




Meta-Synthesis of Identifying Servant Leadership Components Based on Employees' Innovative Behavior

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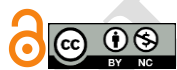
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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study seeks to systematically review the findings of prior studies on this subject through a meta-synthesis approach, analyzing them based on the formation process and outcomes.

Methodology: This research utilizes the meta-synthesis technique and is applied in nature. Accessible and credible documents and records available on websites were examined, focusing on English-language sources from 2010 to 2024 and Persian sources from 2010 to 2024. Among a large number of initial articles, 63 suitable articles were identified. To analyze the selected articles, the concepts, dimensions, and influential components were studied using content analysis. For validating the extracted concepts, a Delphi panel comprising several experts and scholars was employed.

Findings: The results indicated four main components: organizational characteristics, leadership style, employee characteristics, and management characteristics. Additionally, experts ranked the importance of servant leadership dimensions based on employees' innovative behavior in the following order: leadership style, management characteristics, employee characteristics, and organizational characteristics.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that focusing on the components identified in this research facilitates the development of servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior.

Keywords: *Servant Leadership, Innovative Behavior, Meta-Synthesis.*

1 Introduction

In today's world, with the increasing expansion of modern information and communication technologies, coupled with the phenomenon of globalization and comprehensive

organizational transformations, organizations are compelled to consider various factors to adapt to these changes and ensure their survival. One such factor is leadership within organizations, which plays a critical role in organizational mechanisms and, ultimately, in improving organizational

performance (Gloet & Samson, 2017). Consequently, the significance of leadership in organizations has led management researchers to explore the characteristics and traits of successful organizational leaders. Over recent decades, numerous leadership theories have emerged, introducing various leadership styles to the academic community. Among these, the servant leadership style has garnered considerable attention (Askari Dehfa et al., 2020).

Servant leadership is an approach to leadership and service wherein the leader primarily serves and then leads (Emami Fard et al., 2016). This leadership style values human equality and seeks the individual development of all organizational members. A servant leader's role is to nurture employees' intelligence and character, enabling them to realize their full potential. Accordingly, many governmental organizations today adopt servant leadership principles to manage their operations, as public interest management necessitates that managers focus more on servant leadership models in their daily practices and behaviors (Kamali Karsalari et al., 2018).

Management and organizational theorists regard the 21st century as the century of leadership for organizations. Many researchers have concluded in their studies that leaders can differentiate organizations. Leadership is associated with bringing about change; however, the fundamental challenge for organizations is that traditional leadership styles have become ineffective in meeting the current needs of organizations. Therefore, there is a need for a leadership style that balances organizational goals with employee needs. In this context, servant leadership has been widely examined by researchers. Servant leadership emphasizes serving others, often prioritizing others' interests over personal gains (Ghafari et al., 2021; Khalil et al., 2024).

Moreover, many researchers argue that servant leadership offers an alternative to the traditional authoritarian power structures still prevalent in many contemporary organizations, promoting positive organizational changes (Brewer, 2010). In organizations led by servant leaders, all members are treated equally and actively participate in management and decision-making processes (Askari Dehfa et al., 2020; Azimpour & Jalilian, 2019; Brewer, 2010; Daft, 2012; Sarvari et al., 2023). This leadership style ultimately enhances organizational performance by gradually building a high level of trust between the leader and their followers (Majidian Fard & Rahimian, 2017).

On the other hand, with the rapid advancements in knowledge and technology and the widespread flow of information, organizations today require a workforce

capable of creatively addressing and solving problems. This need highlights the importance of innovative behaviors among employees. Innovative behaviors refer to the process of practically applying novel problem-solving ideas, resulting in new products, services, or processes (Bakker et al., 2010). Such behaviors enhance organizational efficiency and effectiveness by fostering resource transformation, innovation, and adaptability in complex, ambiguous, and team-based environments. Examples of these efforts include collaborating with colleagues, taking on additional tasks without complaints, punctuality, volunteering to assist others, efficient time use, resource-saving, idea sharing, and positively representing the organization (Jamshidi et al., 2020).

In recent years, with the growth of research in various scientific fields and the phenomenon of information explosion, scholars have realized that it is nearly impossible to master all aspects of a field while staying up-to-date. This realization has led to the increasing use of meta-studies, which systematically and scientifically synthesize the essence of prior research for researchers (Ghorbanizadeh & Behfar, 2013). One such method introduced for analyzing, synthesizing, and critiquing past research is the meta-study method, consisting of four parts: meta-analysis (quantitative analysis of initial studies), meta-synthesis (qualitative analysis of initial studies), meta-theory (theoretical analysis of initial studies), and meta-method (methodological analysis of initial studies) (Bench & Day, 2010).

Meta-synthesis, as a qualitative study type, examines information and findings from other qualitative studies on a related topic. Therefore, the sample for a meta-synthesis study is composed of selected qualitative studies based on their relevance to the research question (Zimmer, 2006). Consequently, researchers have sought to identify the factors influencing innovative behaviors among employees, concluding that leadership styles, particularly servant leadership, play a significant role in this context.

Despite the importance of adopting servant leadership models and fostering innovative behaviors among employees, evidence from the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province indicates a significant gap between employees and management, as well as their respective expectations. Managers in this organization exhibit behaviors that lack servant leadership characteristics, creating a climate of distrust. Consequently, innovative behaviors among employees are substantially diminished.

Innovative employee performance has significant effects on customers, human capital, and organizational capital. Servant leadership and competitive advantage notably impact the performance of the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization. This study employs the meta-synthesis method to systematically review prior research. Subsequently, empirical data will be analyzed to propose a comprehensive model identifying servant leadership components based on innovative behavior. Sarvari et al. (2023) examined the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on employees' innovative behavior, mediated by an innovation climate and ethical climate. Results indicated a significant positive impact of entrepreneurial leadership on innovative behavior. Moreover, the mediating roles of innovation and ethical climates were confirmed (Sarvari et al., 2023). Nazari et al. (2023) reported a direct influence of coach-style leadership on innovative work behavior (0.33), with public service motivation and trust-based relationships playing partial mediating roles (0.18 and 0.17, respectively) (Nazari et al., 2023). Norouzi et al. (2022) highlighted the significant positive effects of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behavior and employee performance. They also identified the mediating role of organizational culture and commitment between servant leadership, organizational citizenship behavior, and performance (Norouzi et al., 2022). Ghaffari et al. (2021) concluded that servant leadership and its components (e.g., social love, altruism, empowerment, and vision) significantly correlate with employees' organizational commitment. Munawar et al. (2024) evaluated the effects of emotional intelligence, servant leadership, and psychological safety on employees' innovative behavior, moderated by task interdependence. They found that emotional intelligence positively influences servant leadership, which subsequently impacts psychological safety and employees' innovative behavior (Ghafari et al., 2021). Mughal et al. (2024) demonstrated that green servant leadership positively influences employees' green workplace behavior, mediated by green self-efficacy and green work engagement (Mughal et al., 2024). Khalil et al. (2024) revealed that the relationship between servant leadership and job outcomes is mediated by job crafting behaviors, with conscientiousness moderating the links between servant leadership, resource seeking, and challenge seeking (Khalil et al., 2024). Huo and Liu (2023) explored the relationship between servant leadership and employees' negative feedback-seeking behaviors, finding that leader-member exchange and leader identification sequentially mediate the relationship (Huo & Liu, 2023).

Today, innovation and knowledge creation are critical not only for private and commercial organizations but also for public and governmental sectors, as societal expectations of public organizations have evolved. Consequently, employees in public organizations increasingly exhibit innovative behaviors, which are recognized as behaviors that introduce change by creating new or different products, services, processes, or approaches (Azimpour & Jalilian, 2019). Modern organizations can maintain long-term competitive advantages by fostering and promoting employee innovative behaviors. However, evidence shows that the level of innovative behavior in organizations remains low. Public organizations, in particular, often disregard employees' innovative ideas, perceiving them as risky. This neglect can contribute to the low economic growth observed in developing countries. Recognizing the critical role of leadership in fostering employees' innovative behaviors, researchers have extensively examined the relationship between leadership styles and employee innovation. Traditional hierarchical leadership approaches are often viewed as obstacles to cultivating productive and entrepreneurial employees (Sharifzadeh et al., 2015).

This study aims to identify the dimensions of servant leadership based on innovative behavior, systematically reviewing relevant research to address the question: What are the components of servant leadership based on innovative behavior in the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province?

2 Methods and Materials

This study is applied in purpose and qualitative in data collection methodology, utilizing a library-based research method. It employs secondary studies and meta-synthesis, focusing on servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior. The data analysis was conducted in three stages.

In the first stage, a comprehensive review of the research literature was performed, compiling a list of relevant articles, including those indirectly addressing the topic. In the second stage, article abstracts were extracted, and the articles were categorized. In the third stage, key elements were extracted, a final synthesis was performed, and an analysis and summary were conducted. Meta-synthesis is particularly useful in disciplines where studies predominantly rely on qualitative analyses. It serves as a suitable method for creating a comprehensive synthesis of servant leadership factors based on employees' innovative behavior. For this

research, the seven-step approach by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) was employed, as outlined below.

Research Question

The primary research question is: *What are the components of servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior in the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province?*

Additionally, the study aims to provide a deep analysis of these factors at both international and national levels, offering a classification based on prior studies.

Literature Review

In this stage, systematic searches were conducted using the research keywords across various reputable scientific journals, public sources, and websites of credible domestic and international organizations. The goal was to identify valid and relevant documents within an appropriate timeframe. Following the formulation of the research question, systematic searches were conducted using keywords related to "servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior" across databases such as ScienceDirect, Emerald, MagIran, Irandoc, NoorMags, and Civilica, covering the years 2010–2024 CE. Information gathering tools in the initial stage included databases and computer networks, with related articles collected from online sources using note-taking tools.

Search and Selection of Relevant Texts

The search process considered various factors, including titles, abstracts, content, article details (author names, publication year, etc.), and more. Articles not aligned with the research question and objective were excluded. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were based on language, timeframe, study conditions, study population, and study type. Inclusion criteria required:

1. Research documented in credible databases.
2. The inclusion of advanced technology and commercialization in the study.
3. Sufficient information for practical extraction and analysis in the article.

Screening was conducted in multiple stages. Through repeated reviews, the final texts were examined multiple times to extract the required information systematically. In this study, 63 selected studies were analyzed using content analysis, and the extracted information was coded and categorized by researcher and year of study.

Data Extraction

Selected articles underwent repeated reviews during the meta-synthesis process to extract findings from distinct content areas representing primary studies. After collecting

and reviewing the necessary data, they were organized into semantic units and specific codes. For the analysis phase and the presentation of the final meta-synthesis findings, thematic analysis was employed. This method identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns (themes) within the data, organizing and describing them in detail, and even interpreting various aspects of the research topic.

Analysis and Integration of Qualitative Findings

The goal of meta-synthesis is to create a unified and novel interpretation of findings. During this stage, researchers explore new themes emerging from the studies and provide a classification to best describe these themes.

Quality Control

To ensure the quality of research findings, one of the main tools for achieving maximum theoretical and practical validity in the meta-synthesis method is expert opinion for validation. In this study, extracted concepts were reviewed by several management experts. Finally, to assess the quality and ensure reliability, Cronbach's alpha method was applied, resulting in a reliability score of 90.9%. Since this value exceeds 0.75, the coding reliability is confirmed.

Presentation of Findings

The researcher organizes and synthesizes the results of the study based on the research question. In this step, all findings from the previous stages are presented.

3 Findings and Results

This study builds upon previous models and research, focusing on the concepts of servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior—an actionable and practical approach demonstrated in prior studies. A model for servant leadership aligned with innovative behavior is proposed. Another key finding from earlier studies is the comprehensive role of internal and external influencing factors, emphasizing a holistic perspective on servant leadership and employees' innovative behavior. Accordingly, the present research reviewed texts based on relevance to the research objective, accessibility, publication period, and content alignment.

In the subsequent phase, qualitative data collection utilized a review method to harmonize theoretical foundations with data collection strategies. The design of the questionnaire relied on related literature, and the data obtained from articles were analyzed using MAXQDA software. First, open coding was conducted, followed by constructing concepts from the initial codes. Finally,

categories were formed by connecting these concepts. The process's stages are elaborated below.

In the open coding stage, 69 codes were extracted, resulting in the identification of four main categories (Table 1).

Table 1

Components of Servant Leadership Based on Employees' Innovative Behavior

Dimensions	Components	Concepts
Organizational Factors	Organizational Characteristics	Knowledge sharing, Person-organization fit, Perceived organizational support, Organizational learning, Organizational trust, Organizational sustainability, Employee-organization relationships, Motivation and organizational support, Innovation and knowledge creation, Development/improvement of existing processes, Organizational commitment, Organizational culture, Celebrating diversity and employee loyalty, Respect for employees, Organizational identity, Capacity for innovative behavior, Strategies for innovative behavior, Organizational climate, Knowledge management, Teamwork-based work culture, Modern information and communication technologies.
	Leadership Styles	Green servant leadership, Servant leadership, Transformational leadership, Inclusive leadership, Shared servant leadership, Transactional leadership, Positive leadership.
Individual Factors	Employee Characteristics	Life satisfaction, Work enthusiasm, Job autonomy, Job satisfaction, Work commitment, Motivation, Participation in organizational innovation, Work engagement, Ethical and religious beliefs, Employee intelligence and character, Willingness to learn from others.
	Management Characteristics	Employee usage practices, Emotional intelligence, Future-oriented thinking, Managerial enthusiasm, Empowerment, Conceptual skills, Supporting employee growth, Granting authority and power, Creating value for society, Creating value for the group, Caring for stakeholders' welfare, Listening, Attending to subordinates' needs, Ethical equality and integrity, Perseverance, Courage and supervision, Humility, Authenticity, Accountability and flexibility, Managers' mental models, Inspirational motivation, Managers' communication skills, Developing individuals' talents, Awareness of future needs, Providing necessary training, Modeling, Voluntary constructive ideas, Collaboration with others, Producing pre-innovation models.

In the subsequent stages, the identified categories were reviewed by experts. It is important to note that descriptive data analysis does not address the primary research questions; it only provides a statistical representation of responses.

After designing the questionnaire, the scientific and practical opinions of experts on the identified dimensions and components were collected using a single-sample Likert scale. The ranking results using the Friedman test are as follows:

Table 2

Results of the Friedman Ranking Test

Dimensions	Mean Rank	Rank
Organizational characteristics	1.67	4
Leadership style	3.30	1
Employee characteristics	1.93	3
Management characteristics	3.10	2

Based on the results of Friedman test, the ranking and importance of expert opinions regarding the dimensions of servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior are as follows: leadership style, management characteristics, employee characteristics, and organizational characteristics.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

This research sought to address two primary questions: First, can the process of implementing servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior in the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan

Province be defined and structured into a model that can serve as a template? Second, if so, what are the dimensions, components, and concepts of this model?

A review of the literature on servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior revealed that many models and theories, despite their differences in scope, share commonalities. This indicates the potential of interdisciplinary studies to uncover shared aspects across domains. In this study, 69 concepts were identified as influential factors in the literature, leading to the identification of four main categories.

The first main category is organizational characteristics. These characteristics influence both the internal organizational expectations of members and their interactions with external stakeholders. Effective organizational characteristics, defined by multiple expectations, facilitate strategic resource management efforts. By equally prioritizing opportunistic and advantage-seeking behaviors, effective organizational characteristics encourage creativity, risk-taking, and tolerance for failure, while promoting learning, supporting innovation in production and processes, and viewing constant change as an enabler of new opportunities.

The second category is leadership style. Leadership and management have garnered significant attention from organizations striving for transformation. The critical role of leaders and managers in driving fundamental organizational changes is undeniable. Through a process of social influence, leaders establish organizational culture and guide employees toward achieving superior goals and securing competitive advantages in knowledge-based economies.

The third category is employee characteristics. These characteristics emphasize how organizations capitalize on opportunities arising from external environmental uncertainties. Wealth creation is only possible when organizations recognize and utilize the behaviors and attributes of their employees. Organizations that identify the valuable potential attributes of their employees can leverage them to build competitive advantages. However, organizations that lose their ability to recognize high-value entrepreneurial opportunities may struggle to sustain their competitive edge over time.

The fourth category is management characteristics. In today's dynamic, complex, and highly competitive business environment, organizations must prioritize managers and their attributes to respond effectively to environmental changes. Organizations must identify and understand managerial factors and characteristics, acquire knowledge, and, through learning and recombination of existing knowledge and experiences, create new knowledge to drive innovation.

Having developed a model for servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior in the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, a strategy can now be proposed for implementing this model. In summary, this model serves as an empirically tested guide for achieving the goals of servant leadership based on employees' innovative behavior, grounded in prior studies.

Notably, no prior research or studies have been conducted under this specific title in the organizational domain. Servant leadership based on innovative behavior is an emerging concept that holds great potential for extensive and broader research. Given its importance for organizations and their management, this research aligns closely with the needs of strategic organizational management.

This study was conducted based on the accumulated research on servant leadership and employees' innovative behavior from the past decades. Therefore, the findings and recommendations derived from this study have practical applications. The following suggestions can be made for future research:

Evaluation of the Proposed Model Using Quantitative Research: Future studies could test the results obtained from this qualitative research quantitatively, providing a robust examination of the proposed model.

Assessment of the Model's Impact on Organizational Performance: This recommendation involves using the model to evaluate the influence of servant leadership based on innovative behavior on various aspects of organizational performance, examining both qualitative and quantitative impacts.

Expansion of the Model Across Other Organizations: The proposed model for the Industry, Mining, and Trade Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province could be extended to other companies and organizations. This would involve creating a servant leadership model based on innovative behavior applicable across diverse industries or at least other similar organizations.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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