntary employee turnover has been a significant challenge for researchers and practitioners over the years (Babalola et al., 2016), mainly due to the considerable costs involved at both the personal and organizational levels. These costs include the loss of organization-specific human capital, expenses related to the recruitment and training of replacement employees, reduced service quality, and other associated costs (Allen et al., 2010; Glebbeek & Bax, 2004; Hancock et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2001; Wright & Bonett, 2007). In this regard, many studies have shown that voluntary employee turnover is a negative indicator of organizational effectiveness (Allen & Griffeth, 2001; Glebbeek & Bax, 2004). Therefore, a growing body of research has attempted to understand turnover intention in order to enhance organizational effectiveness by retaining valuable employees (Hom et al., 2012). This is because turnover intention, which measures employee inclinations to leave their job voluntarily (Meyer & Tett, 1993), is consistently identified as a reliable predictor of actual turnover (Fugate et al., 2012; Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom et al., 2012; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Vandenberg & Nelson, 1999). Thus, it is critical to understand the causes of employee turnover to define efficient retention policies and improve organizational effectiveness (Griffeth & Hom, 2001).

Griffeth et al. (2000) conducted a meta-analysis study which found that leadership style is crucial in reducing turnover intention among employees. Other studies have also shown that the servant leadership style has a significant impact on shaping employees' intention to leave their jobs (Babakus et al., 2010; Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009).

As described above and in accordance with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees may view the servant leader's dedication to meeting their needs and ensuring their wellbeing as

deserving of a reciprocal response. Therefore, an employee's engagement and commitment to remain with the organization instead of quitting may represent a form of "payback" for a positive social exchange (Erdogan et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Building on this rationale and research evidence, we anticipate that followers of servant leaders are unlikely to develop the intention to leave their organization. Therefore:

H3. Servant leadership is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment

Beyond its direct effect on turnover intention, servant leadership may have an indirect effect on turnover through job satisfaction and affective commitment. In other words, these two variables could be the underlying mechanisms through which servant leadership influences turnover intention.

There has been a significant amount of research on the connection between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Davis, 2013; Markovits et al., 2010), with studies indicating a positive relationship between the two (Caillier, 2013; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). However, studies that have examined the causality between job satisfaction and organizational commitment have had mixed findings (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Caillier, 2013; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Park & Rainey, 2008; Sharma et al., 2010; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992; Williams & Hazer, 1986). Nevertheless, models predicting that job satisfaction precedes organizational commitment have been widely accepted across cultures (Porter et al., 1974; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992; Wang & Xu, 2019; Williams & Hazer, 1986).

Furthermore, previous research based on social exchange theory suggests that, when employees are satisfied with their job security, pay and benefits, work autonomy, career opportunities, training, and development, they are more likely to reciprocate with a strong affective commitment towards the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos,

2006). Drawing on social exchange theory, we propose that job satisfaction will positively affect employees' affective commitment. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4. *Job satisfaction positively relates to affective commitment.*

Additionally, when employees feel that their leaders actively adopt servant leadership behaviors (i.e., paying attention to their subordinates' concerns), employees are more satisfied with their jobs. Therefore, based on social exchange theory, they may feel obligated to reciprocate that treatment by being committed to the organization; therefore, taking hypotheses H1 and H4 together, we can hypothesize that:

H5. *Job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and affective commitment.*

In terms of turnover intention, research has identified a wide range of antecedent variables that predict employees' intentions to leave their jobs (Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom et al., 1992; Meyer & Tett, 1993). However, many scholars have anticipated and tested that job satisfaction is a key antecedent of employee turnover (Helm, 2013; Mobley et al., 1979; Price & Mueller, 1986; Williams & Hazer, 1986). Dissatisfaction can lead to the intention to leave, which can ultimately result in turnover (Lambert et al., 2001). Therefore, a decrease in or a lack of job satisfaction among employees can lead to an increase in employee turnover. Based on this logic and previous empirical evidence, we predict that:

H6. *Job satisfaction negatively relates to turnover intention.*

When employees perceive that their leaders are exhibiting servant leadership behaviors, such as prioritizing subordinates' needs, the likelihood that employees will be more satisfied with their job

increases. Drawing on social exchange theory, it is expected that high job satisfaction will be negatively related to turnover intention because employees who experience high levels of satisfaction tend to remain in their organizations. Conversely, employees who are dissatisfied are more likely to look for employment opportunities elsewhere (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Based on this logic, we hypothesize that:

H7. *Job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention.*

Additionally, results of a meta-analysis (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) of 200 organizational commitment studies support Mowday et al.'s (1982) prediction that the strongest and most predictable behavioral consequence of employee commitment is low turnover. Likewise, another meta-analysis of 155 studies that included 178 independent samples reported that the level of organizational commitment is a predictor of turnover intention (Meyer & Tett, 1993). Based on this evidence, we can hypothesize that:

H8: Affective commitment is negatively related to turnover intention.

Furthermore, boundary conditions in organizational settings play a complex role in explaining the effects and correlations of leaders' influence. Based on the former rationale, this role implies that job satisfaction and affective commitment have a sequential mediating effect on the relation between servant leadership and employee turnover intention. As explained above, commitment plays a determinant role in predicting turnover. Therefore, combining hypotheses H6 and H8, we contend that the process through which servant leadership influences employee turnover intention can be attributed to employees' job satisfaction, and, respectively, their affective commitment to the

organization. Therefore, we hypothesize a serial¹ relationship among all study variables:

H9. Job satisfaction and affective commitment will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention.

5.4 Methods

Procedure

We used an online questionnaire for data collection. We distributed the survey link among 840 employees in various Iranian SMEs in different industrial sectors. The questionnaire's welcome screen informed participants that their participation in the study would be kept confidential as there was no need to disclose their identity.

Sample

The final number of responses received were from 280 participants, among which we retained only those from 227 employees due to the remaining questionnaires being incomplete. The final response rate was 33% (280 returned questionnaires out of 840 potential participants). Among the participants, 64% were male and 35% were female; only one person chose not to disclose their gender. The age distribution was diverse, with 18% of participants falling between 18 and 27 years old; 41% between 28 and 37; 27% between 38 and 47; 12% between 48 and 57; and 2% above 58. In terms of educational qualifications, 17% of participants held high school diplomas; 41% held Bachelor's degrees; 31% held Master's degrees; and only 11% held PhDs.

¹ A *serial multiple mediator model* depicts a two-mediator model in which X is modeled as affecting Y by means of four pathways. One pathway is indirect and only runs from X to Y through M1. A second indirect path only runs through M2, and a third indirect influence passes through both M1 and M2 in serial, with M1 affecting M2. The remaining effect of X is direct from X to Y without passing through either M1 or M2.

Measures

To assess the questionnaire's constructs, we used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Servant leadership. Servant leadership was measured through the servant leadership scale developed by Liden et al. (2008). It was validated as a short scale (7-item) by Liden et al. (2015). Example items include: "I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem" and "My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community." Factor loading ranged between 0.620 to 0.836, and Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.883.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was assessed with six items developed by Tsui et al. (1992). Sample items were: "How satisfied are you with the nature of the work you perform?" and "How satisfied are you with the person who supervises you?" Factor loading ranged between 0.588 to 0.735. We eliminated one item because of its low load. Cronbach's alpha for this shorter scale is 0.809.

Affective commitment. To measure affective commitment, a 6-items scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) was used. An example item was: "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own." Factor loading ranged between 0.529 to 0.725. We dropped two items because they did not achieve a good load. Cronbach's alpha for this shorter scale is 0.700.

Turnover intention. To measure turnover intention, we used the 4-item scale developed by Kelloway et al. (1999). Sample items include: "I am thinking about leaving this organization" and "I intend to ask people about new job opportunities." Factor loading ranged between 0.659 to 0.851, and Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.856.

Control variables. Employees were asked to report some demographic data: their gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female) and age (where 1 = 18 to 27 years old, 2 = 28 to 37 years old, 3 = 38 to 47 years old, 4 = 48 to 57 years old, and 5 = 58 or more years old), as well as their educational level (1 = High-school degree, 2 = Bachelor's degree, 3 = Master's degree, and 4 = PhD) which were used as control

variables.

Statistical Analyses Strategy

After collecting data, we conducted some preliminary analyses to check the psychometric properties of the scales used for the hypothesized model (i.e., the internal reliability and consistency of the scales), as well as series of CFAs with SPSS and AMOS statistical package (v.27). We then conducted correlational analyses to examine the co-variation of study variables.

We carried out path modeling to test our hypotheses; we applied structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques (AMOS 22) to examine all the research hypotheses, including the indirect effects of servant leadership on outcomes via job satisfaction (H1 to H7). Furthermore, in addition to the SEM techniques, we also used the PROCES macro, which is an OLS logistic regression path analysis modeling tool. This macro developed by Hayes (2013) allows estimating direct and indirect effects in single mediator models.

Measurement model. Due to using self-reported measures, we controlled for potential common method variance. we used Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to identify any possible effects. Accordingly, if there is common method variance, a single-factor confirmatory factor analysis model will provide better-fit indices, accounting for the majority of the covariance among all of the studied variables.

The hypothesized serial mediation model (see Figure 5.1, p. 135) includes servant leadership, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and turnover intention. As can be seen in Table 5.1, the four-factor model yielded a good fit for the data [$\chi^2(164) = 362.32, p < .000, \chi^2/df = 2.21, CFI = 0.904, RMSEA = 0.073, TLI = 0.889, SMRM = 0.687$]. Contrarily, the single-factor model did not provide good-fit indices: [$\chi^2(209) = 886.89, p < .000, \chi^2/df = 5.22, CFI = 0.652, RMSEA = 0.137, TLI = 0.611, SMRM = 0.117$]. The same occurs when considering all three factors instead of just one factor.

Table 5.1 - Harman's single-factor test

| | χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMSEA | TLI | SMRM |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 3 factors (commitment) | 288.84 | (101) | 0.000 | 2.86 | 0.878 | 0.091 | 0.855 | 0.076 |
| 1 factor (commitment) | 467.47 | (104) | 0.000 | 4.49 | 0.763 | 0.124 | 0.727 | 0.097 |
| 3 factors (turnover) | 241.91 | (101) | 0.000 | 2.40 | 0.919 | 0.079 | 0.904 | 0.067 |
| 1 factor (turnover) | 662.04 | (104) | 0.000 | 6.37 | 0.680 | 0.154 | 0.631 | 0.123 |
| 4 factors | 362.32 | (164) | 0.000 | 2.21 | 0.904 | 0.073 | 0.889 | 0.687 |
| 1 factor | 886.89 | (170) | 0.000 | 5.22 | 0.652 | 0.137 | 0.611 | 0.117 |

Note. χ^2 = Chi squared, (df) = (degrees of freedom); χ^2/df = ratio Chi squared by degrees of freedom; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation, TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

Table 5.2 presents the results regarding the construct reliability of the study variables, as well as the model's convergent and discriminant validity. The composite reliability (CR) scores were equal to or higher than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006) for each of the variables. The average variance extracted (AVE) score was around 0.50 or more, and the AVE for the four variables was greater than the variance shared with the remaining constructs, thus supporting convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2009).

Table 5.2- Measurement model

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> | <i>MSV</i> | <i>ASV</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. Servant Leadership | 0.89 | 0.53 | 0.49 | 0.31 |
| 2. Satisfaction | 0.81 | 0.49 | 0.49 | 0.38 |
| 3. Commitment | 0.71 | 0.49 | 0.51 | 0.37 |
| 4. Turnover | 0.86 | 0.61 | 0.51 | 0.33 |

Note. CR = Construct Reliability; AVE = Average Variance extracted; MSV = Maximum Shared Variance; ASV = Average Shared Variance.

Despite recommendations to use average variance extracted (AVE) figures higher than 0.5, some scholars accept the 0.4 cut-off (Hair et al., 2006). In this sense, Fornell and Larcker (1981) indicate that, if AVE is less than 0.5 but composite reliability (CR) is higher than 0.6, the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate.

5.5 Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 5.3 shows the descriptive statistics and zero order correlations among study variables. Servant leadership is positively correlated with job satisfaction and employee commitment ($r = 0.57$, $p < .001$; $r = 0.46$, $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with employee turnover intention ($r = -0.33$, $p < .001$). Job satisfaction positively correlates with commitment ($r = 0.49$, $p < .001$) and negatively with turnover intention ($r = -0.47$, $p < .01$). In addition, commitment is negatively correlated with turnover intention ($r = -0.62$, $p < .01$).

Table 5.3- Mean, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables (N=227)

| | Mean | (SD) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-----------------------|------|------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|----|
| 1. Gender | 1.36 | 0.49 | -- | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 2.40 | 0.98 | -0.21** | -- | | | | | |
| 3. Education | 2.37 | 0.90 | - 0.08 | 0.28** | -- | | | | |
| 4. Servant Leadership | 3.07 | 0.84 | 0.16* | - 0.06 | -0.15* | -- | | | |
| 5. Job satisfaction | 3.11 | 0.81 | 0.08 | - 0.03 | - 0.05 | 0.57*** | -- | | |
| 6. Commitment | 3.30 | 0.74 | 0.05 | 0.21** | - 0.01 | 0.46*** | 0.49*** | -- | |
| 7. Turnover intention | 2.97 | 0.91 | - 0.03 | -0.19** | 0.01 | -0.33*** | - 0.47*** | - 0.62*** | -- |

Note. Significant at *** $p < .001$ (2-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed); * $p < .05$ (2-tailed). Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female. Age: 1 = [18 to 27 years old], 2 = [28 to 37 years old], 3 = [38 to 47 years old], 4 = [48 to 57 years old], and 5 = [58 years old and above]. Education: 1 = High school degree, 2 = Bachelor's degree, 3 = Master's degree, 4 = PhD

All three control variables have a significant correlation with a latent variable. Servant leadership is positively correlated with gender ($r = 0.16, p < .05$) and negatively with education ($r = -0.15, p < .05$). Age positively correlates with commitment ($r = 0.21, p < .01$) and negatively with turnover intention ($r = -0.19, p < .01$).

We decided to control for all available control variables in our subsequent analyses.

Direct Effects of Servant Leadership on Outcomes

Hypotheses 1 to 3 anticipate the direct effect of servant leadership on outcomes. Specifically, the first hypothesis predicts the positive association between the employees' perception of servant leadership on job satisfaction (M) (first path of the mediation). As can be seen in Table 5.4, servant leadership is significantly associated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.496, p < .000$). The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval is entirely above zero (0.35 to 0.66). Thus, servant leadership positively and significantly affects job satisfaction, corroborating hypothesis 1.

The second hypothesis predicts that servant leadership (X) is positively associated with commitment (Y). As shown in Table 5.4, employees' perception of servant leadership is significantly associated with commitment ($\beta = 0.177, p < .05$). The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the direct effect based on 50,000 bootstrap samples is above zero (0.01 to 0.38). Therefore, the direct effect of servant leadership (X) on affective commitment (Y) is positive and significant. Thus, these results corroborate hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 posits that servant leadership (X) is negatively associated with turnover intention (Y). As can be seen in Table 5.4, employees' perception of servant leadership is not significantly associated with turnover ($\beta = 0.165, p = ns.$). This path of influence cannot be claimed as definitively different from zero because the 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval straddles zero (-

0.06 to 0.47). Therefore, the direct effect of X on Y is not significant. Thus, these results do not corroborate hypothesis 3.

Hypotheses four and six predict the second path of the indirect effect. Specifically, hypothesis 4 anticipates that job satisfaction (M) is positively associated with commitment (Y). Results in Table 5.4 provide evidence that job satisfaction is significantly and positively associated with commitment ($\beta = 0.385, p < .01$). The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval is also entirely above zero (0.09 to 0.77). Therefore, the effect of job satisfaction on affective commitment is significant, corroborating hypothesis 4.

Table 5.4- Path results - Regression coefficient, Standard errors, and model summary

| Outcomes: | Job Satisfaction (M ₁) | | Commitment (M ₂) | | Turnover (Y) | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|-------|
| Predictors | Unstandardized path (SE) | β | Unstandardized path (SE) | β | Unstandardized path (SE) | β | |
| Gender | ----- | | ----- | | -0.041 (.10) | -0.022 | |
| Age | ----- | | ----- | | -0.117*(.05) | -0.126 | |
| Education | ----- | | ----- | | 0.060 (.06) | 0.059 | |
| Servant Leadership | 0.496*** (.07) | 0.68 | 0.177* (.08) | 0.256 | 0.165 (.10) | 0.160 | |
| Job Satisfaction | ----- | | 0.385**(.13) | 0.395 | -0.525**(.17) | -0.362 | |
| Commitment | ----- | | ----- | | -0.840***(.17) | -0.565 | |
| R² | 0.485 | | 0.362 | | 0.553 | | |
| Fit indices of the full mediated model | | | | | | | |
| χ^2 | (df) | p | χ^2/df | CFI | RMSEA | TLI | SMRM |
| 467.19 | (224) | 0.000 | 2.086 | 0.885 | 0.069 | 0.870 | 0.077 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. β = standardized path coefficients; SE = standard error; $\chi^2 / (df)$ = Chi squared (degrees of freedom); GFI = Goodness of fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual; X = Antecedent variable; M = Mediator; Y = Dependent. CI = Confidence interval. LLCI = Lower-level confidence interval, ULCI = Upper-level confidence interval. CIs containing zero are interpreted as non-significant. Results are based on 50,000 bootstrap samples.

Hypothesis 6 predicts that job satisfaction (M) is negatively associated with turnover intention (Y). Results in Table 5.4 shows that job satisfaction is significant and negatively associated with turnover intention ($\beta = -0.525$, $p < .01$). The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval is also entirely below zero (-1.07 to -0.13). Thus, the higher employee perception of job satisfaction is, the lower their turnover intention, corroborating hypothesis 6.

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

Hypotheses 5 and 7 predict the mediation role of job satisfaction. Specifically, hypothesis 5 postulates that servant leadership (X) has an indirect effect on affective commitment (Y) through job satisfaction (M). As shown in Table 5.5, the 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of X on Y is significant ($ab = 0.191$; $p < .01$), as it is entirely above zero (0.046 to 0.421). Therefore, the results demonstrate that employees' perception of servant leadership indirectly affects commitment through job satisfaction. Thus, these results support hypothesis 5 in predicting job satisfaction's mediation role.

Hypothesis 7 predicts the indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on turnover intention (Y) through job satisfaction (M). The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of X on Y is significant ($ab = -0.156$; $p < .000$), as it is entirely below zero (-0.250 to -0.072). Therefore, the results indicate that employees' perception of servant leadership indirectly affects their turnover intention through job satisfaction. The greater employee's perception of servant leadership is, the lower their turnover intention. Thus, these results corroborate hypothesis 7 in predicting job satisfaction's mediation role.

Hypothesis 8 anticipates that employees' organizational commitment is negatively associated with turnover intention. As shown in Table 5.4, this relationship is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.840$,

$p < .000$). The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the direct effect based on 50,000 bootstrap samples is above zero (-1.64 to -0.43). Therefore, the relationship is negative and significant, corroborating hypothesis 8.

Table 5.5- Mediation results: Indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on turnover intention (Y) via job satisfaction (M1) and affective commitment (M2)

| Indirect effects | Estimate (SE) | LLCI | ULCI |
|---|---------------|--------|--------|
| Servant leadership → Job Satisfaction → Commitment | 0.191 (.039) | 0.046 | 0.065 |
| Servant leadership → Job Satisfaction → Turnover | -0.156 (.045) | -0.250 | -0.072 |
| Servant leadership → Commitment → Turnover | -0.145 (.042) | -0.230 | -0.065 |
| Servant leadership → Job Satisfaction → Commitment → Turnover | -0.105 (.025) | -0.160 | -0.060 |

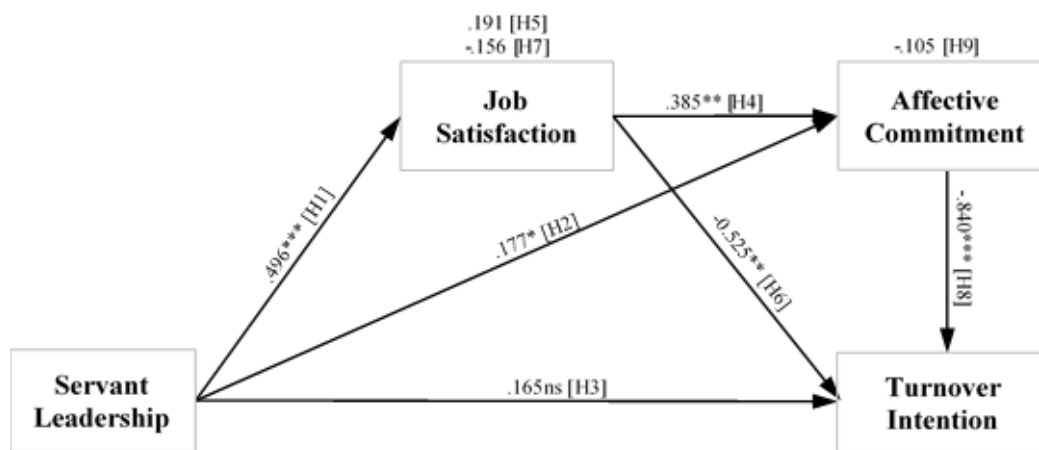
Note. SE = standard error; CI = Confidence interval. LLCI = Lower-level confidence interval, ULCI = Upper-level confidence interval. CIs containing zero are interpreted as non-significant. Results are based on 50,000 bootstrap samples. PROCESS results (model 6)

Serial Mediation (Indirect Effect through Job Satisfaction and Commitment)

Hypothesis 9 predicts serial mediation, specifically, the indirect effect of servant leadership (X) on turnover intention (Y) through the job satisfaction (M_1) and commitment (M_2) mediators. The 95% of bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of X on Y is negative and significant ($ab = -0.105$; $p < .000$) as it is entirely below zero (-0.16 to -0.06). Therefore, we can conclude that employees' perception of servant leadership indirectly affects their turnover intention through job satisfaction and commitment. The higher employees' perception of servant leadership is, together with satisfaction and commitment, the lower their turnover intention. Thus, these results corroborate hypothesis 9 in predicting job satisfaction's and commitment's mediation role.

Consistent with our hypothesized model, these findings provide empirical evidence of the indirect effect of servant leadership style on employees' turnover intention, specifically through their job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thus corroborating the serial mediation model. In other words, employee assessment of the support they receive from organizational representatives translates into employees' positive job satisfaction and affective commitment to the organization, and these two jointly influence employees' turnover intention. (See next figure 5.2 with summary results)

Figure 5.2- Results of the dual mediation model (Study-3).



Note. Unstandardized path coefficients

5.6 Discussion

This study aimed to examine servant leadership theory and its impact on organizational work outcomes to better understand the mechanisms shaping employees' work-related attitudes. It provides empirical evidence about the serial mediation of servant leadership through job satisfaction and affective commitment in explaining employees' turnover intention.

These findings indicate that servant leadership has a significant relationship with employee

job satisfaction (H1) and affective commitment (H2), though it does not have a significant negative and direct effect on turnover intention (H3). In turn, job satisfaction has a significant positive relationship with affective commitment (H4) and a significant negative effect with turnover intention (H6). Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment (H5) and turnover intention (H7). Finally, affective commitment is negatively related to turnover intention (H8), and both affective commitment and job satisfaction together mediate the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention (H9).

These findings corroborate the indirect effect of servant leadership in predicting turnover intention. However, servant leadership's direct effect on turnover intention was not proven to be significant, but the indirect effect through job satisfaction and commitment is. Consequently, employees' turnover intention can be better explained when considering employees' job satisfaction and affective commitment levels.

Further, the indirect relationship between employees' perceived servant leadership style and their turnover intentions through job satisfaction and affective commitment indicates that servant leaders help influence employees' decisions to stay or leave the organization. These results thus enable concluding that servant leaders influence their followers' attitudes (Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom et al., 2012). Consequently, it is likelier that followers of leaders with a service orientation (i.e., servant leadership) are more satisfied, more committed, and will remain with their leaders for longer periods of time compared to those with other leaders who are not service oriented. This can be due to the servant leaders' actions and attitudes, such as putting subordinates first, the emotional healing they provide, helping subordinates grow and succeed, etc., all of which seem to be crucial in modulating employees' work-related attitudes. The servant leaders' continuous support and focus on employees' welfare and development (which are inherent values of the servant leadership style) enhance employees' job satisfaction. Thus, followers with high job satisfaction levels reciprocate their leaders'

supportive behavior by showing greater commitment to the organization and lowering their turnover intention (Mowday et al., 1982).

5.7 Theoretical Implications

Answering calls to further assess the underlying mechanisms that explain the relationship between servant leadership style and organizational outcomes (Eva et al., 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011, Wu et al., 2021), we have proposed and provided empirical evidence that employee job satisfaction and affective commitment work as important mediating mechanisms in explaining this relationship. Thus, this study contributes to servant leadership theory by clarifying these nuances. It contributes to the servant leadership domain by identifying one of the mechanisms influencing the relationship between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention, specifically, through a serial mediation mechanism (i.e., employees' job satisfaction and affective commitment).

5.8 Practical Implications

This empirical study also has some important implications for organizations. First, organizations should consider developing and training leaders to adopt a servant leadership style due to its positive and significant impact on employees' job satisfaction, their affective commitment, and retention (negative significance with respect to turnover intention). Second, organizations can manage turnover concerns (Yang et al., 2012) by dealing with employees' needs and developing a servant leadership culture due to its effective and positive influence on turnover intention through employee job satisfaction and affective commitment. This might help organizations deal with and overcome the rising rate of employee turnover in today's competitive environment.

5.9 Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional research design does not allow implying causality. Future research should adopt a longitudinal design to test the hypothesized model.

The second limitation is the use of a single source of informants. Furthermore, due to the self-reported nature of the measures, the possibility of common method bias cannot be discarded (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research should use a different research design and/or different informants for the predictors and criteria variables.

Third, the nature of the sample limits the generalizability of the study's results to other settings. Though the current sample comes from different organizations in Iran, future research could obtain more robust findings by testing the model in other contexts (e.g., various industry sectors and/or additional countries).

5.10 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to further explain servant leadership's contribution to organizational settings. The findings provide empirical evidence about the serial mediation of servant leadership through job satisfaction and affective commitment in explaining and reducing the likelihood of turnover intention as a dependent variable. Framed within social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), this study conceptualizes employees' job satisfaction and affective commitment as two underlying mediating mechanisms which establish the relationship between servant leadership actions and employees' turnover intention.

Chapter Six:

Thesis Conclusions

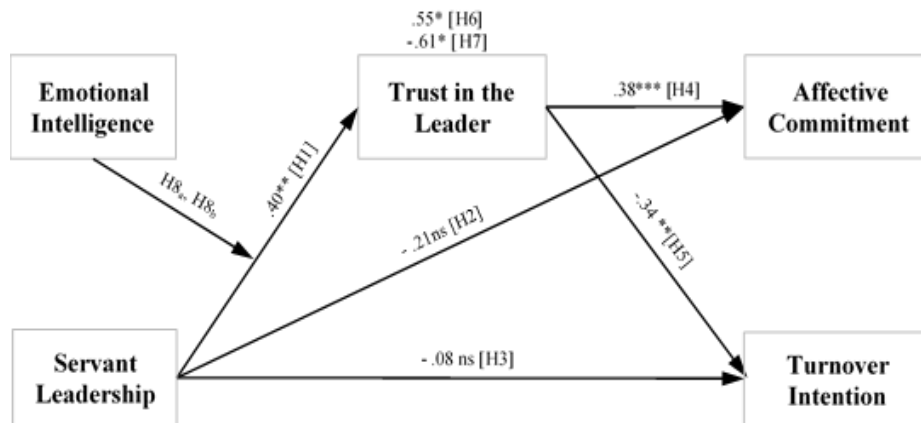
THESIS CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter, we would like to recap the main contributions of this thesis. First, we will summarize the key findings of Study 1 (Chapter 3), Study 2 (Chapter 4), and Study 3 (Chapter 5) with the list of supported hypotheses. Second, we will address the theoretical contributions and the practical implications of the different studies. And, finally, we will conclude with the main limitations of these studies and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

Paper 1: SERVANT LEADERSHIP EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEES' OUTCOMES: HOW DO EMPLOYEES' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRUST IN THE LEADER PLAY A ROLE?

Figure 6.1- Hypothesized model results (Study 1)



Note. Unstandardized path coefficients

Table 6.1- Study one - Hypotheses results

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| H1. Employee perception of servant leadership is positively related to trust in the leader. | Supported |
| H2. Employee perception of servant leadership is positively related to affective commitment. | Not Supported |
| H3. Employee perception of servant leadership is negatively associated with employees' turnover intention. | Not Supported |
| H4. Employees' trust in the leader will be positively associated with organizational commitment. | Supported |
| H5. Employees' trust in the leader will be negatively associated with turnover intention. | Supported |
| H6. Employees' trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and commitment. | Supported |
| H7. Employees' trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention. | Supported |
| H8a & H8b. Employees' emotional intelligence moderates the positive relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader such that, when emotional intelligence is high, the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is positive and strong, while, when emotional intelligence is low, this relationship is weakened in terms of predicting commitment (H8a) and in predicting turnover (H8b). | Supported |

The aim of Study 1 was to test the effect of servant leadership on employees' perceptions and intentions, specifically, its relationship with trust in the leader as a mediator, with turnover intention and affective organizational commitment as dependent variables. We wanted to examine the mediating role that trust in the leader has. Furthermore, we hypothesized that employees' emotional intelligence plays a moderating intervening role in the model.

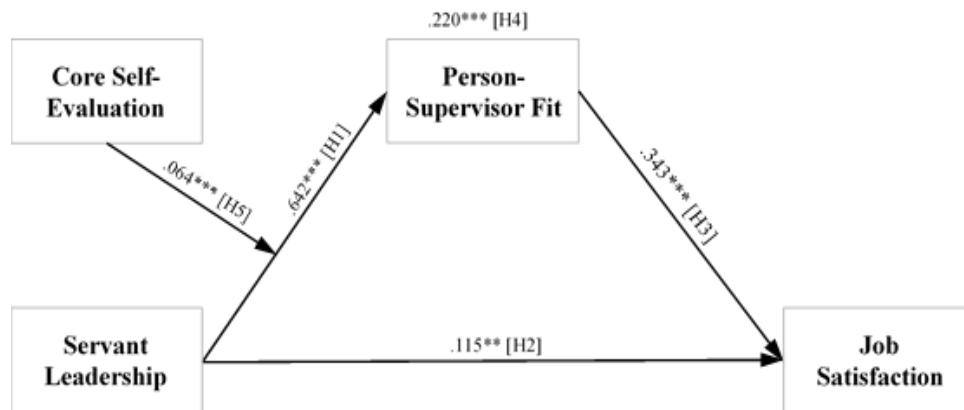
Consistent with our hypotheses, this study's results corroborated that employees' perception of servant leadership has a significant and direct effect on their trust in the leader (H1) but not directly on their turnover intention (H2) and/or organizational commitment (H3).

Furthermore, this study explored the specific mechanism through which servant leadership translates its influence in predicting outcomes, that is, whether trust in the leader mediates the relation between servant leadership and turnover intention (H6) and between servant leadership and commitment (H7). Although the results did not corroborate servant leadership's direct effect with the dependent variables, the findings do provide evidence about its indirect effect through trust in the leader in terms of predicting employee turnover intention and organizational commitment. In this sense, the study also corroborates the mediator's second path (H4 and H5). Therefore, we can infer that servant leadership channels its effect on employees' turnover intention and affective organizational commitment accordingly, depending on the level of trust in their leaders.

Finally, by looking at employees' emotional intelligence as a moderating variable, this study provides greater granularity about the boundary conditions of servant leadership's influence. Indeed, employees' emotional intelligence moderates the positive relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader such that, when emotional intelligence is high, the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is positive and strong. Contrarily, when emotional intelligence is low, this relationship is weakened in terms of predicting turnover intention (H8a) and affective commitment (H8b). These findings provide support for both conditional mechanisms.

Paper 2: FOSTERING EMPLOYEES’ JOB SATISFACTION THROUGH PERSON-SUPERVISOR FIT: THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES’ CORE SELF-EVALUATION.

Figure 6.2- Hypothesized model results (Study 2)



Note. Unstandardized path coefficients

Table 6.2- Study two - Hypotheses results

| | |
|---|------------------|
| H1. Employee perception of servant leadership is positively related to employees’ person-supervisor fit. | Supported |
| H2. Employee perception of servant leadership is positively related to employees’ job satisfaction. | Supported |
| H3. Employee person-supervisor fit predicts employees’ job satisfaction. | Supported |
| H4. Employees’ person-supervisor fit mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employees’ job satisfaction. | Supported |
| H5. Employees’ core self-evaluation moderates the positive relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit, such that, when their core self-evaluation is high, the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is positive and strong. Contrarily, when their core self-evaluation is low, this relationship is weakened. | Supported |

This second study aimed to test a moderated mediation model for servant leadership's ability to predict employees' job satisfaction through person-supervisor fit. We also predicted the moderating role of employees' core self-evaluation traits on the effects of servant leadership on employees' person-supervisor fit (first mediation path).

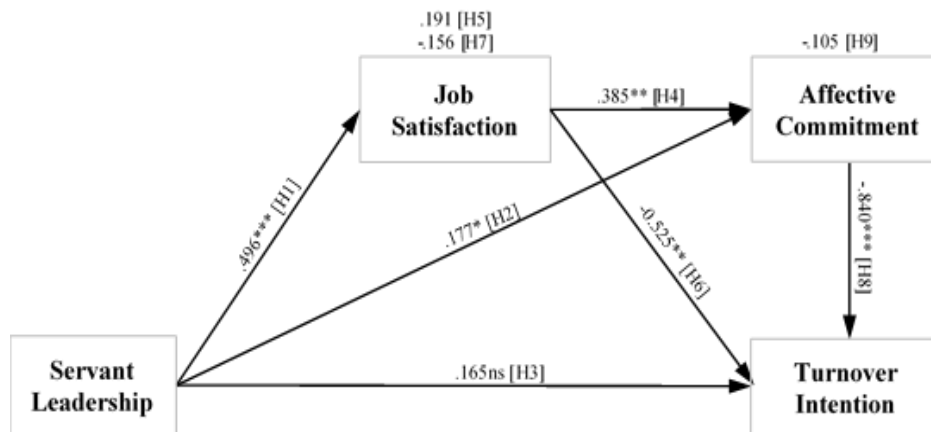
Consistent with these hypotheses, the study's results corroborate that having a high perception of servant leadership translates into a positive perception of fit between employees and their supervisors which, consequently, affects their job satisfaction levels (H1, H2 & H3).

Furthermore, in addition to corroborating the specific and significant effect through which servant leadership improves employees' job satisfaction –the mediating role played by person-supervisor fit (H4)–, the findings also provide evidence regarding the conditional role that employees' core self-evaluation traits play in this indirect effect (H5).

Employees' core self-evaluation characteristics moderate the positive relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit, such that, when their core self-evaluation is high, the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is positive and strong. Conversely, when their core self-evaluation is low, this relationship is weakened in terms of predicting job satisfaction.

Paper 3: SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES' WORK OUTCOMES: THE SERIAL MEDIATION OF EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Figure 6.3- Hypothesized model results (Study 3)



Note. Unstandardized path coefficients

Table 6.3- Study three - Hypotheses results

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| H1. Employee perception of servant leadership is positively associated with employees' job satisfaction. | Supported |
| H2. Employee perception of servant leadership is positively related to employees' affective organizational commitment. | Supported |
| H3. Employee perception of servant leadership is negatively associated with employees' turnover intention. | Not Supported |
| H4. Employees' job satisfaction positively relates to employees' affective organizational commitment. | Supported |
| H5. Employees' job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' affective organizational commitment | Supported |
| H6. Employees' job satisfaction negatively relates to employees' turnover intention. | Supported |
| H7. Employees' job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention. | Supported |

| | |
|--|------------------|
| H8. Employees' affective commitment is negatively related to their turnover intention. | Supported |
| H9. Employees' job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' turnover intention [serial mediation]. | Supported |

This third study presents servant leadership's serial mediating effects on employee job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Servant leadership has a significant relationship with employees' job satisfaction (H1) and affective commitment (H2), but it does not have a significant negative and direct effect on turnover intention (H3).

In turn, job satisfaction has a significant positive relationship with affective organizational commitment (H4) and a significant negative effect on turnover intention (H5). Therefore, job satisfaction mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment (H6) and turnover intention (H7).

These findings corroborate servant leadership's indirect effect in predicting turnover intention (although the direct effect between servant leadership and turnover intention does not achieve significance). Consequently, employee turnover intention can be better explained when considering their level of job satisfaction, given that servant leadership indirectly influences employee turnover intention through their level of job satisfaction.

Finally, this study aimed to achieve granular insights on the specific path of different servant leadership outcomes. We provided empirical evidence about servant leadership's serial mediation through job satisfaction and affective commitment in explaining the turnover intention dependent variable.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

According to Liden et al. (2014), servant leadership's theoretical development is still in its infancy. While the majority of studies on servant leadership primarily concentrate on this leadership style's favorable effects on work outcomes (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Van Dierendonck, 2011), only a limited number of studies have started examining the individual differences which could potentially have impact on the employees' perception of a servant leader's behavior (e.g., Meuser et al., 2011; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Van Dierendonck et al., 2014).

This thesis followed calls from previous researchers (Eva et al., 2019; Huning et al., 2020; Liden et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2021) encouraging more research to explore the individual differences and to shed light on the underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms that influence servant leadership's relationship with employees' work outcomes. This thesis advances the field's theoretical understanding of servant leadership based on the findings of the three studies as discussed below.

In the **first study** (chapter 2) based on social exchange theory which emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers –employers and employees–, the results indicate that followers with high emotional intelligence positively reciprocate the supportive and positive behavior from their leaders by showing higher levels of trust in their leader and exhibiting greater job commitment and less intention to quit the organization. Conversely, followers with high emotional intelligence but low levels of perceived servant leadership exhibit less trust in their leaders as an exchange relationship of perceived behaviors. These findings indicate that servant leadership exerts its effect on employees'

affective commitment and turnover intention through the mediation mechanism of trust in the leader. This means that leaders who adopt a servant leadership style should strive to gain the trust of their followers.

Emotional intelligence, which is a multidimensional construct based on the self-appraisal and expression of emotion, the appraisal and recognition of emotion in others, the regulation of emotion in oneself, and the use of emotion to facilitate performance (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), plays an important role in explaining the effects of servant leadership. The emotional intelligence variable captures affective and perceptual differences between individuals (Wong & Law, 2002). In this same vein, leadership implies the interaction between leaders and other individuals (House & Aditya, 1997). Once social interactions are involved, emotional awareness and emotional regulation become important factors that affect the quality of these interactions (Wong & Law, 2002).

To summarize, Study 1's findings are consistent with other studies (Eva et al., 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011) and support the hypothesized model regarding the significant role servant leadership plays and its association with employees' work outcomes. Moreover, it not only sheds light on the mediating effects of employees' trust in the leader but also corroborates the conditioned role of the different levels of employees' emotional intelligence.

In the **second study** (Chapter 3), our findings provide additional empirical evidence about servant leadership's effect on employee satisfaction through the fit between the supervisor and the employee. Consistent with social exchange theory, when servant leaders establish a well-founded relationship with their subordinates, they are more likely to share values, goals, and even similarities, as these leaders take their followers' needs into

consideration (Greenleaf, 1977). This study's findings indicate that, when employees perceive a good fit with their supervisors, they will subsequently feel more satisfied with their jobs.

Furthermore, employees' core self-evaluation, which includes their self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability, describes how individuals evaluate themselves and their attitudes towards the context and situations they are involved in, as well as how they perceive their competences (Judge, 2009). Scholars have found that core self-evaluation is one of the key determinants of individuals' attitudes and behaviors and, accordingly, of employees in the work place (Judge et al., 2003).

We also expected and corroborated that subordinates with high core self-evaluations have a significantly better perception of a servant leader's behaviors which accentuates the servant leadership's effect on employees' job satisfaction as they perceive a better fit with their supervisors at work.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that provided evidence regarding servant leadership's positive association with job satisfaction (Chan & Mak, 2014; Donia et al., 2016; Mayer et al., 2008). By considering core self-evaluation's moderating role, this study's results are particularly compelling.

In the **third study** (Chapter 4), the aim was to trace the specific path of different servant leadership outcomes. We examined servant leadership's effects on the outcome variables in both the first and second study combined. The results provide further evidence about servant leadership's serial mediation through job satisfaction and affective commitment in explaining the turnover intention dependent variable.

These findings corroborate servant leadership's indirect effect in predicting turnover intention (although the direct effect between servant leadership and turnover intention did not achieve significance). As these results indicate, and consistent with social exchange theory, servant leadership exerts its effect through the job satisfaction mediation mechanism as it influences commitment and/or turnover intention through the indirect effect of employees' job satisfaction. This implies that followers with high job satisfaction reciprocate the supportive and positive behavior of their leaders by showing higher job commitment and lower turnover intention.

To the best of our knowledge, this empirical PhD thesis is the first to explore and introduce employee emotional intelligence and core self-evaluation constructs as moderating variables to gain insights on conditions related to servant leadership's influence on employees' work outcomes. This study also serves to expand the field's theoretical framework.

6.3 Practical Implications

These empirical studies yielded some interesting results and provided practical implications for organizations that want to successfully influence their employees and achieve better outcomes. As a whole, this research confirms the organizational benefits of adopting a servant leadership style on employee's attitudes. Servant leaders can, first, enhance employees' job satisfaction, second, positively affect their affective commitment to the organization, third, persuade employees to remain in the organization (by lowering their turnover intention), and, fourth, build solid employee trust in their managers/leaders and

enhance the person-supervisor fit.

Our findings are also relevant for organizations that recognize the critical role that top management teams play in their success. Consequently, these organizations should attempt to hire, invest in training, and develop leaders with this characteristic managerial style, those who are ethically competent, and tend to behave as servant leaders. Organizations could also improve the leaders' moral competences by recognizing and training the related values and encouraging servant leader behaviors among their line managers.

These results also help advance the emotional intelligence domain by providing empirical support for emotional intelligence's role in developing positive attitudes towards the organization and its managers. Despite the ongoing debate in this field, studies have shown that the likelihood of emotional intelligence existing is not always high, though it can be successfully developed through training (Chrusciel, 2006; Jonker, 2009; Luthans et al., 2007). Therefore, to achieve better organizational results, it is important for companies to attract and select employees with emotional intelligence competences (or, at least, help them develop these traits). This would enhance servant leadership's effects on employees' attitudes and, ultimately, improve organizational achievements.

Another practical implication is that employees with high core self-evaluations can appreciate greater congruence between their values and those of their supervisors with a servant leadership managerial style, therefore improving the likelihood of feeling greater job satisfaction. Accordingly, to improve the fit between leaders and their followers, organizations should also try to attract, select, and retain employees with high core self-evaluations.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research is not without limitations which might provide useful insights to pursue future research avenues. First, the cross-sectional research design of the three studies does not allow us to infer causality between the variables included in the research models. Future research could adopt a longitudinal or experimental research design to overcome this limitation.

Second, the studies relied on self-reported measures which might raise the possibility of common method variance and inflate the coefficients (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, we conducted Harman's single factor test to address this issue. Results of the CFAs carried out suggest that such inflation was minimal. Furthermore, the measurement model ratios also provide evidence of good model fit. Future research could use a different research design and collect data from multiple sources (e.g., adopt a supervisor-employee dyadic study design) to cross-validate these findings.

Third, the nature of the sample limits the generalizability of these results to other settings. The current sample is based on different organizations in Iran (Study 1, educational sector; study 2, Home electrical appliance manufacturing sector; and Study 3, small and medium enterprise (SMEs)), which could be context or country-specific. Future research could obtain more robust findings by testing the model in other contexts (e.g., other industry sectors or additional countries).

Fourth, this research did not consider the differences between leaders' and employees' perceptions. The two groups' approaches can be very distinct in terms of attitudes towards the organization (Petty et al., 1984). Future research should consider including both

perspectives, as well as managers' practices and employees' behaviors.

Finally, future research can also extend these studies' conceptual frameworks by exploring the effects of a larger set of variables on other outcomes, as well as their role as predictors of followers' positive reciprocity and the role servant leadership style plays in this social exchange process.

6.5 Concluding Summary

This thesis contributes to and extends the servant leadership field by showing its effects on followers and organizational outcomes. It corroborates that the relationship between servant leadership and trust in the leader is conditioned by employees' emotional intelligence, which serves to reinforce the effect on employees' work outcomes (commitment and turnover intention). It also supports that the relationship between servant leadership and person-supervisor fit is conditioned by employees' core self-evaluation traits, which in turn impacts their job satisfaction.

Lastly, this thesis also provides evidence that employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment are two underlying mediating mechanisms between servant leadership actions and employees' turnover intention.

In conclusion, this thesis sought to address the gap in our understanding of how servant leadership impacts employees' attitudes towards work. Through exploring boundary conditions, mediators, and moderators related to individual differences among followers, the underlying mechanisms by which servant leadership influences work outcomes were investigated. Overall, this thesis contributes to the servant leadership field and provide practical insights for managers and organizations seeking to implement this approach.

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