



## Conceptual Model of Servant Leadership as a Part of Efforts for Improving Service Quality

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### **Abstract**

Servant leadership is highly important within an organization. Effective leadership is considered one of the key factors contributing to a healthy development and success of an organization. Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of leadership to explore the relationship between leadership quality and service quality. This research utilized a comparative literature approach. The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of servant leadership significantly influences service quality, even when considering various moderation and mediation factors within a conceptual model. However, it is important to note that, due to the comparative literature approach, the data collected did not come from primary sources related to the research subject. This limitation implies that the available information might not be as comprehensive as research methods involving direct techniques like interviews, questionnaires, or direct observations of research subjects.

**Keywords:** *Servant Leadership; Service Quality; Organization*

### **Introduction**

Every organization has a vision and mission. Achieving the organization's objectives requires leadership roles to serve as the primary source of strength. According to Terry (1960), the leader's functions in the organization can be grouped into four categories: planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. Leaders must not only fulfill their roles within an organization but also possess the ability to engage in open communication and engage in two-way interactions, both "top-down" and "down-top," with their members. A servant leadership approach is highly essential within an organization. Servant leadership is defined as someone who serves first (Robert K. Greenleaf, 1970).

Although there are some doubts about the feasibility and effectiveness of this leadership approach, numerous empirical studies provide strong evidence indicating that servant leadership is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008), corporate social responsibility, and social corporate behavior, psychological well-being, organizational commitment, customer service quality, and performance (Chen, Zhu, & Zhou, 2015; Kwak & Kim, 2015), among other outcomes. Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1994) argue that servant leadership acts as the engine driving the organization towards service excellence.

The role of leadership in the success of organizations has been the subject of recent debate. Empirical examples from around the world show that some organizations outperform others, winning in competition and prospering, while others experience setbacks in the same environment. Effective leadership is considered one of the key factors contributing to an organization's healthy development and success. There are various opinions on the characteristics of successful leaders. Characteristics of effective leadership in one type of organization and situation may not be suitable for other types of organizations and situations. Therefore, extensive research has been conducted in the field of leadership to explore the relationship between leadership quality and service quality.

Quality is described as "fit for use" (Juran, 1974) in a user-based approach and "conformance to requirements" (Crosby, 1979) in a manufacturing-based approach. There are five main approaches to identifying quality definitions (Garvin, 1984): (1) transcendental philosophy approach, (2) product-based economic approach, (3) user-based economic approach, (4) manufacturing-based, (5) value-based operations management approach.

There are notable differences between services and goods. The basis of services is intangible, whereas goods are tangible. Since services are intangible, measuring service quality can be more challenging. Service quality measures how much the service is delivered according to consumer expectations. To measure intangible service quality, researchers generally employ service quality perception frameworks. Service quality perception is a result of comparing perception of the service delivery process and actual service outcomes (Grönroos, 1984; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). This article explores several conceptual models of the effect of servant leadership within organizations to enhance service quality within those organizations.

## ***Theoretical Review***

### **Servant Leadership**

The concept of servant leadership was first introduced in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf, the Vice President of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T). It was introduced in his book entitled "The Servant as Leader." Greenleaf states that a servant leader refers to an individual who first becomes a servant, possessing a natural and conscious awareness that those who wish to lead must first serve. Their primary motivation is the desire to help others and lead them.

Greenleaf emphasizes the need for a novel leadership model capable of serving employees, customers, and the community, viewing them as the top priority. This model takes jobs, social consciousness, and the shared decision-making process into account comprehensively.

A servant leader could be defined as an individual who prioritizes service for other individuals over themselves (Spears, 2002:255). This preference emerges as their motivation to lead others and is evident in the actions taken by the servant leaders, whose primary belief is that the basic needs of others must be met. A servant leader primarily aims to serve and meet the needs of others. According to Russel and Stone (2002:11), such purposes should ideally be the primary driving force of leadership. Ultimately, a servant leader will cultivate a mindset among those around them with the expectation of reciprocating with equally good service.

Max DePree, in his book "The Art of Leadership," states that servant leadership is about "Respect for others." This begins with the understanding that every human being possesses unique abilities. These differences necessitate the cultivation of mutual trust. Differences require us to better recognize the strengths of others. Each individual is born with special and distinct talents, not the same talents. Life is not just about achieving goals. As individuals and as part of a group, humans need to achieve their maximum potential. The art of leadership refers to the ability to provide facilities, opportunities, and

maximize the diverse talents of each individual. Leadership demands special maturity. This maturity is demonstrated by a sense of self-respect, ownership, hope, responsibility, and the fundamental belief that, at its core, all humans are equal.

Lantu (2007) has developed a model of servant leadership that prioritizes the development of employees as the primary and first tool, indirectly guiding the company toward long-term and sustainable success. This results from a sequential and continuous phase of changing behavior to serve subordinates. It is clear that leadership is not about popularity, power, and long-term planning. Simply put, leadership is the collaborative resolution of matters with others and assisting them in achieving shared goals and expectations.

The model of servant leadership characteristics has evolved into six categories as the basis for measurement. These six key characteristics provide a comprehensive depiction of servant leadership behaviors experienced by team members. Servant leaders provide motivation by empowering and developing an individual's behavior (Conger, 2000). They demonstrate humility in prioritizing the interests of others, including their sense of responsibility (Greenleaf, 1996), exhibit authenticity through consistency between thoughts and inner feelings (Harter, 2000), understand and empathize with the feelings of others and their backgrounds (George, 2000), ensure that they know what is expected of them, which benefits both employees and the organization (Laub, 1999), and courageously take responsibility to serve the greater organization, rather than control it for personal gain (Block, 1993; Spears, 1995). These characteristics have been further developed by subsequent research, incorporating additional reinforcing variables to support servant leadership (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

### **Service Quality**

The term "Service Quality" is a combination of two distinct words: service and quality. Service refers to activities or benefits that can be exchanged with one another at any given time, most importantly being intangible and not resulting in ownership of physical good. Quality should be a strategic element to support operational efficiency and enhance work performance.

Service quality means the availability of service capabilities to provide customer satisfaction in an efficient manner and it can enhance work performance. This is because the realization of a positive relationship with benefits, market share improvement, and most importantly, customer satisfaction. Several previous studies have found that the concept of quality in services differs from the common concept in the product sector. The reason for this is that some aspects of services are interrelated, such as intangibility, inseparability from the provider, heterogeneity, and so on. Therefore, there are different frameworks for explaining and measuring quality of service.

Defining and evaluating service quality is considered more difficult. Several authors have attempted to define it from various perspectives. Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong (1991) describe service quality as a company's ability to serve and satisfy its customers. They suggest that in terms of customer retention, service quality is the best measure for this purpose. Christian Grönroos (1984) recommended viewing service quality as perceived by consumers, with two dimensions: the technical or outcome dimension and the process function dimension. In enhancing competitiveness in the market, especially the service market, the focus on service quality is central to a company's sustainability and success. This is achieved by applying six dimensions of service quality, including trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility (Singaraj et al., 2019).

### **Research Method**

The measurement techniques of servant leadership in improving service quality have been a prominent area in leadership literature for the past few decades, for the reasons mentioned above. This

research focused on the conceptual model of servant leadership within organizations as part of improving service quality. It reviewed the conceptual models of servant leadership in enhancing service quality that are present in the research literature, following a chronological order. The research method used is a literature review, employing theories, concepts, and findings relevant to the research problem (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

The data collection process in this study involves three stages. According to Hasan (2002), a literature review is carried out in three stages, which involve identifying the type of literature needed, evaluating and collecting bibliographic materials, and presenting the literature review. The literature was obtained from existing research articles as the primary source. Secondly, the review of the literature used a tool known as a bibliography card or citation/reference card. Thirdly, the literature review is presented through direct and indirect quotations.

Data were analyzed using a narrative approach and comparisons with journal articles as the main source. The main content of this discussion describes how servant leadership is required to enhance service quality. In the discussion section, the interrelationships between the conceptual models from various previous studies are presented.

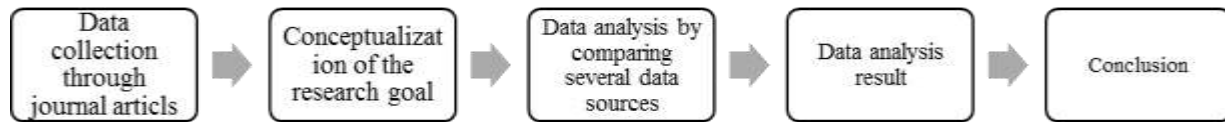


Figure 1: Research process

**Result and Discussion**

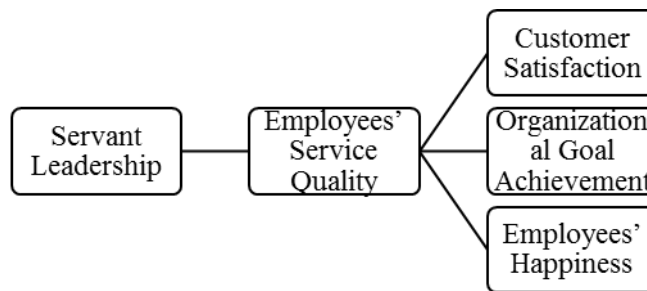


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

**Servant Leadership and Service Innovative Behavior**

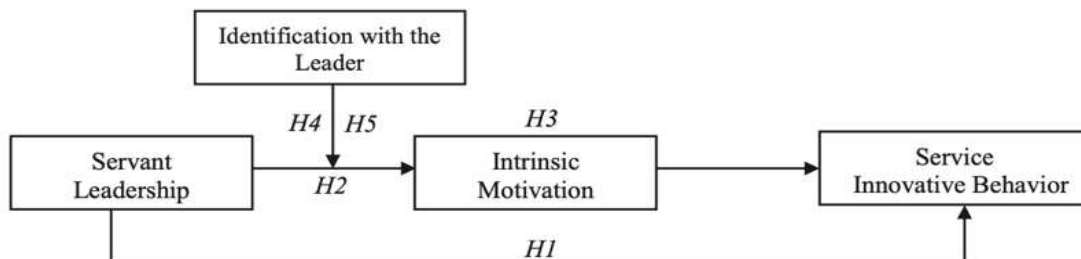


Figure 3: Conceptual model 1 (Su et al., 2020)

In the first conceptual model, servant leadership serves as a significant driving force for individual service innovation behavior, providing new insights to managers or leaders on how to enhance the service innovation behavior of their members. Managers or leaders need to shift from traditional top-down management to adopt a "servant-first" leadership strategy rather than "leadership-first." Conversely, organizations should not only focus on selecting servant leaders but also assist current leaders in developing servant leadership through well-designed training and educational programs.

Regarding the mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between servant leadership and employees' innovative service behavior, this research has significant implications for practice. Organizations and their managers should pay more attention to the spiritual needs of subordinates, share more power with subordinates, and involve subordinates more in decision-making, ultimately boosting subordinates' confidence and motivation to participate in service innovation activities. Furthermore, from an employee's perspective, intrinsic motivation can provide a fertile ground for individual service innovation promotion and cultivation. Hence, managers should recruit more employees with high intrinsic motivation during the recruitment process.

The final practical implications concern the role of leader identification. The influence of servant leadership on employees' intrinsic motivation and innovative service behavior is likely to be stronger among employees with a high level of identification with their leaders. Therefore, managers should recognize the need to recruit and develop employees who have a high level of identification with them. They can also take various actions, such as constructive feedback, heart-to-heart conversations, personalized attention, etc., to further enhance subordinates' identification with themselves. At the same time, managers should pay attention to the small details in day-to-day work and respect the views and opinions of subordinates to boost employee identification with their leaders.

The results confirm that servant leadership can enhance innovative service behavior and intrinsic motivation in employees. Furthermore, employees' intrinsic motivation mediates the influence of servant leadership on their innovative service behavior. Moreover, this mediating relationship depends on the moderating role of individual identification with the leader in the pathway from servant leadership to individual intrinsic motivation.

### The Effect of Servant Leadership and Self-Efficacy on Service Quality

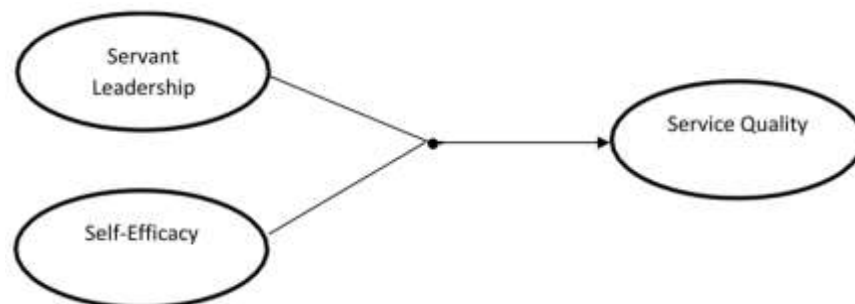


Figure 4: Conceptual model 2 (Qiu et al., 2020)

In the second conceptual model, self-efficacy strengthens the relationship between servant leadership and service quality, and employee service quality is higher when both perceived servant leadership and self-efficacy are higher. Also, the greater the difference between servant leadership perception and self-efficacy, the higher the employee service quality. The significance of servant leadership behavior in driving service quality in the hospitality industry is notable. Even employees with low self-efficacy levels demonstrate improved task performance under the support and encouragement of servant leadership.

Servant leadership provides emotional healing, empowers employees, and guides followers in realizing their full potential (Liden et al., 2008). Considering the foundation of hospitality (providing service), servant leadership is deemed particularly relevant in hospitality companies (Brownell, 2010). It is crucial for hospitality companies to establish human resource policies related to the recruitment, selection, and training of their managers in the qualities and behaviors of servant leadership (Qiu & Dooley, 2019).

Furthermore, it was found that self-efficacy reinforces the impact of servant leadership on service quality. This clearly highlights the importance of self-efficacy in determining employee performance in the hospitality sector. The combination of very low self-efficacy and very high servant leadership results in very high service quality. This demonstrates that servant leadership is particularly valued by employees with low self-efficacy. When they perceive their managers or supervisors as servant leaders, they provide the best service to their customers in the workplace. Supervisors and managers are encouraged to focus more on employees who have the least self-confidence in their abilities to successfully complete a task. This suggests that low self-efficacy in hospitality employees requires attention and emotional healing as they may face negative emotions such as frustration, stress, and despair.

### Servant Leadership and Service Performance

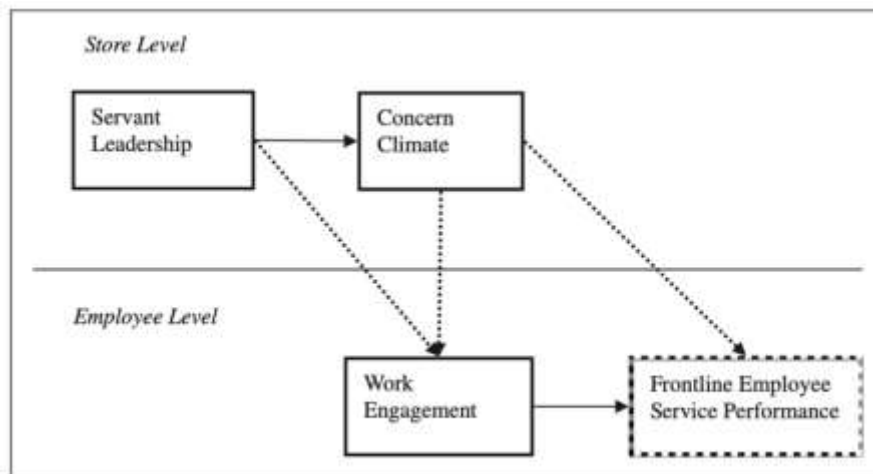


Figure 5: Conceptual model 3 (Peng & Chen, 2021)

In this conceptual model, two factors, namely, job-focused attachment and condition -focused attachment, strengthen the relationship between branch manager's servant leadership performance and frontline employee service. Specifically, the research findings suggest several theoretical implications. Organizational service contextual factors such as servant leadership in this case can foster job engagement, in addition to enhancing service performance.

The positive association between servant leadership and condition focus can be seen as a reflection of the moral responsibility of department supervisors towards their team members. It also indicates that leaders will allocate department resources to meet the needs and well-being of the organization's stakeholders. From a practical standpoint, branch manager's servant leadership can enhance frontline employee's service attachment and subsequently improve their service performance. The concern for branch-level service focus positively influences service performance.

## Servant Leadership and Employees' organizational behavior on Public service motivation

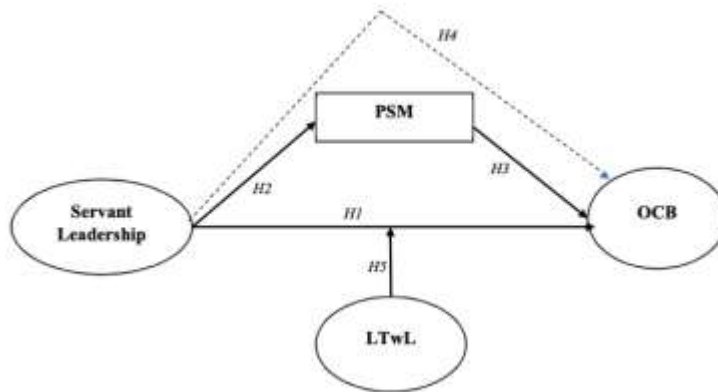


Figure 6: Conceptual model 4 (Gnakob et al., 2022)

In this conceptual model, it was found that servant leadership significantly influences organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and public service motivation. The research also reveals that public service motivation significantly strengthens the relationship between servant leadership and OCB, whereas the duration of interaction with leaders does not reinforce the relationship between servant leadership and OCB.

The findings indicate that servant leadership has a significant positive impact on OCB in the metropolitan assemblies of Ghana, supporting hypothesis one. The study concludes that when the Ghanaian government or public sector policy advocates wish to promote citizenship behavior among employees in these sectors, they should pay attention to the types of supervisors placed in various units and departments within these institutions. In summary, immediate supervisors or department heads in this sector should exhibit friendliness, support employee well-being, and set a positive example. Employees are more likely to display OCB when they believe they have the ability and competence to perform their tasks successfully and have the autonomy and freedom from their superiors to carry out their duties. Therefore, when servant leaders demonstrate care for their employees' well-being, strive for employee advancement, and grant them autonomy, they are likely to receive extra-role behavior as feedback.

In essence, servant leaders tend to cultivate characteristics of Public Service Motivation (PSM), such as altruism, ethics, compassion, and dedication to organizational goals. Once again, to rekindle the initial orientation of public sector employees towards serving the broader community, managers and institutional leaders must consistently exhibit the "leading by serving first" approach. This perspective aligns with Social Learning Theory (SLT), where Bandura (1977) asserts that employees display specific characteristics in an organization because they learn from or emulate their role model leaders. Servant leaders, who focus on humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance while seeing employees as ends in themselves by helping them advance their personal and professional growth to reach their potential, have implications for PSM among servant leadership subordinates (van Dierendonck, 2011).

Similarly, the findings suggest that PSM has a statistically significant influence on employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) in Ghana. Hence, employees are willing to exhibit extra-role behaviors such as providing support to colleagues when needed, safeguarding organizational property, offering constructive suggestions within the organization, demonstrating patience, effectively sharing useful information, and promoting the public good. The organization's image is based on their proclivity to do good in society.

It can be concluded that the impact of servant leadership on employee extra-role behaviors in the metropolitan assemblies in Ghana can be further enhanced through a stronger emphasis on PSM.

Moreover, public managers, including heads of various departments in local government structures, who demonstrate servant leadership qualities, will enhance employee PSM, ultimately leading to employees demonstrating OCB. This is because employees in the public service view their superiors as role models (Bandura, 1977), from whom they (the employees) emulate behavior that reminds them of their commitment to civic duties and working for the common good of the community. These PSM traits of employees result in demonstrations of OCB, including knowledge sharing (Tuan, 2016), safeguarding organizational property, and enhancing the institution's image.

However, the amount of time spent with the leader does not moderate the relationship between servant leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Therefore, Hypothesis five is not supported. The research argues that since OCB is not part of employees' formally assigned tasks (Organ, 1988), they will choose to perform it at their discretion regardless of how long they have served under a servant leader. The desire of public sector employees in Ghana to uphold the image of their institution, be supportive of colleagues, and avoid unnecessary complaints is purely based on their discretion and is not influenced by how often they witness their superiors demonstrating a servant attitude. This study supports empirically grounded propositions made by some experts (Abid et al., 2015; Singh and Kolekar, 2015) that OCB is not obligatory and cannot be coerced by managers or supervisors upon their subordinates because OCB is fundamentally voluntary.

### Servant Leadership and Service-oriented behavior

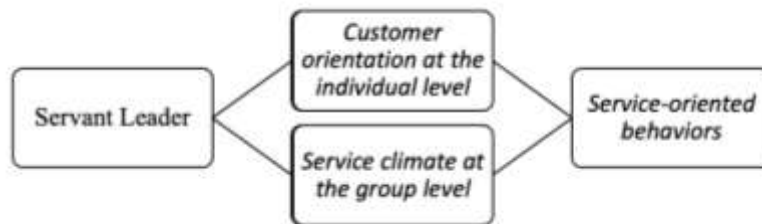


Figure 7: Conceptual model 5 (Bentein et al., 2022)

In this conceptual model, it was found that servant leadership at the individual level is aggregated by calculating employees' service-oriented behaviors via supervisor-consumer orientation, and conversely at the group level, servant leadership is aggregated by calculating employees' service-oriented behaviors via community service situations.

By integrating two complementary measures of service-oriented behavior, a more complete picture of public employee service performance is obtained. Furthermore, this research explores the mechanisms through which servant leadership influences service-oriented behavior. It suggests that servant leaders may not only act based on the motivation and attitudes of public employees but can also incorporate citizens' needs into their self-definition through role modeling and relational identification processes.

The results of this conceptual model also indicate that servant leadership enhances employee service-oriented behavior by changing the service climate at the group level. This emphasizes that servant leaders operate not only at the individual level but also act based on group dynamics as a whole, thus fostering a positive service climate within group units.

The implications of this conceptual model suggest that in public libraries, servant leadership may be a promising remedy for negative service interactions, as it can create a deep service orientation towards citizens and a service climate that supports public agents in meeting citizens' needs. Public libraries can benefit from promoting or recruiting managers who are service-oriented and by providing



leadership training to become servant leaders. Another practical implication is to develop and communicate a culture that values service quality and focuses on service-oriented group-level company values. Promoting such a servant leadership culture may require significant time and effort from leaders, as it prioritizes the needs of followers that go beyond merely creating a pleasant work environment.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Customer satisfaction, organizational goal achievement, and employee happiness are projected outcomes when servant leadership is well-implemented. From the reviewed literature, it is evident that servant leadership plays a vital role in achieving improved service quality. Enhanced service quality can be achieved when servant leadership is implemented with leader-follower identification as a moderator and intrinsically motivated employees, thereby fostering service innovation behaviors. Servant leadership, aligned with employees' self-efficacy, can influence service performance. Servant leadership should support and exemplify its employees, thus impacting motivation for delivering public service. Finally, servant leadership, mediated by customer orientation at the individual level and service conditions at the group level, shapes service-oriented behaviors.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Service quality can be assessed through several dimensions, including reliability (the provider's ability to deliver services as promised accurately, dependably, and reliably), responsiveness (the promptness in delivering services), assurance (the provider's ability to instill confidence in the service), empathy (the company's capacity to understand customer desires), and tangibles (the physical appearance of the service) (Gea & Mendrofa, 2022).

Customer satisfaction refers to the feelings of contentment or disappointment that individuals experience when comparing their perceptions of the actual performance of a product or service with their expectations (Sangadji, 2013). Customer satisfaction is the level of happiness or disappointment felt after comparing the received service/product with the expected one (Zulkarnaen, W., Amin, N. N., 2018:109).

According to Irawan (2008), indicators of customer satisfaction manifest as follows: 1) Customer enjoyment, where the provided service makes customers feel comfortable. 2) Repeated purchase of products or services, meaning that customers regularly buy the products. 3) Recommending products to others. 4) Meeting customer expectations, implying that the service provided aligns with customer expectations.

### **Organizational Goal Achievement**

Human beings are social creatures and have life goals. To achieve these life goals, people must cooperate and work in teams, which is one of the foundations of the formation of organizations (Adel, 2012). The vision of an organization represents long-term goals that describe the desired image of the organization, while the mission of an organization comprises a set of reasons for its existence (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2001). Organizational goals are defined as the achievements that an organization aims to reach (Locke, et al., 1981). The vision, mission, and goals of an organization should clearly and explicitly describe the strategic programs, annual programs, and annual activity plans of the organization (Adel, 2012).

All members of the organization are expected to understand the annual activity plans and work in accordance with them. Wexley and Yuki (2005) state that organizational structure is a formal plan to achieve efficient and effective task allocation in coordinating the activities of all organization members. Therefore, the organizational structure must align with the vision, mission, and goals of the organization (Nugraha & Pradana, 2021).

## Employees' Happiness

The source of happiness in the workplace is pleasant relationships with others. Recently, interpersonal relationships in the workplace have gained attention, and it appears that "high-quality connections" with others become a vital source of happiness and energy for employees (Dutton 2003; Dutton & Ragins 2007). Thus, what makes people happy in a general sense includes self-confidence, interactions with others, and situations that create happiness, as well as organizational support, which is a perception of employees and holds significant implications for happiness (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Workplace happiness is a positive feeling experienced by employees when they are at work (Pryce & Jones, 2010). This feeling arises when employees can manage and perform their tasks optimally. According to Argye & Hills (2002), workplace happiness can be measured using indicators such as considering life a gift, mental alertness, an enjoyable life, finding beauty in things, feeling satisfied, managing time effectively, looking attractive, and having pleasant memories. In addition to these indicators, various factors affect employee happiness in the workplace, including positive relationships with others, achievements, compensation, work environment, and health (Widyastuti, 2014). The comfort or discomfort of the work environment will influence employees' levels of happiness (Risbian Isnaeni et al., 2023).

According to Kesebir & Diener (2008), happiness is defined as a person's global assessment of their life, satisfaction with personal life, the prevalence of positive moods and emotions, and a low level of negative influence. Workplace happiness refers to employees' satisfaction with their job and life (Wesarat, Sharif, & Majid, 2015; Prasetyo, Ratnaningsih, & Prihatsanti, 2017). Employees who experience workplace happiness tend to be more focused on their work and enhance their productivity. Salas-Vallina, Alegre, and Fernández (2017) statistically improved and validated a workplace happiness scale, beginning with Fisher's conceptualization of workplace happiness (Djatnika Effendi et al., 2023).

Table 1: Conceptual Model

	Secondary	Moderation	Mediation	Elements Service Quality	Final Indicator
Servant Leadership	-	Leader's identification	Intrinsic motivation	Service Innovation behavior	1. Customer Satisfaction 2. Organizational Goal Achievement 3. Employees' Happiness
	Self-efficacy	-	-	Service Quality	
	-	-	1. Goal Situation 2. work engagement	Frontline employees' service performance	
	-	-	-	Public service motivation	
	-	-	1. Customer-oriented at the individual level 2. Service condition at the group level	Service-oriented behavior	

## Limitation

This study has some limitations. Because it is based on a literature review, the findings do not draw data directly from primary sources related to the research subject. This leads to incomplete information compared to research methods such as interviews, surveys, and direct observations of research subjects. Furthermore, future studies are expected to use qualitative or quantitative methods to obtain a more comprehensive measurement of research results. Additionally, the scope of research could be extended to cover all organizational sectors, including government, non-governmental or voluntary organizations, education, business, religious institutions, and so on.

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