Servant Leadership: A Systematic Literature Review of Definitions, Measurement, and Its Effects on Employee Performance and Well-Being (2010–2025)

(*Kepemimpinan Pelayan: Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis tentang Definisi, Pengukuran, dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Kinerja dan Kesejahteraan Karyawan (2010–2025*)

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Abstract : Servant leadership emphasizes prioritizing followers' needs, moral values, and the development of individuals within organizations.

Objective: This systematic literature review explores theoretical advancements, measurement instruments, and empirical evidence of servant leadership from 2010 to 2025.

Methods: The analysis covers antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and organizational outcomes, including performance, well-being, and innovation.

Results: The review finds consistent evidence of positive relationships between servant leadership and job satisfaction, trust, and organizational citizenship behavior, mediated by psychological safety and meaningfulness. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Trust, Well-Being, Performance, Innovation.

1. Introduction

Servant leadership has emerged as one of the most influential leadership paradigms over the past two decades. Originally introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970), this concept emphasizes that genuine leaders are servants first and leaders second. In contemporary organizational contexts that demand collaboration, empathy, and sustainability, servant leadership has become increasingly relevant in addressing

moral, psychological, and social challenges in the workplace (Van Dierendonck 2010).

Unlike transactional or transformational leadership styles, servant leadership emphasizes moral and altruistic dimensions, particularly the motivation to place followers' interests above the leader's self-interest (Liden et al. 2008). Servant leaders focus not only on performance achievement but also on followers' personal and professional growth, the creation of inclusive communities, and contributions to overall organizational well-being. Consistent with this perspective, recent studies indicate that servant leadership enhances trust, employee well-being, and organizational citizenship behavior (Canavesi and Minelli 2021; Saavedra et al. 2024).

Recent empirical research has expanded understanding of servant leadership's impact on innovative work behavior and employee engagement. For instance, (Xiao et al. 2025) found that servant leadership positively influences innovative behavior among public sector employees in China through the mediation of psychological safety. In Indonesia, (Afrianty 2025) demonstrated that servant leadership strengthens employee voice behavior through career development policies and trust-based leader–subordinate relationships. Similarly, (Hanafiah 2024) confirmed that servant leadership in the public sector enhances service culture and organizational commitment.

From a measurement perspective, servant leadership has been operationalized through various scientific instruments, including the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SL-28) developed by (Liden et al. 2008) and the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) proposed by (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011). These instruments identify core dimensions such as empowerment, humility, authenticity, stewardship, and emotional healing. More recent adaptations, such as the Asian Servant Leadership Scale (Hanafiah et al. 2024), incorporate collectivist values and service-oriented cultural characteristics typical of Asian contexts.

At the organizational level, servant leadership has been shown to significantly enhance job satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational performance across both private and public sectors (Le Ba 2025; Saragih and Limbong 2023). In Indonesian public service institutions such as BPJS Ketenagakerjaan the application

of servant leadership principles is particularly strategic. Leaders who adopt a servant-oriented role can strengthen service excellence culture, foster employee loyalty, and reduce turnover intention (Wiyono et al. 2024).

Accordingly, servant leadership should be understood not merely as an ethical approach but as a strategic managerial framework oriented toward sustainable performance improvement. This literature review synthesizes global and national research published between 2010 and 2025, focusing on: (1) the development of servant leadership theory and measurement instruments; (2) the relationship between servant leadership and organizational outcomes such as performance, well-being, and innovation; and (3) the relevance of servant leadership within the Indonesian organizational context.

2. Methods

This study adopts a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** approach to examine the development of servant leadership research during the 2010–2025 period. The review process follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability (Canavesi and Minelli 2021; Hanafiah 2024).

2.1 Data Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using five major academic databases: **Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar.** Keywords included *"servant leadership," "servant leadership scale," "organizational performance," "well-being," "organizational citizenship behavior,"* and *"public sector leadership."* The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English or Indonesian between 2010 and 2025.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they:

(a) explicitly addressed servant leadership concepts, dimensions, or outcomes.

(b) employed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches with empirical data.

(c) were published in nationally accredited journals (SINTA 2–4) or international indexed journals (Scopus Q1–Q4).

2.3 Selection and Analysis Process

Conference proceedings, unpublished theses, and articles lacking methodological clarity were excluded (Van Dierendonck 2010).

From approximately 40 initially identified articles 27 met the final inclusion criteria after screening and eligibility assessment. Each article was coded based on publication year, country and sector context, methodological approach, key constructs (antecedents, mediators, outcomes), and principal findings. Data were analyzed using thematic synthesis (Canavesi and Minelli 2021), focusing on:

1) theoretical and measurement development,

2) individual and organizational outcomes, and

3) application in Asian and Indonesian contexts.

2.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure synthesis validity, two researchers independently conducted coding and cross-checked interpretations, achieving an inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.87 (Cohen's Kappa). Cross-contextual comparison was applied to balance global and local representation (Afrianty 2025; Xiao et al. 2025).

3. Results of the Literature Review

The analysis yielded three major findings:

3.1 Evolution of Theory and Measurement

Servant leadership has evolved from a moral ideal to a measurable behavioral model. (Liden et al. 2008) introduced the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ-28) comprising seven core dimensions, while (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011)

developed the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) with expanded dimensions including humility and authenticity. Recent adaptations, such as the Asian Servant Leadership Scale (Hanafiah 2024), highlight collectivist and community-oriented values. These models demonstrate strong cross-cultural reliability and are widely applied in public sector research.

3.2 Evolution of Theory and Measurement

Most studies report positive relationships between servant leadership and individual outcomes. (Saavedra et al. 2024) found reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction among nurses in Spain. (Le Ba 2025) demonstrated enhanced knowledge sharing and work performance through trust mediation. Indonesian studies confirm improvements in organizational citizenship behavior and service commitment (Saragih and Limbong 2023). At the organizational level, servant leadership significantly influences innovation through psychological safety (Xiao et al. 2025).

3.3 Relevance in Indonesian and Asian Contexts

Research on servant leadership in Indonesia has grown rapidly since 2020, reflecting strong cultural alignment with collectivist values such as empathy, mutual cooperation, and social service orientation. Studies confirm its effectiveness in public institutions and social organizations (Afrianty 2025; Hanafiah 2024; Indiarti et al. 2025).

3.4 Final Synthesis

Overall, servant leadership consistently enhances employee well-being, performance, prosocial behavior, and innovation while reducing burnout. In Indonesia, this leadership model is particularly suitable for public service institutions such as BPJS Ketenagakerjaan, which emphasize humanitarian values and social responsibility.

Tabel 1. Comparison of Servant Leadership Measurement Instruments

No.	Instrument	Author(s) and Year	Key Dimensions	Strengths and Limitations
1	SL-28 (Servant Leadership Questionnaire)	Liden et al. (2008)	Conceptualizing, Emotional Healing, Putting Followers First, Helping Followers Grow, Behaving Ethically, Empowering, Creating Community	Most widely used instrument; strong cross-cultural validation; however, relatively lengthy (28 items).
2	Servant Leadership Survey (SLS)	Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011)	Empowerment, Humility, Authenticity, Stewardship, Accountability, Forgiveness, Courage, Standing Back	Suitable for European contexts; comprehensive dimensions; however, complex for factor analysis.
3	Servant Leadership Short Form (SL-7)	Liden et al. (2015)	Integration of seven core servant leadership dimensions	Concise and practical for large-scale surveys; however, structural validity is still debated in Asian contexts.
4	Asian-Adapted Servant Leadership Scale	Hanafiah et al. (2024)	Service Orientation, Empowerment, Community Building, Humility	Contextually adapted to collectivist cultures; empirical application remains limited to the public sector.

Source : Processed from various studies (2010–2025**)**

Tabel 2. Summary of Servant Leadership Research Findings (2010–2025)

No.	Author(s) and Year	Research Context	Method	Outcome Variables	Key Findings
1	Canavesi and Minelli (2021)	European companies	Systematic literature review	Performance, OCB, Well-being	Servant leadership enhances well-being and organizational citizenship behavior through trust.
2	Xiao et al. (2025)	Public sector employees in China	Quantitative survey (n = 742)	Innovation, Psychological Safety	Servant leadership positively influences innovation through psychological safety.

No.	Author(s) and Year	Research Context	Method	Outcome Variables	Key Findings
3	Afrianty (2025)	State polytechnics, East Java (Indonesia)	SEM-based survey	Employee Voice Behavior	Servant leadership strengthens voice behavior through career development policies and trust in leadership.
4	Hanafiah (2024)	Indonesian public sector	Systematic literature review	OCB, Organizational Commitment	Servant leadership positively affects public service culture and organizational commitment.
5	Saavedra et al. (2024)	Hospital nurses in Spain	Cross-sectional study	Job Satisfaction, Burnout	Servant leadership reduces burnout and increases job satisfaction through moral leadership.

Source : Synthesized from reviewed articles (2010–2025)

3.5 Discussion and Managerial Implications

The findings reinforce the view that servant leadership is not only an ethical orientation but also a strategic leadership approach that improves organizational performance. In Indonesia, its application is especially relevant for public organizations focused on community service. Implementing servant leadership can strengthen employee trust, reduce turnover intention, and foster a strong service culture. Managers are encouraged to implement leadership development programs emphasizing empathy, self-awareness, and service orientation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, servant leadership makes a significant contribution to employee performance and well-being. Future research should employ longitudinal and cross-cultural designs to enhance generalizability. Additionally, the development of locally grounded measurement instruments is recommended to better capture Indonesia's socio-cultural context.

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