The Effects of Servant Leadership, Occupational Commitment, and Work Engagement on Creativity of Teacher

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Abstract

This study identifies the influence of servant leadership on teacher creativity. We considered occupational commitment and work engagement as sequential mediators in the relationship between servant leadership and teacher creativity. This current study uses surveys by distributing questionnaires to teachers at the "X" education foundation in one of the cities in East Java. Hypothesis testing uses partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Our study shows that servant leadership does not directly enhance teacher creativity but rather through occupational commitment and work engagement. This finding contributed to the understanding that servant leadership influences teacher creativity through the sequential mediation of occupational commitment and work engagement. As an implication, the "X" educational foundation needs to choose principals who are able to act as servant leaders. In order to effectively increase teacher creativity, servant leaders must provide support and opportunities for teachers that will boost their commitment to their work. Teachers with high occupational commitment will be more engaged with their work, allowing them to become more creative. In addition, various employee management activities, such as training, recognition, and selecting effective school principals, are needed to increase teachers' commitment, engagement, and creativity.

Keywords: servant leadership, creativity, occupational commitment, work engagement

1.   INTRODUCTION

Employee creativity is an important factor for the organization since it contributes to innovation, competitive advantage (Nguyen et al., 2022), profits generated (Lin et al., 2018), and organizational success (Medase and Savin, 2023). Creativity is the emergence of new and valuable ideas (Tang et al., 2017). Therefore,

organizations, including schools, need to build the creativity of their teachers. Since the success of student learning outcomes is determined, among other things, by learning methods at school (Saptono et al., 2021) and there is increasing competition between schools in Indonesia (Pradana et al., 2023), creative human resources are increasingly needed. Creative teachers can help their students think creatively and make it easier for them to understand their lessons (Sahoo et al., 2023). Creativity becomes more important when schools and teachers face various environmental changes, such as technology and the demographic profiles of their students.

The existence of technology requires teachers to be able to master and use it as a teaching aid. School students are now part of Generation Z, born 2000-2012, and Alpha, born 2013-2025 (Hartmans, 2023). These two generations provide a different profile from the previous generation (Ziatdinov and Cilliers, 2021; Karatayev et al., 2023) and have different learning styles. Generation Z is characterized by technology literacy, independence, and confidence (Tang et al., 2020). The alpha generation needs autonomy, care, and recognition and is very connected to technology (Gupta et al., 2022). Social media influences the learning styles of these two generations, so it requires innovative learning methods (Ziatdinov and Cilliers, 2021). Therefore, teachers need to be creative in carrying out their roles. Since creativity is an important factor, it is necessary to investigate the factors that serve as its antecedents (Pérez-Luño et al., 2024).

Based on social cognitive theory, individuals' behavior can be determined by environmental factors, such as their supervisors (Wood and Bandura, 1989). In line with this theory, creativity can be raised by contextual factors such as leaders (Lin et al., 2016). Furthermore, servant leadership is the behavior of leaders considered suitable for bringing up creativity (Kumar et al., 2024). This leading style is also considered appropriate for education (Stoten, 2013; Khatri et al., 2023). Servant leaders focus their behavior on meeting the needs of followers, providing inspiration, motivation, and support for them (Aboramadan, 2021), empowering, and focusing on the development of followers (Yang et al., 2017). Thus, servant leaders may bring up their followers' creativity.

Several studies have demonstrated the relationship between servant leadership and creativity (e.g., Aboramadan, 2021; Aboramadan et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Gelaidan et al., 2023; Hanaysha et al., 2022; Shaleh et al., 2024); Yang et al., 2020). However, there have been few studies on servant leadership in the context of education (Khatri et al., 2023), whereas principals who implement serving behavior can become effective leaders for their schools (Bier, 2021). Referring to these studies, although servant leadership tends to have a positive relationship with creativity, Shaleh et al. (2024) found that the two were not significantly related. Various studies, e.g., Aboramadan (2021) and Hanaysha et al. (2022), have shown that there are mediators in the relationship between the two. In addition, the mechanisms explaining the relationship between servant leadership and creativity are little known (Yang et al., 2020). The current study considers work engagement and occupational commitment as mediators of the relationship between servant leadership and creativity.

Work engagement is an important determinant of creativity (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2020). Even Aboramadan et al. (2022) found that the work engagement of employees of nonprofit organizations in Palestine fully mediated the relationship

between servant leadership and creativity. Employees who are engaged show physical, cognitive, and emotional expressions while carrying out their duties (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2020). Moreover, individuals with high work engagement are more open to information and act proactively (Aboramadan et al., 2022), which is likely to enable them to produce creativity. However, the survey of employees in Indonesia in the 2020-2022 range by Gallup (2023) shows that only 24% of respondents have engaged in their work. In light of the findings, analyzing whether teachers' work engagement affects their creativity is necessary.

In addition to work engagement, we investigate occupational commitment as a mediating role in the relationship between servant leadership and teachers' creativity. Occupational commitment is an individual's psychological link to their occupation based on their affective reaction (Lee et al., 2000). Sawhney et al. (2020) discovered a positive relationship between occupational commitment and work engagement. Furthermore, leadership can raise occupational commitment (Cohen, 1992). Therefore, our study investigates the relationship between servant leadership and creativity by considering occupational commitment and work engagement as the mediating effects.

Creative teachers are an important factor in improving their performance and the quality of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it takes the role of the principal, who can encourage increased teachers' creativity. The teachers' high occupational commitment may increase their engagement (Huang et al., 2023). In addition, teachers with high work engagement can contribute to student satisfaction and better performance (Bilal et al., 2021). Our study has contributions; namely, based on social cognitive theory, we identify the role of mediation from occupational commitment and work engagement in the relationship between servant leadership and creativity. In addition, we consider occupational commitment and work engagement as sequential mediations in the relationship between the two. Previous studies have yet to explore the mechanism of considering occupational commitment and work engagement in explaining the relationship between servant leadership and creativity. In addition, we investigate the research model in the context of teachers, which existing studies have rarely offered.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity

Servant leadership is leader behavior that prioritizes the fulfillment of the most important needs of followers and shows humility, ethics, emotional healing, empowerment, and concern for the development of followers (Yang et al., 2020), enabling them to achieve organizational goals (Aboramadan, Dahleez and Hamad, 2020). Servant leaders make their followers feel emotionally safe to increase their commitment and willingness to innovate, produce new ideas, and make changes (Alblooshi et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022). Being a servant is their main thing so their followers can grow, become healthier and wiser, and be free to make choices (Greenleaf, 1973). They also increase meaningful work and make the workplace more appealing (Qamar et al., 2023). In the educational context, servant leadership behavior is considered capable of improving teacher performance (Schroeder, 2016).

Creativity refers to the unusual and unique ideas used to address existing situations (Sahoo et al., 2023). Moreover, creativity is the ability of individuals to create, develop, and implement new and valuable thoughts related to their work to increase their performance (Hanaysha et al., 2022). Creative employees can be demonstrated by producing new information, increasingly advanced technology, and increasingly better processes (Hanaysha et al., 2022), suggesting ideas to improve performance and be able to solve problems, as well as new ways to do job tasks (Liu et al., 2012). To be creative in a job, individuals need to have knowledge about the field and the freedom to provide ideas beyond ordinary thinking and find solutions to problems (Sahoo et al., 2023).

Servant leaders will encourage their followers to think of new ways of working and provide work conditions that make their followers dare to try these new ways (Chen et al., 2022). Previous studies such as Aboramadan (2021), Aboramadan et al. (2022), Chen et al. (2022), Gelaidan et al. (2023), and Hanaysha et al. (2022) have found that the more leaders implement serving behavior, the higher the creativity of employees. In school, principals who build trust, provide care, opportunities for development, freedom to take risks, and empower teachers have consequences for increasing self-confidence and teacher performance (Schroeder, 2016). Thus, teachers whose leaders behave in serving and prioritizing their development will be increasingly able to show their creativity.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Servant leadership has a positive effect on creativity.

2.2. The Mediating Roles of Occupational Commitment and Work Engagement

Occupational refers to certain types of work involving a person and requiring certain expertise, knowledge, and tasks (Lee et al., 2000). People who are committed to the job have a positive experience with their work (Lee et al., 2000). In addition, individuals who like to live and are proud of their work can indicate a commitment to their occupation (Blau, 2003). Occupational commitment is a result of, among others, the support of supervisors (Zhang et al., 2023). In addition, a study by Blaique et al. (2022) found that providing support, opportunities, and challenges can increase occupational commitment. Since servant leaders provide concern and inspiration for their followers, they may be able to increase their followers' occupational commitment.

People who are very committed to their occupation will put in more effort to advance their careers and develop their skills (Hackett et al., 2001). In addition, workers who commit to their profession will be more obedient to the demands of it (Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, expertise and knowledge of a work can be important factors in the emergence of creativity (Chen et al., 2022). Since individuals with high occupational commitments try to have more expertise and follow the demands of their profession, they may become more creative. Consistent with social cognitive theory, teachers with leaders who provide inspiration, stimulation, and opportunities to develop will have a positive experience in their work. They will be happier and proud to work as teachers. They also increasingly have expertise as teachers. It allows them to have ideas for improvement and ways to carry out their teaching profession.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Occupational commitment has a mediating effect on the relationship between servant leadership and creativity.

According to Schaufeli et al. (2006), work engagement is the state of mind of individuals related to their work and is represented by vigor, dedication, and absorption. High levels of energy and mental endurance indicate vigor; dedication is characterized by high involvement in work, and a high focus on work characterizes absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Individuals with energy, enthusiasm, and focus can find problems in their work and find new ways to solve them (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2020). Therefore, the more individuals have a high level of work engagement, the more likely they are to produce creativity.

Work engagement is also important in determining creativity (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2020). According to Alblooshi et al. (2020), servant leadership indirectly influences the emergence of new ideas. Furthermore, servant leaders provide support and empower their followers and want to sacrifice for them (Bao et al., 2018). Consequently, followers will have the resources needed and receive positive evaluations and high work engagement (Bao et al., 2018). Thus, servant leaders will increase work engagement and their followers' creativity. A study of employees in nonprofit organizations in Palestine by Aboramadan et al. (2022) found that servant leadership can increase creativity only through work engagement. Consistent with the social cognitive theory, we expect that teachers who get support, opportunities to develop, and concern from their leaders will have positive experiences and be encouraged to involve themselves in their work. The teachers may show energy and enthusiasm and want to give themselves entirely emotionally, physically, and cognitively to do their work. Furthermore, they will be increasingly able to propose new ideas and ways that are solutive and useful for improving performance.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Work engagement has a mediating effect on the relationship between servant leadership and creativity.

Based on social cognitive theory, creativity can be raised with a stimulant through support from its social environment (Rubenstein et al., 2018), such as leaders (Lin, 2017). According to Cohen (1992), leadership can raise occupational commitment. Leaders who care about growth and provide opportunities to develop teachers may increase teachers' commitment to their work. Since individuals with high commitment to their work strive and work hard to achieve high performance (Lin et al., 2022), they can focus more and show their dedication in completing their work. Sawhney et al. (2020) also found a positive relationship between occupational commitment and work engagement.

Individuals who show their dedication and give themselves entirely to work will have more new ideas (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2020). Moreover, Liu & Ge (2020) argue that work engagement is a form of intrinsic motivation; hence, people with high work engagement will put all their effort into solving problems, interacting with coworkers, and coming up with creative ideas. Therefore, teachers who have high work engagement are increasingly showing creativity.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There will be a sequential mediation from servant leadership to creativity through occupational commitment and work engagement.
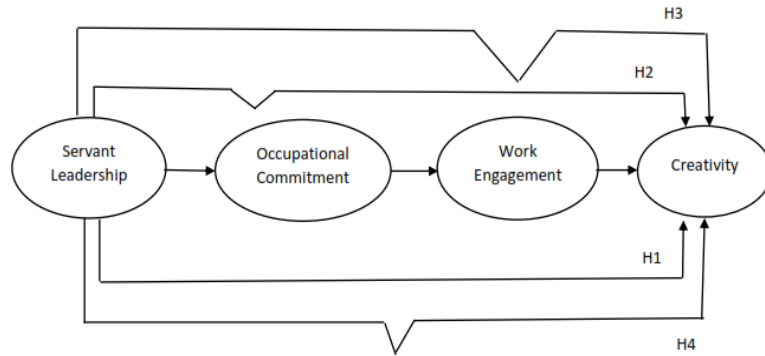
Figure 1. Research Model

3. METHODOLOGY

This study's respondents are teachers working in schools at the "X" Education Foundation in East Java. This foundation oversees schools at the kindergarten, elementary, and junior high school levels. Data collection was carried out using a Google Form questionnaire. The head of the foundation distributed the form to the teachers through the school principals. One hundred twenty-four teachers work at this foundation. We asked the foundation to distribute questionnaires to teachers who have worked for a minimum of one year. During data collection over two weeks, the study received 90 responses that could be used in data analysis. Most of the respondents are women (70%), aged 35-<45 years (33.3%), have undergraduate education (86.7%), and have been tenured for more than 15 years (41.1%).

Partial least square-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is used to examine the research model. We tested the measurement model in the initial stage, including convergent and discriminant validity and reliability tests. The convergent validity of a construct is based on the average variance extracted (AVE) and outer loading value (Hair et al., 2017). Heterotrait and Monotrait (HTMT) approach with a value of HTMT.85 is used to identify discriminant validity (Ting et al., 2019). Meanwhile, reliability is based on the value of composite reliability (CR)> 0.7 (Ting et al., 2019). Second, the structural model will be tested to identify the significance of the pathway between the hypothesized variables. The significance of a relationship is based on the value of t > 1.96.

This study uses established measurement instruments for our four research variables. We use ten items from Sokoll (2014), e.g., my direct supervisor cares about others, to measure servant leadership. Occupational commitment is measured by four items from Blau (2003), e.g., I am proud to work in the field I am currently running. Work engagement uses seven items (e.g., I focus on my work) from Karatepe et al. (2019). Creativity is measured by 13 items from Liu et al. (2012), e.g., I have new and practical ideas to improve performance. The response to these measurement items uses a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The use of self-report survey designs may result in common method bias (CMB) issues (Islam et al., 2021). We employ an anonymous survey to lower CMB (Kim et al., 2022). We also identify statistics based on Harman's single-factor test approach (Islam et al., 2021). The results show no single factor, and the first factor explains the variance of 33.67%, so CMB is not a significant problem (Jahanzeb et al., 2021).

Table 1 shows the results of convergent validity and reliability. We excluded several items from further testing to comply with the reliability and validity requirements. The construct exhibits convergent validity when the outer loading values are more than 0.6 and the AVE values are more than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). The construct has met acceptable consistency criteria, as indicated by the CR value greater than 0.8 (Siyal et al., 2021).

Table 1. The Results of Convergent Validity and Reliability

Constructs	Items	Loading	CR	AVE
SL	sl2	0.62	0.903	0.543
	sl3	0.8		
	sl4	0.819		
	sl5	0.822		
	sl6	0.853		
	sl7	0.613		
	sl8	0.68		
	sl9	0.637		
OCC	occ2	0.926	0.908	0.845
	occ3	0.9		
	occ4	0.931		
ENG	eng1	0.786	0.87	0.6
	eng2	0.803		
	eng3	0.713		
	eng4	0.848		
	eng5	0.787		
	eng7	0.7		
CRE	cre1	0.763	0.918	0.545
	cre2	0.818		
	cre3	0.657		
	cre4	0.773		
	cre5	0.767		
	cre6	0.613		
	cre8	0.701		
	cre9	0.724		
	cre10	0.785		
	cre12	0.749		
	cre13	0.749		

Source: Processed data (2023).

Table 2 shows the results of discriminant validity testing based on the HTMT approach. The four constructs are unique since the entire correlation value between constructs is less than the HTMT 0.85 value.

Table 2. The Results of Discriminant Validity

	CRE	ENG	OCC
ENG	0.737		
OCC	0.428	0.767	
SL	0.359	0.506	0.458

Source: Processed data (2023).

Table 3 displays the results of hypothesis testing. Contrary to our prediction, servant leadership does not significantly affect creativity (b = 0.069, n.s.), indicating that hypothesis 1 is not supported. As part of the mediation test, although not hypothesized, we also obtained the results of the test of the significant direct effect of servant leadership on occupational commitment (b = 0.428, p < 0.01) and work engagement (b = 0.204, p< 0.05). Furthermore, our test showed that occupational commitment significantly influenced work engagement (b = 0.596, p< 0,01) and the significant direct effect of work engagement on creativity (b = 0.712, p<0,01). Figure 2 shows the results of the structural model test.
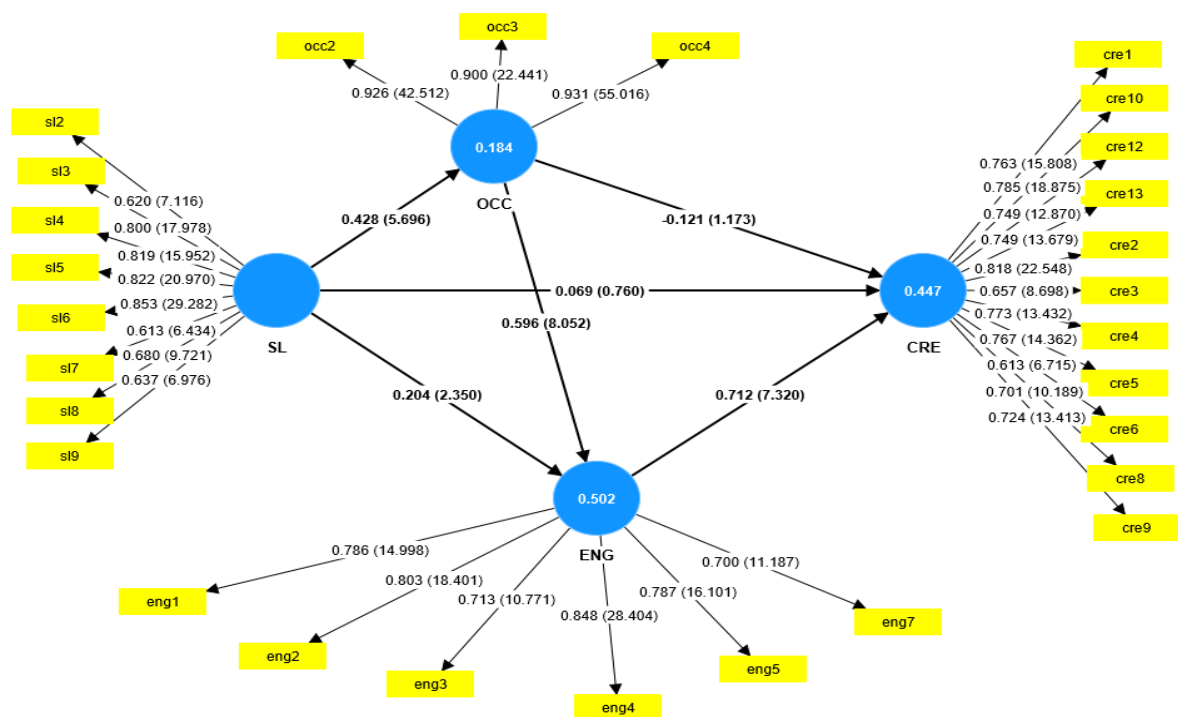

Figure 2. Structural Model

Source: Processed data (2023).

Further, this study provides results testing the mediating role of occupational commitment and work engagement. Occupational commitment also does not significantly mediate the relationship between servant leadership and creativity (b = -0.052, n.s.); thus, hypothesis 2 is unsupported. This study finds that the relationship between servant leadership and creativity is significantly mediated by work engagement (b = 0.145, p < 0.05). These results support hypothesis 3. In supporting

hypothesis 4, the relationship between servant leadership and creativity is mediated sequentially by occupational commitment and work engagement (b = 0.182, p < 0.01).

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Path	Beta	t-value
H1	SL→CRE	0.069	0.76
H2	SL→OCC→CRE	-0.052	1.082
H3	SL→ENG→CRE	0.145	2.193
H4	SL→OCC→ENG→CRE	0.182	3.804

Source: Processed data (2023).

The test results show that servant leadership does not significantly affect creativity, indicating that hypothesis 1 is unsupported. It supports a study by Shaleh et al. (2024) that shows that the influence of servant leadership on creativity is not significant. Our study also shows that other factors must mediate the relationship between servant leadership and creativity. We find that work engagement mediates the relationship between servant leadership and creativity. It aligns with previous studies, e.g., Khan et al. (2020) and Hui et al. (2020), that the relationship between creativity and its antecedent is mediated by work engagement.

Work engagement has been considered an important mediating factor (Bellamkonda et al., 2021). Individuals with high work engagement will put more effort into their work, be persistent in doing difficult tasks, be enthusiastic, and be willing to give more time for their work (Bilal et al., 2021). They may be more willing to devote their efforts and thoughts to creative ways of carrying out their duties. In addition, the result supports the previous research, i.e., Aboramadan et al. (2022), that work engagement fully mediates the influence of servant leadership on creativity. Referring to our result, even though leaders were concerned and wanted to sacrifice to help followers, it was not enough to encourage the emergence of the creativity of the teachers. The behavior of serving leaders must encourage the emergence of the enthusiasm and focus of the teachers in their work first; consequently, their creativity will increase.

Unlike what we expected, this study finds that occupational commitment did not significantly mediate the relationship between servant leadership and creativity. This finding indicates that teachers with leaders who care and are willing to provide assistance and services to them will increase their commitment to their work. However, their commitment does not necessarily make them more creative. This study found that servant leaders can make teachers committed to their work. They become happy and proud of their work. This condition will continue with increasing teacher creativity if commitment to work produces energy, enthusiasm, and focus on work. Teachers who work enthusiastically and put their mind and physical effort into doing their work will likely have more knowledge and expertise. Consequently, they will better recognize deficiencies in their work processes and results. Furthermore, they may provide new solutions that are beneficial to their performance.

Our study shows servant leadership positively influences teacher creativity through occupational commitment and work engagement. Thus, these results

support the social cognitive theory that a positive social environment, such as leaders, may affect employee outcomes. Teachers with leaders who support their development may result in creativity if they experience an emotional attachment to their work and are motivated to be enthusiastic and work fully.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study enrich our understanding of the mechanisms of servant leadership's influence on creativity. The results of this study show that servant leadership does not directly increase teachers' creativity but needs mediation from occupational commitment and work engagement. These results indicate the need for the "X" education foundation to implement employee management practices such as selecting school leaders. Individuals who become leaders in schools need to provide care, be positive examples, be trustworthy, and be willing to help teachers meet their needs. Moreover, people must be knowledgeable about their work in order to be creative (Sahoo et al., 2023). Knowledge can be obtained through activities such as training and sharing (Parhamnia et al., 2022). Therefore, consistent with the behavior of servant leaders, school principals need to provide development opportunities for teachers by involving them in training activities. In addition, they need to encourage teachers to share information that is relevant to their work. In this way, it is possible that their creativity will increase. Schools need to carry out competency-strengthening training for leaders and all teachers regularly so that they can produce creativity.

Our study also has limitations regarding the specificity of the research object, i.e., teachers who work at the "X" Education Foundation. Different study contexts may provide different findings. For example, Aboramadan's (2021) study on hotel employees found that servant leadership directly influences creativity, and there are also significant factors mediating the relationship between the two. Meanwhile, our study shows that servant leadership must first boost occupational commitment and work engagement to increase creativity. Therefore, further studies in different contexts are needed to investigate this research model. Our study also considers occupational commitment and work engagement as explanatory mechanisms for the relationship between servant leadership and creativity. Future studies could consider other mediator variables, such as self-efficacy and work values.

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