Serving to Lead: Impact of Servant Leadership on Employee Engagement, Organizational Commitment, and Adaptive Performance in Hotels in Northern Province, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: In the hotel industry, strong leadership is vital for retaining skilled customer-contact employees who are essential to delivering high-quality service. This study examines the relationship between servant leadership and key job outcomes - employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance among customer-contact employees in Sri Lanka's hotel industry. Drawing from the Social Exchange Theory (SET), the research investigates the direct effects of servant leadership on these job outcomes and examines the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between servant leadership and both organizational commitment and adaptive performance. A multi-source, multi-wave field study was conducted across seven three-star hotels in Northern Province, Sri Lanka, collecting data from 220 subordinates and 23 supervisors in supervisor-subordinate dyads. A judgmental sampling approach was used to select participants for this study. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Correlation analysis revealed that servant leadership positively correlates with employee engagement ($r = 0.408$, $p < 0.01$), organizational commitment ($r = 0.222$, $p < 0.05$), and adaptive performance ($r = 0.207$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, employee engagement was found to positively mediate the relationship between servant leadership and both organizational commitment ($r = 0.464$, $p < 0.05$) and adaptive performance ($r = 0.452$, $p < 0.01$). This study contributes to both theory and practice by extending the application of Social Exchange Theory (SET) in the hospitality sector and enriching the body of literature on servant leadership. This study emphasizes the importance of servant leadership in enhancing employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance. When hotels prioritize a leadership, culture based on service and support, they can create a more motivated workforce, reduce staff turnover, and enhance service quality. For Sri Lanka's hotel industry, these insights are especially valuable as it works to raise service standards and stay competitive in the tourism sector. By applying Social Exchange Theory (SET) to hospitality and contributing to research on servant leadership, this study bridges theory and practice. Moreover, Servant leadership helps hotels build a more committed and engaged workforce, leading to better service and a stronger industry overall.

Keywords: *Adaptive Performance, Employee Engagement, Hotel Industry, Organizational Commitment, Servant Leadership, Sri Lanka*

Introduction

In the hotel industry, customer-contact employees play a vital role in successfully managing the service delivery process. To retain the talented employees necessary for meeting these demands, effective leadership is crucial. Rooted in positive psychology, servant leadership has emerged as a promising approach for the hospitality sector (Chon, & Zoltan, 2019). Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their subordinates, viewing themselves as servants first (Grisaffe et al., 2016). Fairness is a cornerstone of their leadership style; they consistently consider their subordinates' best interests and make equitable decisions in all operational aspects (Derry & Yvonne, 2021). These leaders foster an environment built on strong relationships, empowerment, opportunities for growth and success, ethical behavior, conceptual skills, and a focus on meeting subordinates' needs while creating value for external stakeholders (Ehrhart, 2004). When implemented successfully, servant leadership yields positive outcomes, including psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, service quality, increased work engagement, higher job satisfaction, and improved performance (Kaya, & Karatepe, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, the present study proposes a research model examining the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between servant leadership and both organizational commitment and adaptive performance. Moreover, this study investigates the direct effects of servant leadership on employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance, as well as the indirect effects of servant leadership on organizational commitment and adaptive performance, where employee engagement acts as a mediator. Employee engagement, referred to as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles, involves employees being physically, cognitively, and emotionally present while performing their tasks (Kahn, 1990). Adaptive performance refers to the ability of customer-facing staff to respond effectively to varying interpersonal

demands (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Organizational commitment, on the other hand, reflects employees' emotional attachment, identification with, and dedication to their organization (Mowday et al., 1979).

This study aims to address several gaps in the existing literature. A meta-analytic study by Hoch et al., (2018) explored various leadership styles and identified servant leadership as significantly related to a range of motivational and job outcomes. Additionally, the review by Zhang et al. (2021) calls for an investigation into the impact of servant leadership on these outcomes. Within the hospitality sector, employees are expected to exhibit high levels of engagement, deliver customized services, and effectively address service breakdowns to achieve customer satisfaction and foster strong customer connections (Chen, 2019). Servant leadership is considered particularly appropriate for the hospitality industry (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). However, while servant leadership, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance have been studied individually, the mediating role of employee engagement in their interrelationship is yet to be examined empirically. Second, Lee et al. (2020) found insufficient evidence in their meta-analysis to clearly define the theoretical mechanisms linking servant leadership to its direct and indirect outcomes. To address this gap, this study employs SET (Blau, 1964) to elucidate how servant leadership influences adaptive performance and organizational commitment through employee engagement. Third, existing literature has identified various mediators in the relationship between servant leadership and work-related outcomes (Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there remains a need for further research to better understand the mechanisms through which servant leadership influences these outcomes (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Awasthi & Walumbwa, 2022). Notably, adaptive performance as a behavioral outcome of servant leadership has been explored in only one study to date (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). This gap is particularly significant in the context of frontline service roles, where adaptive performance is critical. Employees in such roles must effectively respond to diverse customer needs and resolve service-related challenges (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Given this, the current study positions adaptive performance as a key outcome of servant leadership. Finally, this paper provides practical insights for managers and employees on how to leverage servant leadership to enhance employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Conceptual Model

This study investigates whether servant leadership predicts employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance. As illustrated in the research model (Figure 1), servant leadership is proposed to have a positive direct influence on employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance. Furthermore, the model suggests that employee engagement fosters both organizational commitment and adaptive performance. Additionally, servant leadership is anticipated to indirectly influence organizational commitment and adaptive performance through employee engagement. These hypothesized relationships are grounded in SET (Blau, 1964). The study also controls for gender and organizational tenure as potential influencing factors.

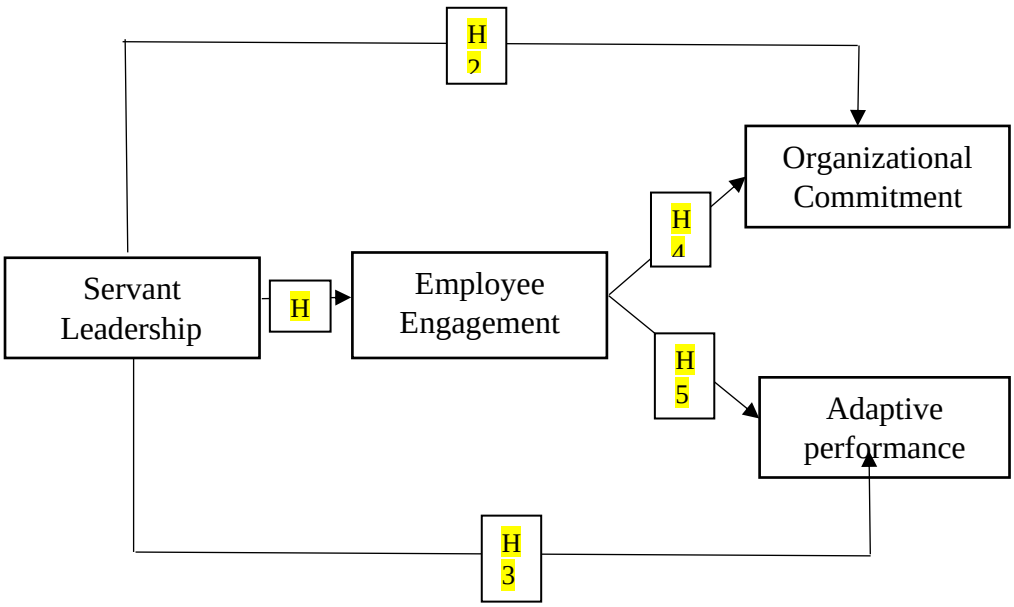


Figure I: Hypothesized Research Model (Author's Own Compilation)

Hypotheses

The impact of Servant leadership on Employee Engagement, Organizational Commitment, and Adaptive Performance

SET posits that trusting, high-quality relationships, built on adherence to exchange norms, benefit both employers and employees (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Saks (2006) argues that employees reciprocate positive actions by employers. For instance, servant leaders create environments where employees have access to resources such as support. In such environments, employees are likely to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement (Saks, 2006). This heightened engagement, in turn, fosters organizational commitment and a greater focus on work, ultimately enhancing adaptive performance in service encounters.

Servant leaders prioritize sharing knowledge, fostering understanding, and working collaboratively to achieve consensus (Rai & Prakash, 2012). This approach reflects their preference for persuasion over coercion or manipulation (Xiu & van Dierendonck, 2024). In their interactions with subordinates, servant leaders rely on persuasive techniques, such as presenting factual evidence, to guide decision-making and build trust (Xiu & van Dierendonck, 2024). This emphasis on persuasion is further supported by Sousa and van Dierendonck (2021), who identify persuasion and active listening as defining traits of servant leadership. Similarly, Liu (2019) notes that servant leaders depend on persuasion rather than positional authority when making organizational decisions, reinforcing the idea that their influence stems from respect and collaboration rather than hierarchical power.

Servant leaders empower their subordinates by delegating responsibilities and fostering their development (Kim, 2020). They emphasize stewardship, such as promoting social responsibility, while providing clear direction through appropriate accountability. Additionally, they demonstrate interpersonal acceptance, exemplified by empathy, and act authentically by keeping their promises (Bavik, 2020). A key aspect of servant leadership is humility, which involves prioritizing the interests of employees above their own (Bavik, 2020). Importantly, Van Dierendonck (2011) clarifies that a service-oriented approach does not imply servility, nor does it suggest that followers hold all the power or that leaders lack self-esteem. Instead, servant leaders use their power thoughtfully to create meaningful benefits for their subordinates.

Existing research consistently highlights the positive outcomes associated with servant leadership. For instance, a study conducted in the Pakistani banking sector by Zeeshan et al., (2021) found a positive correlation between servant leadership and employee engagement. Similarly, Kaur (2018) demonstrated the same positive relationship in a study undertaken in Punjab, India. Beyond employee engagement, servant leadership has also been linked to organizational commitment. Howladar and Rahman (2021) revealed this connection in their study among private commercial bank staff in Bangladesh, while Dahleez et al. (2021) confirmed similar findings in the higher education sector in Palestine. Furthermore, servant leadership has been shown to enhance job performance. Ludwikowska's (2023) study in Poland and Vuong's (2023) research among civil servants in Vietnam both underscore the role of servant leadership in improving job performance.

In summary, Servant leaders empower their teams, fostering their professional and personal growth while prioritizing their overall well-being. (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2022). As Ling et al. (2017) argue, servant leadership is rooted in the belief that actions speak louder than words, fostering reciprocal relationships built on trust and mutual respect. By leading through actions rather than words, servant leaders effectively influence their subordinates. Drawing on the theoretical foundations and available empirical data, we posit the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis -1: There is a positive relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement.

Hypothesis -2: Servant leadership is positively associated with organizational commitment.

Hypothesis -3: Servant leadership positively influences adaptive performance.

The Impact of Employee Engagement on Organizational Commitment

SET suggests that organizations and employees who adhere to exchange norms develop trusting, high-quality relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees reciprocate by demonstrating higher levels of engagement, which is sustained through positive reciprocal exchanges (Saks, 2006). As a result, they develop a stronger commitment to their organization. Empirical evidence supports this relationship: Lee and Ok (2016) found that engaged hotel employees exhibit greater organizational commitment, and Hanaysha (2016) demonstrated that employee engagement significantly enhances organizational commitment. Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation, we put forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis – 04: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational commitment.

The Impact of Employee Engagement on Adaptive Performance

SET suggests that employees feel compelled to reciprocate when they experience positive relationships with their employers (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Positive exchanges between employees and employers lead to higher levels of engagement and improved performance (Saks, 2006). Within the hotel sector, employees who are highly engaged are more capable of managing a variety of customer requests and exhibit a keen understanding of customer needs. Such employees adapt their approaches to effectively understand and address a wide range of customer demands (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Given the dynamic nature of the hospitality sector, hotels require employees with strong adaptive performance capabilities. These employees are particularly skilled at resolving customer dissatisfaction, ensuring positive service experiences.

The literature highlights several studies examining the relationship between employee engagement and performance outcomes. However, research specifically examining the impact of employee engagement on the adaptive performance of customer-contact employees remains limited. For instance, Kim and Koo (2017), in their study conducted in South Korea, found that employee engagement significantly enhanced job performance among hotel employees. Similarly, a study among hotel employees in Pakistan by Asghar et al (2021) revealed that highly engaged employees reported higher levels of job performance. Building on the theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and adaptive performance.

The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement in the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Organizational Commitment and Adaptive Performance

SET is employed to establish the relationships among servant leadership, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In organizations where servant leadership is effectively practiced, both employers and employees adhere to the norms of mutual exchange. Employees, in response to the positive treatment and support they receive from servant leaders, reciprocate by demonstrating higher levels of engagement. This heightened engagement, in turn, strengthens their organizational commitment and enhances their adaptive performance.

Servant leaders focus on the well-being of their subordinates, embodying leadership roles while fostering a sense of equality among their peers (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2021). Instead of relying on authority or control, they influence their teams through persuasion and conviction, guiding organizational decision-making in a collaborative and inclusive manner (Uluturk, 2024; Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2021). According to Eva et al., (2019), the authenticity of servant leaders stems from a genuine commitment to serving others and creating a positive impact, rather than from superficial attempts to appear authentic. This intrinsic motivation derives servant leaders to consistently focus on the needs and interests of their employees, fostering trust and mutual respect within the organization (Grisaffe et al., 2016).

Empirical evidence supports the significant influence of servant leadership on organizational outcomes. Kaya and Karatepe, (2020) highlighted its impact on various performance metrics, while Harwiki (2016) found that servant leadership strongly enhances job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. Building upon these insights, we posit that in environments where servant leadership is effectively practiced, hotel employees tend to exhibit increased engagement levels. This increased engagement is expected to foster stronger organizational commitment and enhance employee adaptive performance. Based on this reasoning, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 6: Servant leadership is indirectly positively related to organizational commitment through employee engagement.

Hypothesis 7: There is an indirect positive relation between servant leadership and adaptive performance, mediated by employee engagement.

Methods

Participants and Data Collection

The responses were collected from frontline service employees (reception staff, guest relations associates, dining service personnel) and their supervisors, working in three-star hotels in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. This region, known for its rich cultural heritage, is an emerging tourism destination (Dissanayake & Samarathunga, 2021). Initially, the researchers aimed to gain access to 16 hotels, but only seven permitted data collection. To ensure the sample was representative, human resource managers distributed surveys to employees in various customer-facing roles. A judgmental (purposive) sampling approach was used to select participants for this study.

This method enabled the inclusion of employees who could provide valuable feedback on their supervisors' leadership styles, enhancing the reliability of the findings (Sara Elder, 2009).

To address potential common method variance several procedural remedies were implemented (Podsakoff et al., 2012). First, the survey cover page emphasized anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and management endorsement to encourage honest responses. Second, a time-lagged design was employed, with data collected in two waves spaced two weeks apart. This approach helped reduce bias from single-time responses. Furthermore, direct supervisors evaluated employees' adaptive performance to offer an unbiased assessment. Third, anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the process. Surveys were distributed in sealed envelopes, and respondents returned completed surveys in the same manner. Fourth, employee and supervisor surveys were matched using identification codes assigned by the researchers, ensuring data accuracy while preserving confidentiality (Khan et al., 2018).

The surveys were initially developed in English and subsequently translated into Tamil using a back-translation method to ensure accuracy. Before full deployment, pilot studies were conducted with five employees for the employee survey and five supervisors for the supervisor survey. Feedback from these pilot studies indicated that no revisions to the scale items were necessary. In the Time 1 survey, 278 questionnaires were distributed to customer-contract employees, with 253 responses returned, measuring servant leadership and employee engagement. In the Time 2 survey, 253 questionnaires were distributed, and 220 responses were returned, measuring organizational commitment and demographic variables. Additionally, 23 supervisors evaluated the adaptive performance of these employees.

Demographic Profile

The sample consists of 220 employees working in various customer-facing roles in three-star hotels, with a majority (47.7%) falling in the 30-39 age group, followed by 21-29 years (23.2%), while only 2.3% are 60 and above. The sample is predominantly male (52.5%), with females making up 47.5%. In terms of marital status, most participants are married (73.2%), while 25.5% are single, and a small percentage (1.4%) are either divorced, separated, or widowed. Regarding educational qualifications, 49% completed only GCE A/L, while 39% have completed professional courses, and 12% hold an undergraduate degree. The majority (51.2%) of the sample consists of reception staff, while 37% are guest relations associates, and a smaller fraction (11.8%) are dining service personnel.

Measures

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership was measured using seven items adapted from Liden et al., (2014). A sample item is, “My manager can tell if something work-related is going wrong.” Respondents evaluated each item using a seven-point Likert scale, with options from 1 (“never”) to 7 (“always”). The scale showed high reliability, indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.869.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was assessed using Saks’ (2006) twelve-item scale. A sample item is, “Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time.” Participants rated their responses on a five-point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The scale showed high reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.751.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment was assessed using a 19-item scale by Meyer and Allen (1997). A sample item is, “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.” Participants expressed their level of agreement on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). The measure’s reliability was robust, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.703.

Adaptive Performance

Supervisors assessed adaptive performance with a 10-item scale developed by Hartline and Ferrell (1996). A sample item is, “This employee knows that every customer requires a unique approach.” Responses were collected on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). The measure exhibited good reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.868.

Control Variables

Gender and organizational tenure were included as control variables in this study. Organizational tenure was measured on a four-point scale, with higher scores indicating longer tenure with the organization. Gender was coded as a binary variable, with males represented as 0 and females as 1.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The skewness and kurtosis values for Servant Leadership (-0.685, 0.388), Employee Engagement (-0.415, 0.175), Adaptive Performance (-0.16, 0.351), and Employee Commitment (-0.650, 1.127) indicate that the data distribution does not deviate significantly from normality. Specifically, the skewness values fall below the threshold of 3.00, and the kurtosis values remain within the acceptable range of 8.00. These findings indicate that there is not significant evidence of non-normality in the dataset (Kline, 2011).

Hypothesis testing

Table 1: Correlations Analysis

		Servant Leadership	Employee Engagement	Adaptive Performance	Employee Commitment
Servant Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	220			
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.408**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	220	220		
Adaptive Performance	Pearson Correlation	.207**	.452**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000		
	N	220	220	220	
Employee Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.222**	.464*	.253**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.000	
	N	220	220	220	220

**. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

*. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

The correlation analysis provides evidence supporting H1, revealing a moderate positive association between servant leadership and employee engagement ($r = .408$, $p < .01$). This finding is consistent with previous research (Zeeshan et al., 2021; Kaur, 2018), highlighting that servant leadership enhances engagement by empowering employees, using persuasive influence, and providing necessary resources. Additionally, the correlation analysis supports H2, indicating a weak to moderate association between servant leadership and organizational commitment ($r = .222$, $p < .05$). This suggests that while servant leadership does enhance commitment, its impact may not be as strong as its influence on employee engagement. This result is in line with previous studies (Howladar & Rahman, 2021; Dahleez et al., 2021), highlighting that commitment might be more strongly influenced by engagement.

The analysis supporting H3 reveals a correlation of ($r = .207$, $p < .01$), indicating that employees under servant leadership demonstrate better adaptability. This finding is supported by previous literature (Ludwikowska, 2023; Vuong, 2023), which highlights the role of servant leadership in fostering adaptive performance behaviors. H4 is supported by the correlation analysis, which reveals a positive relationship between employee engagement and

organizational commitment ($r = .464$, $p < .05$), indicating that higher engagement significantly enhances commitment. This finding reinforces prior research (Lee & Ok, 2016; Hanaysha, 2016), which emphasizes the critical role of engagement in strengthening employees' dedication to their organizations. The strongest correlation observed ($r = .452$, $p < .01$) provides strong evidence supporting this H5 hypothesis. Highly engaged employees tend to adapt more effectively to dynamic environments, consistent with findings from Kim and Koo (2017) and Asghar et al. (2021).

Given the moderate positive correlation between servant leadership and engagement ($r = .408$, $p < .01$) and the positive association between engagement and commitment ($r = .164$, $p < .05$), there is indirect support for this hypothesis. This suggests that engagement partially mediates the link between servant leadership and commitment, in line with theoretical expectations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). This aligns with SET, which posits that high-quality relationships built on trust and mutual exchange drive positive workplace behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Both the strong positive correlation between employee engagement and adaptive performance ($r = .452$, $p < .01$) and the moderate link between servant leadership and engagement ($r = .408$, $p < .01$) lend support to the H7 hypothesis. This suggests that engagement mediates the link between servant leadership and adaptive performance, strengthening previous research on reciprocal exchanges and performance (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996).

Discussion

The findings of this study strongly support all proposed hypotheses. These results are consistent with the work of Ozturk et al. (2021), who identified a positive association between servant leadership and employee engagement and performance outcomes. Specifically, servant leadership fosters an environment where employees feel supported and empowered, which is particularly critical in high-stress industries such as hospitality.

For instance, hotel employees often face excessive workloads and various stressors, including role stress (Lin & Ling, 2018). Servant leaders play a vital role in mitigating these challenges by providing help, direction, and support, thereby equipping their subordinates to effectively manage problems (Hunter et al., 2013). This supportive leadership style creates a reciprocal relationship, as explained by SET (Saks, 2006). When employees perceive that their leaders genuinely care about their well-being and professional growth, they are more likely to respond with higher levels of engagement, commitment, and adaptive performance.

Employee engagement, in particular, serves as a significant predictor of both organizational commitment and adaptive performance. This finding aligns with the study by Lee and Ok (2016), which established a strong relationship between employee engagement and organizational commitment. According to SET (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), when both employers and employees adhere to the principles of mutual exchange, it fosters trust and strengthens the quality of their relationships. In this context, engaged employees are more likely to reciprocate their organization's support by demonstrating higher levels of adaptive performance and reporting greater organizational commitment.

A key finding is the mediating effect of employee engagement in the connection between servant leadership and both organizational commitment and the ability to adapt to change. This aligns with SET (Saks, 2006), which posits that trust and high-quality relationships are fostered when both organizations and employees adhere to the principles of mutual exchange. Such relationships enhance employee engagement, which subsequently drives higher levels of organizational commitment and adaptive performance among employees.

Finally, the effective implementation of servant leadership within an organization fosters employee engagement, which in turn leads to increased organizational commitment and improved adaptive performance. Employees pay close attention to their supervisors' actions. Servant leaders, by prioritizing shared power, subordinate support, humility, interpersonal acceptance, and clear guidance, can effectively motivate their teams (Bavik, 2020; Van Dierendonck, 2011). In such a supportive environment, employees are more likely to exhibit greater career commitment and enhanced adaptive performance.

Theoretical Implications

This research expands the hospitality literature. It examines how employee engagement acts as a key link between servant leadership and both organizational commitment and adaptive performance. By investigating these relationships, this study addresses the need for further exploration in leadership research (Zhang et al., 2021). Grounded in SET, this study develops and tests hypotheses that elucidate the connections between servant leadership, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and adaptive performance. In doing so, it provides valuable insights into the theoretical pathways through which servant leadership exerts both direct and indirect influence (Lee et al., 2020).

A key contribution of this study is its demonstration of employee engagement as a critical mediating mechanism between servant leadership and its outcomes. This is particularly significant given the hospitality literature's limited understanding of the theoretical mechanisms underlying servant leadership's effects (Lee et al., 2020). Furthermore, while adaptive performance is increasingly recognized as vital for customer-contact employees, few studies have examined it within the context of servant leadership (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). By including adaptive performance in the proposed framework, this research enhances our understanding of how servant leadership fosters employee adaptability within dynamic service environments.

Practical Implications

The findings highlight key implications for hotel managers. Firstly, servant leadership promotes employee engagement, strengthens organizational commitment, and enhances adaptive performance. To implement it effectively, leaders must empower subordinates, foster growth, demonstrate empathy, and ensure accountability (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016). For example, incorporating case studies into training programs can teach employees how to handle diverse customer requests and complaints, a critical skill in hospitality. Workshops and surveys can also gather employee feedback on leadership practices, fostering continuous improvement. However, supervisory empowerment is essential—without it, servant leadership initiatives are likely to fail. Therefore, creating an environment where both supervisors and employees are empowered is crucial.

Secondly, customer-contact-employee interactions are vital to the hospitality industry's future (Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2024). Servant leadership enhances employee engagement, enabling them to deliver exceptional service. Empowered and valued employees are more likely to exceed expectations, improving customer interactions and building loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and a competitive edge. Third, top management needs to produce a virtual video presentation that highlights the mission, vision, and objectives of the organization. This helps potential candidates understand the company's standards and align with its values. A rigorous selection process should then identify candidates with servant leadership qualities, such as stewardship and a collaborative approach (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020), ensuring leaders foster a supportive work environment. Fourth, scenario-based training programs can enhance servant leaders' skills by simulating real-world challenges. Workshops using mini-case studies can also educate employees and supervisors about servant leadership principles, fostering a culture of collaboration and empathy. Finally, since employees cannot always fulfill every customer request, management should encourage informal learning. By leveraging resources like managers, colleagues, and online information, employees can improve their adaptive performance and handle challenging situations effectively, promoting continuous learning and growth.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study acknowledges several limitations and suggests directions for future research. First, this study investigated employee engagement as a mediator between servant leadership and both organizational commitment and adaptive performance. Future research could explore whether this mediating mechanism also applies to other leadership styles, such as ethical and authentic leadership, and their influence on these outcomes. This would enrich the hospitality literature. Second, this study focused solely on employee engagement as a mediator. Future research could investigate multiple mediators, such as employee engagement and job embeddedness (Zia et al., 2022), to provide deeper insights into how leadership influences employee outcomes. Third, although pro-environmental behaviors have been studied (Faraz et al., 2021), research on green recovery performance remains scarce (Vatankhah et al., 2024). Future studies could examine whether servant leadership indirectly impacts green recovery performance through employee engagement. Additionally, given the potential for employees to exhibit environmentally detrimental behaviors (Zhang et al., 2024), exploring how environmentally specific servant leadership reduces non-green behaviors could advance understanding of leadership's role in sustainability. Finally, this study did not account for respondents' industry tenure, which could influence outcomes. Including industry tenure as a control variable in future research would provide a more nuanced understanding of these relationships.

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