

# The effectiveness of servant leadership in enhancing innovative work behavior: The art of job engagement

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**Submission date:** 12-Mar-2025 09:06AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 2612237504

**File name:** JMM\_Lisna\_Susanti.pdf (339.33K)

**Word count:** 7058

**Character count:** 40457

## The effectiveness of servant leadership in enhancing innovative work behavior: The art of job engagement

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Submitted: Jul 24, 2023; Reviewed: Jul 26, 2023; Accepted: Oct 24, 2023

**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to examine the connection between servant leadership and innovative work behavior, with job engagement acting as a mediator. The study involved 211 high school and vocational schoolteachers in Bandung and utilized an online survey. Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 3.2.9 for Windows. The findings confirm that servant leadership has a positive impact on innovative work behavior directly and that job engagement significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior. This study is significant as research on the topic of servant leadership and innovative work behavior in a school context is relatively new. Due to the specificity of the set population within the school institution, the mechanism of how servant leadership impacts innovative work behavior could be better understood. These findings can assist schools' management in developing innovative work behaviors and creating competitive advantages by creating a psychological connection.

**Keywords:** innovative work behavior; job engagement; servant leadership; teachers

## Efektivitas kepemimpinan yang melayani dalam meningkatkan perilaku kerja inovatif: Sebuah seni dari keterlibatan kerja

**Abstrak:** Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk secara empiris menyelidiki hubungan antara kepemimpinan yang melayani dan perilaku kerja inovatif melalui job engagement sebagai variabel mediasi. Studi ini melibatkan 211 orang guru sekolah menengah atas dan kejuruan di Bandung dan dilakukan dengan survei secara daring. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan aplikasi SmartPLS 3.2.9 untuk Windows. Hasilnya mengonfirmasi bahwa kepemimpinan yang melayani dapat meningkatkan perilaku kerja yang inovatif (efek langsung) dan job engagement secara signifikan memediasi hubungan antara kepemimpinan yang melayani dan perilaku kerja inovatif (efek tidak langsung). Studi ini unik karena

How to cite: Limbong, L., & Saragih, S. (2023). The effectiveness of servant leadership in enhancing innovative work behavior: The art of job engagement. *Jurnal Manajemen Maranatha*, 23(1), 33-44. <https://doi.org/10.28932/jmm.v23i1.7018>

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penelitian berbasis sekolah pada topik kepemimpinan pelayan dan perilaku kerja inovatif masih relatif baru. Populasi dalam penelitian ini spesifik hanya pada lembaga sekolah, sehingga mekanisme bagaimana kepemimpinan yang melayani memengaruhi perilaku kerja yang inovatif dapat dipahami dengan lebih baik. Temuan ini dapat membantu manajemen sekolah dalam mengembangkan perilaku kerja yang inovatif dan menciptakan keunggulan kompetitif dengan menciptakan ikatan psikologis.

**Kata kunci:** guru; job engagement; kepemimpinan yang melayani; perilaku kerja inovatif

## INTRODUCTION

The dynamic environment in the workplace is due to changes in technology, business competition, changing ways of working, and variations in the workforce (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). These changes will impact the individual and organization's performance. The work environment is evolving, leading to new trends at different levels - individual, team, and organizational. One significant change is the increasing diversity in the workforce. Additionally, information and technology have a major impact on the nature of work and the labor market. These advancements also bring changes to the internal and geographical divisions of labor within organizations. This condition requires adjustments in working methods, innovative human resource practices, policies, and appropriate leadership styles. Organizations need leaders who can adapt to these changes and create a positive work environment that encourages and motivates employees to work during the changes.

Previous literature states that one of the leadership styles that can motivate employees is servant leadership (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Ozturk et al., 2021). Servant leadership is a style of leadership that highlights the importance of putting others first and focusing on their needs rather than one's own. It involves a leader's commitment to the growth and well-being of their followers, as well as the overall success of the organization (Sendjaya et al., 2008). The other characteristics of servant leadership is their focus on empowering and supporting their team members and promoting the personal and professional development of their followers. This leadership style is rooted in the belief that by serving others, leaders can inspire and motivate their team to achieve their full potential and contribute to the greater good (Sendjaya et al., 2019).

Even though there can be an overlap and integration between servant leadership and other type of leadership, servant leadership is assumed to be superior in creating the emotional bond of followers (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Luu, 2020). Servant leadership places emphasis on the development, welfare, and empowerment of employees. The objective is to create an inclusive and supportive workplace where every individual is encouraged to flourish as their true selves. The main focus is on the employees to advance the organization's growth through their whole. Servant leaders genuinely care about the feelings and perspectives of their team members. They strive to understand the needs and help their followers grow into those who lead by serving others. Thus, prior research has shown that servant leadership is more appropriate when applied to service-oriented industries (Chen et al., 2022; Rabiul & Yean, 2021). The rationale of this statement is because servant leadership promotes the sharing of power and empowering individuals, emphasizing the values of love and equality to create a sense of importance in the workplace. It also ensures that work is distributed in a fair and equal manner, taking into account each person's individual abilities (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). Some examples of research of this topic in service industry are: in high-tech company (Su et al., 2020), school institutions (Anshori et al., 2023; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022), hotel (Ling et al., 2016), college teachers (Shailja et al., 2023), and public company (Chen et al., 2022). These studies have found that servant leadership enhance job engagement (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020), innovative work behavior (Dayanti & Yulianti, 2023; Shailja et al., 2023; Su et al., 2020; Yoshida et al., 2014), creative process engagement (Chen et al., 2022), higher performance (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022), organizational citizenship behavior and extra role behavior (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022), and career satisfaction (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020).

Among many work attitudes as the outcomes of serving leadership, innovative work behavior (IWB) becomes interesting to study in the service industry because of the dynamic workplace environment. The service industry is dynamic, and organizations need to continuously adapt and innovate to remain relevant and successful (Chen et al., 2022; Ling et al., 2016; Su et al., 2020). Employees' ability to drive innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability are the primary skills that

employees should master in this constantly changing situation. Consequently, in the service industry, innovative work behavior plays a crucial role in improving service quality. School institutions are one example of service-oriented organizations where principals, teachers and staff are in direct contact with students and parents. However, nowadays school institutions are facing a high demand for change (Akram et al., 2022). For example, the need for integration of technology in the teaching and learning process, the need for work partnerships with family and community, and the demand for ongoing professional development and support for teachers (Paccaud et al., 2021). Digital transformation in education has created new possibilities for students to access learning materials beyond traditional school hours. As a result, teaching materials that were initially intended for in-person use must now be adapted for digital platforms. Furthermore, schools can streamline administrative tasks by implementing technology for scoring and monitoring students' progress, enhancing efficiency in these areas. Staff are required to make many changes in teaching materials and teaching methods. Thus, the emergence of a servant leader in the school will guarantee a better quality of education (Anshori et al., 2023; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022).

The demand for change in school institutions due to digital technology necessitates teachers to possess an innovative work behavior. When teachers embrace innovation, they can effectively utilize diverse digital tools and resources to enhance learning materials and enrich students' educational experiences. Moreover, this innovative behavior holds significant relevance in adequately preparing students for future learning endeavors. Although numerous studies have indicated how servant leadership promotes IWB, school-based research on this topic is still in its infancy. There is limited awareness among school leaders about the positive impact of servant leadership on innovative work behavior. Therefore, this study will examine servant leadership at high school and vocational schoolteachers. The aim of this study is to enhance our comprehension of the role and impact of servant leadership in supporting innovative work behaviors in educational settings and adapting to an ever-changing work environment. Moreover, this study will provide evidence to managers on how to incorporate psychological connections in organizations to stimulate innovative work behavior. The study will explore the impact of servant leadership and innovative work behavior via a psychological mechanism known as job engagement.

Servant leadership was first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. According to Greenleaf (1970), servant leadership is a leader who is willing to be a servant first. The leader who performs this role starts from a sincere feeling that comes from the heart, that he wants to serve and must first serve. Eva et al. (2019) emphasized that servant leadership prioritizes the interests and needs of its employees. The others servant leadership behaviors have been explained by Sendjaya et al. (2008). According to Sendjaya et al. (2008), a servant leader has an authentic self-identity. They are genuine, aware of one's values and lead with integrity. Servant leadership approach emphasizes the importance of mutual trust and respect and commitment in promoting a sense of purpose. In general, servant leadership behavior encourages the emergence of several positive outcomes (Cai et al., 2018; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022; Ling et al., 2016; Su et al., 2020). Some of them are employees' ability and desire to work innovatively (Cai et al., 2018; Dayanti & Yulianti, 2023; Yoshida et al., 2014), follower performance and motivation (Anshori et al., 2023), employees' service quality (Ling et al., 2016), and lower level of employees' deviance behavior (Sendjaya et al., 2019), meaning that the core essence of the servant leadership model lies in its emphasis on behaviors that prioritize the contributions of followers and support their ability to reach their full potential.

According to Yoshida et al. (2014), servant leadership significantly boosts employee creativity and team innovation by fostering relational identification. A servant leader focuses on creating a supportive and empowering environment, encouraging employees to express their ideas, take risks, and engage in creative problem-solving. Employees feel supported by the leader, fostering innovative problem-solving. In addition, Shailja et al. (2023) mentioned that servant leadership increases positive feelings at place of work because they practice an employee-centered approach. The supportive working environment in turn increases the cognitive ability of employees and thereby has the possibilities of generating creative ideas.

It is necessary to further elucidate the connection between servant leadership and other variables by delving into the underlying mechanisms. By introducing mediation variables, we can shed light on the reasons behind the existence of certain relationships. The emergence of the servant leadership and IWB relationship can be better understood by examining the emotional connection that may transpire

between them. A potential variable to take into account is job engagement. Job engagement is something that refers to positive work behavior, which includes thoughts about the relationship between employees and their jobs. Job engagement has three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Saks, 2019). Vigor is characterized by abundant energy and mental strength in the workplace, along with a strong motivation to exert effort and persist despite challenges. Dedication is the sense of purpose, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and the desire to take on challenging tasks in one's job. Absorption is the state of complete focus and enjoyment in one's work, where time seems to pass quickly, and it becomes difficult to detach from work.

Job engagement is demonstrated by teachers through several behaviors, such as: actively participating in decision-making related to school management. For instance: curriculum changes, school policies, actively developing themselves by attending conferences and trainings, and actively making improvements in teaching materials, resources, and teaching methods. Employees appreciate job engagement because it leads to positive outcomes like job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and high performance. An engaged employee is distinguished by their energy, commitment, and complete immersion in their work (Saks, 2019; Schaufeli, 2017). When applied in the service industry, job engagement built employees' awareness and skills that are embodied in flexible, creative behavior, and open to a new thing (Asan & Huliselan, 2020).

The job engagement model developed by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) is known as job demands and job resources (JD-R Model). This model proposes that job engagement is influenced by two key factors: job demands and job resources. The work-related environmental factors that are included in job demands are workload, emotional demands, and mental demands. In contrast, job resources refer to various aspects of work that contribute to achieving work-related objectives, including physical, psychological, social, and organizational factors. It is worth noting that job resources, such as social support, feedback, autonomy, opportunities for skill-building, and a favorable work atmosphere, can have a positive impact on employee performance and well-being. Extensive research employing the Job Demands-Resources paradigm has certainly shown that job resources play a critical role in strengthening job engagement, particularly when job demands are at the highest point.

The emergence of a servant leader can be perceived as a job resource. Servant leadership exerts a strong influence on followers, allowing employees to engage in productive work activities when followers receive positive encouragement and support. Therefore, by exercising servant leadership principles, employers can effectively engage their employees and foster a positive emotional state towards their work on a daily basis (Anshori et al., 2023; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022; Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). This is the art of job engagement. Job engagement is frequently regarded as an art due to its ability to evoke emotions and leave a long-lasting memory. Crafting job engagement necessitates the use of creativity, initiative, and mutual understanding between employees and leaders to find meaning in their work. Job engagement is a result of the proactive involvement of both parties (employers and employees). Thus, they are not only present at work but also emotionally connected. Consequently, the engaged employees will demonstrate certain behavior, such as vigor or enthusiasm, dedication and absorption (Saks, 2019). Employees show vigor by always giving their best effort in finishing their work and accepting challenging tasks. They are also dedicated to the work and full of concentration doing their work.

Previous studies have established a correlation between servant leadership and IWB, indicating a positive connection between the two. Anshori et al. (2023) stated that when a leader prioritizes their subordinates' needs, supports their growth, and creates a positive work environment, it can enhance employees' motivation and commitment to their work, resulting in increased job engagement. This emotional bonding encourages them to invest time and effort in creating new ideas. As a result, engaged employees are more creative than those who are not disengaged. In addition, the explanation of the relationship between SL and IWB can be explained by social identity theory. Social identity theory is a theory in social psychology that elucidates how individuals conceptualize themselves in relation to their group and how these affiliations impact their attitudes, actions, and interpersonal dynamics (Hogg et al., 2017). According to this theory, individuals classify themselves and others into social groups based on shared attributes such as race, gender, nationality, religion, or occupation. A leader who is able to demonstrate servant leadership behavior and enact a shared social identity among group members is more likely to achieve engaged employees.

After conducting a literature review, the hypotheses for this research are as follows:

- H1: Servant leadership affects innovative work behavior.  
 H2: Servant leadership affects job engagement.  
 H3: Job engagement affects innovative work behavior.  
 H4: Servant leadership affects innovative work behavior through job engagement.

The research model is presented in figure 1.

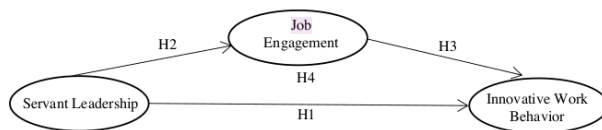


Figure 1 Research model  
 Source: Research studies (2022)

## METHOD

This study's population group includes high school and vocational schoolteachers from Bandung's West, North, and South suburbs. Because the population is quite large, this study uses the standards required by Hair et al. (2022). In accordance with Hair et al. (2022), the recommended minimum sample size is calculated by multiplying the number of questionnaire questions by 5 to 10. In this study, the questionnaire consists of 26 questions. Hence, the estimated sample size required for this research would be 8 multiplied by 26, resulting in a total of 208 respondents. The purposive sampling strategy is used to assure that the sample meets the requirements for the purpose of the study. The criteria used are: (1) teachers who are eligible to participate in this study must work full time, and (2) they have worked as a teacher for at least one year. Data collection was carried out for two months and the questionnaire was given online. To get access to the teachers, the researcher first coordinated with the school principals to obtain permission. For respondents who were willing to participate voluntarily, the researcher provided a small gift as an incentive.

The variables in this study were assessed using widely recognized and validated measurement tools. To measure respondents' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership, this study used an instrument developed by Liden et al. (2008). The instrument consists of 7 questions (e.g., My principals can recognize when I'm down without asking me). The employee engagement scale was initially designed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). This instrument has been used in much research in different contexts and cultures. The short version of the job engagement scale consists of a total of nine items, with three items designed to measure each dimension: vigor, dedication, and absorption. It is also a self-report scale. One of the questions is: "In my work, I feel full of energy." Then, the innovative work innovation is measured by valid instrument developed by De Jong & Den Hartog (2010). The instrument consists of 10 questions to measure all aspects of innovative work behavior. For example, I provide key solutions to solve problems at work. All items of the research measurement were presented with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree").

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Data analysis will begin with descriptive analysis of respondents, testing the validity and reliability of research instruments, followed by model testing and research hypotheses. The first discussion will begin by describing the demographics of the respondents. After two months of data collection, 211 teachers participated in this study. Respondents' demographic data are presented in Table 1.



Table 1. Respondents' demographic

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	93	44,1%
• Female	118	55,9%
Age		
• 25 - 30 years	68	32,2%
• 30 - 40 years	64	30,3%
• 40 - 50 years	39	18,5%
• 50 years	40	19,0%
Job Tenure		
• 1 - 5 years	68	32,2%
• 5 - 10 years	48	22,7%
• 10 - 15 years	40	19,0%
• 15 years	55	26,1%

Source: SPSS processing results (2022)

Based on the respondent demography presented in Table 1, it can be concluded that the sample of this study consisted of 211 teachers, with 55.9% female and 44.1% male. The ages of the respondents varied between 25 to 50 years, with the majority falling in the 30-40 years age group (30.3%). In terms of job tenure, the majority of respondents had worked as a teacher for 1-5 years (32.3%). These demographic characteristics provide insight into the sample of teachers who participated in this study and may help to contextualize the findings.

In this study, data testing was carried out using SmartPLS 3.2.9 for Windows. First, it is important to model the paths or relationships between the variables involved. After building the path model, the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments are checked. To evaluate the overall model, several evaluation metrics are used, such as R-squared, t-values, and p-values. Lastly, this study applied bootstrapping methods to generate confidence intervals and test the significance of the mediation.

The purpose of convergent validity test is to ensure that different measures of the same construct are measuring the same underlying concept or trait. In other words, it aims to establish that the measures are measuring the same construct by showing that they are highly correlated with each other (Hair et al., 2022). Convergent validity tests use outer loading and AVE. The outer loading measurement requires a value of > 0.7 to be acceptable and an AVE value > 0.5. After conducting the validity test with SmartPLS 3.2.9 for Windows, several questions in this study have to be eliminated because they did not meet the requirements. All the indicators that have the value on outer loading is > 0.7 and the value on AVE > 0.5 are used for further analysis. The results of convergent validity testing are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Convergent validity results

Variables	Indicators	Outer loading	AVE
Servant leadership	SL1	0.849	0,652
	SL2	0.815	
	SL4	0.832	
	SL5	0.742	
	SL6	0.794	
	WENG1	0.891	
Job engagement	WENG2	0.944	0.818
	WENG3	0.932	
	WENG4	0.896	
	WENG6	0.884	
	WENG7	0.882	
	WENG8	0.901	
Innovative work behavior	IWB2	0.840	0.713
	IWB3	0.849	
	IWB4	0.831	
	IWB5	0.843	
	IWB6	0.840	

IWB7	0.817
IWB8	0.839
IWB9	0.869
IWB10	0.868

Source: SmartPLS processing results (2022)

In order to evaluate the discriminant validity, the present study utilized the Fornell-Larcker criterion. For an instrument to be deemed valid, the square root value of each constructs Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should exceed its correlation with other latent variables. Table 3 displays the conclusive findings of the discriminant validity test, revealing that all indicators in this measurement demonstrate higher loading values and meet the criteria set by Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion

Variables	SL	WENG	IWB
SL	0.807		
WENG	0.758	0.905	
IWB	0.758	0.866	0.844

Source: SmartPLS processing results (2022)

The reliability of the measurements can be assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) as outlined by Hair et al. (2022). Cronbach's Alpha is a statistical tool employed to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of a scale or questionnaire. It gauges the degree to which the items within a scale correlate with one another. A high value of Cronbach's Alpha (ranging from 0 to 1) signifies that the items consistently measure the same underlying construct. On the other hand, Composite Reliability (CR) is an additional measure used to assess internal consistency reliability. It is similar to Cronbach's Alpha but is based on the factor loadings of the items in a scale. CR also ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating excellent reliability. In this study, all variables successfully passed the reliability test, indicating that the instruments of servant leadership, job engagement, and innovative work behavior are reliable. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability both surpass 0.70, indicating that they are valid. Table 4 provides a detailed overview of these values for reference.

Table 4. Reliability test

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Servant leadership	0.867	0.903
Job engagement	0.963	0.969
Innovative work behavior	0.950	0.957

Source: SmartPLS processing results (2022)

The value of R Square is used to measure how many endogenous variables are influenced by other variables. This study found that innovative work behaviors are influenced by servant leadership and job engagement by 77.4%, while the other 22.6% are explained by other factors that are not involved in this study. Meanwhile, job engagement is influenced by servant leadership by 57.5%, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. R-Square

Path	R-Square
SL → WENG	0.575
WENG → IWB	0.774

Note(s): SL=Servant Leadership; WENG = Job Engagement; IWB= Innovative Work Behavior

Source: SmartPLS processing results (2022)

In order to determine the fitness of the model in this study, NFI values can be assessed. The expected NFI value is the highest possible NFI value. The higher the NFI value, the better. In this study, the NFI result is 86.2%, meaning that the model in this study can be stated as a good model.



The structural model was utilized to examine both direct and indirect relationships between the constructs. The statistical formula for each hypothesis is:

1.  $IWB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SL$  (Servant leadership has a significant effect on innovative work behavior).
2.  $WENG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SL$  (Servant leadership has a significant effect on job engagement).
3.  $IWB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WENG$  (Job engagement has a significant effect on innovative work behavior).
4.  $IWB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SL + \beta_2 WENG$  (Servant leadership has a significant effect on innovative work behavior through job engagement).

Hypothesis testing was conducted using SmartPLS 3.2.9, which considers path coefficients and parameter coefficients. As per Hair et al. (2022), the t-statistic value and p-value aid in determining the significance of the relationships between variables. If the t-statistic value exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, it indicates that all hypotheses are supported. After analyzing the data, it was found that all hypotheses in this study were supported. The study suggests that there is a positive correlation between servant leadership and innovative work behavior (IWB). Additionally, job engagement is found to significantly mediate the relationship between servant leadership and IWB. Consequently, work engagement serves as a partial mediator in servant leadership and IWB interactions. The results of the hypothesis testing can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypotheses test results

Path	Original sample	T-statistic	P-value	Conclusion
SL → IWB	0.239	4.383	0.00	Hypothesis-1 supported
SL → WENG	0.758	20.166	0.00	Hypothesis-2 supported
WENG → IWB	0.685	7.742	0.00	Hypothesis-3 supported
SL → WENG → IWB	0.519	12.694	0.00	Hypothesis-4 supported

Note (s): SL=Servant Leadership; WENG = Job Engagement; IWB= Innovative Work Behavior

Source: SmartPLS processing results (2022)

In the SmartPLS model diagram (presented in Figure 2), the arrows indicate the direction of the relationship between the constructs. They show whether a construct affects other constructs or not. For example, the arrow from  $X_1$  (SL) to  $Y$  (IWB). Additionally, arrows leading from variables to indicators represent the relationship between latent variables (constructs) and their indicators. Examples include the arrow from  $Y$  (IWB) to  $IWB_2$ . These whole model testing are presented in Figure 2.

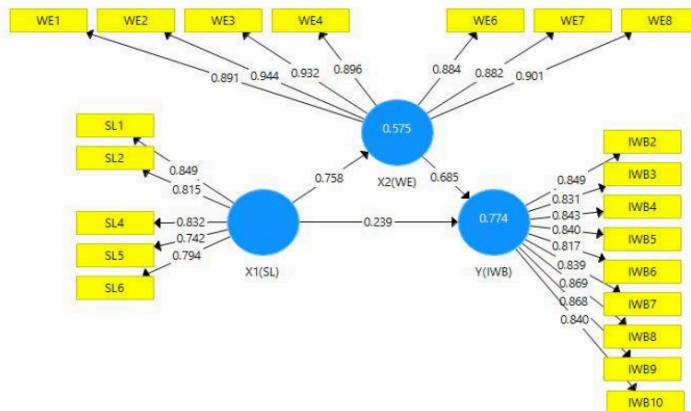


Figure 2 Estimate result

Source: SmartPLS processing results (2022)

## Discussion

### *The effect of servant leadership on innovative work behavior*

The present study's statistical analysis demonstrates a strong and positive association between servant leadership and innovative work behavior (IWB), consistent with the findings of Kaya & Karatepe (2020) and Shailja et al. (2023). Servant leadership is a leadership style characterized by prioritizing the needs of followers, emphasizing visioning, modeling through personal example, mentoring, and empowering. When employees witness this behavior, it enhances their trust and respect for their leader. As a result, there is a sense of relational identification which promotes employees' willingness to contribute more towards organizational creativity and team innovation (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Ling et al., 2016; Yoshida et al., 2014).

Working in school institutions nowadays requires a willingness to learn new skills and technologies. For some teachers, this situation might sound exhausting and worrisome. However, the role of the principal in encouraging the teachers to be open to a new challenge and master new skills is essential. A principal who demonstrated a servant leadership approach will focus on the followers need and growth will, he will create a supportive and empowering environment. This working situation will encourage teachers to express their ideas, take risks, and engage in creative problem-solving. Teachers feel more comfortable sharing their innovative thoughts and suggestions, knowing that their leaders genuinely value their input.

According to the social identity theory of leadership, this finding is in line with the idea that leaders who effectively communicate and embody a shared social identity among group members are more likely to achieve favorable work outcomes (Hogg et al., 2017). As a case in point: innovative work behavior, job engagement, organizational commitment, and better performance. This is due to the fact that a shared social identity can foster motivation among group members, resulting in increased dedication towards the group's objectives and enhanced performance. Moreover, effective leadership can cultivate a positive work environment and a willingness to go above and beyond what is expected.

### *The effect of servant leadership on job engagement*

This study found that servant leadership significantly affects job engagement. Servant leaders values people (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). They are attentive to their followers' personal growth. Thus, servant leaders can engage employees emotionally because they are empathetic, growth-oriented, and prioritize the needs of their subordinates. When employees perceive that their leader values them and cares about them, employees will tend to form emotional bonds. This relationship has played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of purpose and fulfillment among employees. As a result, they are more inclined to go beyond their regular job duties, leading to increased levels of job engagement. This result aligned with Anshori et al. (2023), De Souza, (2014); and Kaya & Karatepe (2020). According to Anshori et al. (2023), when school principals pay more attention to the teachers needs than their personal needs, it will enhance teachers' personal growth and self-expression. This is perceived as a positive energy from the leader and the principals are tightening emotional bonds with the schoolteachers.

A teacher's job is often considered a calling, since it entails a sense of purpose and a strong intrinsic motivation to positively impact others' lives (Gradišek et al., 2020; Shang et al., 2022). In contrast, teaching is a complex and demanding profession, especially in the digital age, where teachers must integrate technology into their teaching methods. Additionally, teachers face challenges such as low salaries and few opportunities for promotion (Gradišek et al., 2020). It is therefore necessary for them to have organizational support from their leaders. Teachers need a servant leader who can help them find meaning, engage with their work and see their work as a calling.

### *The effect of job engagement as a mediation of servant leadership and innovative work behavior*

Examining job engagement in the light of the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior revealed a positive outcome. The results of the study indicate that the level of engagement a person has in their job plays a significant role in the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior. This suggests that an effective servant leader is able to motivate and inspire

their team members to become more engaged in their work, which in turn leads to innovative behavior. When school principals apply servant leadership principles, they help teachers build mutual trust because they understand their needs, especially during times of change. Working as a servant principal creates a positive work environment that allows employees to grow and share ideas. A servant leader helps employees find meaning in their working lives, feel a sense of purpose, and enhance their emotional commitment.

By utilizing social identity theory, we can gain valuable insights into the correlation between servant leadership, job engagement, and innovative work behavior (IWB). This understanding can prove to be highly beneficial for organizations looking to cultivate a work environment that fosters innovation and growth. According to this theory, individuals derive their sense of identity and self-worth from the groups they belong to (Hogg et al., 2017). When the school principals exhibit servant leadership behaviors, such as empathy, support, and empowerment, they foster a shared social identity among their staff. This shared identity promotes a sense of belonging, trust, and commitment, which in turn enhances job engagement.

When employees are engaged emotionally, they are dedicated and enthusiastic about doing their work despite facing challenges (Asan & Huliselan, 2020). According to Sendjaya et al. (2008), a servant leader will focus on his ability to inspire and empower others to reach their full potential. It involves visioning, modeling through personal example, mentoring, and empowering. This role model will help teachers grow, succeed and understand the purpose of their profession. As a consequence, this kind of leader/school principal will make teachers eager to mobilize their energy in completing the work and be able to deal with the intensity at work.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion above, this study concludes that leadership that applies the principles of servant leadership will likely encourage innovation. Servant leaders who demonstrate traits such as humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance, have the ability to cultivate a favorable work atmosphere where employees feel emotionally supported. This leads to an increased readiness among the employees to generate fresh ideas and drive change. By forming strong connections with their subordinates, servant leaders can promote a sense of inclusivity and acceptance that contributes to a positive self-image in employees. This, in turn, motivates employees to engage more actively and creatively in their work.

In addition, servant leadership will also promote job engagement. Servant leadership encompasses various behaviors, including conceptualizing, emotional healing, prioritizing followers' needs, facilitating their growth, demonstrating ethical behavior, and empowering the team members. Servant leaders actively listen to the concerns and needs of their team members, seeking to understand their perspectives and emotions. This kind of behavior will make employees have an attachment to their work. As a consequence, engaged employees will show the attitudes and behaviors of vigor, dedication, and absorption, which in turn can create innovative work behavior. Thus, this study concludes that job engagement partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior.

There are limitations in this study. First, the sample size. Although the number of samples has met the minimum requirements, involving a larger sample will increase generalization. Therefore, future research needs to consider a larger number of respondents. Second, the data collection was done by online survey. This method did not allow the researchers to directly interact with and observe participants' innovative work behavior. Online surveys rely on self-reported responses, which may be subject to biases and limitations. Direct observation or qualitative methods could provide a more in-depth understanding of participants' behavior.

This study offers practical and theoretical implications. From a practical standpoint, the findings emphasize the importance of implementing key principles of servant leadership in school settings. This includes practices such as conceptualizing, providing emotional healing, prioritizing followers' needs, fostering their growth and success, demonstrating ethical behavior, and empowering them. As a specific example, providing the necessary support and resources to improve teachers' skills and well-being, encouraging teachers' active participation in decision-making and giving space for their ideas to make

an improvement of their teaching materials, and build inclusive and trusting relationships with teachers. These principles can be effectively integrated into human resource management practices within schools. For example, providing non-formal activities that bring teachers and principals together to share and providing regular training to help teachers deal with changes related to their work. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of research on servant leadership in school settings, especially among high school and vocational schoolteachers in Indonesia.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to the school principals of various high schools and vocational schools positioned in the West, North, and South regions of Bandung. Their invaluable permission granted us the opportunity to conduct this research within their esteemed educational institutions. Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude to all the teachers who willingly and actively participated in this study.

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