

Servant Leadership Knowledge Structures: A Bibliometric Review

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Abstract: Servant leadership is an emerging approach that appears timely debate for scientific progress in leadership research. There have been several qualitative, quantitative, and systematic reviews on servant leadership. Surprisingly, there needs to be more research using bibliometric analysis on servant leadership. For this reason, this study addresses methodological limitations by using a bibliometric review to analyze and visualize the historical background of servant leadership, its present state of knowledge structures and emerging trends. To do so, we included a sample of 214 peer-reviewed articles over the period 2004 to 2022 by using the Web of Science (WoS) database. The bibliometric analysis revealed three major clusters in servant leadership: (1) Servant leadership and innovativeness, (2) Servant leadership with employees' extra-role behaviours and personality traits, (3) Attitudinal and behavioural employee outcomes such as emotional labour and ethical followers. Significantly, our contribution recognizes more nuanced results than previously partially identified and highlights servant leadership research. This study also opens a fresh avenue for future scholars by providing future research questions.

Keywords: Servant leadership, Knowledge structures, Bibliometric review

1. Introduction

Leadership research has transitioned from a greater emphasis on transformational leadership to a collective, interpersonal, and broader perspective where leader-follower engagement is crucial (Avolio et al., 2009). With the market trend for even more moral, individual administration, servant leadership theory might be precisely what organizations require, and consideration for community has been an issue of terms and conditions (Van Dierendonck, 2011). According to a Forbes magazine survey, nearly one of America's top 100 organizations collaborate to exhibit or enhance servant leadership traits (Levering et al., 2000; Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010).

For leadership scholars, servant leadership is displayed as a new area of study (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Academicians have been investigating the role of servant leaders on believers for an extended period, and they have consistently found positive results (Chen et al., 2015; Neubert et al., 2008). Nevertheless, people have become more interested in servant leadership in recent years (Heine et al., 2022; Kauppila et al., 2022). To prevent uncertainty in light of the various concepts that are accessible (Barbuto Jr & Wheeler, 2006; Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Regardless of its antiquated beginnings, people continue to apply that same meaning of servant leadership. Subsequently, (Greenleaf, 1970) discussed servant leaders "place the needs of their subordinates before their own needs and centred their efforts on helping subordinates grow to reach their maximum potential and achieve optimal organizational and career success."

A prior literature reviews to highlight the essential questions in the servant leadership field. For example, (Van Dierendonck, 2011) conducted systematic review on brief overview of the development, key characteristics, and evaluation tools for servant leadership in relevant studies. A recent review explored antecedents and consequences on servant leadership (Langhof & Gldenbergl, 2020). Similarly, another review examined as a holistic approach and focused on individual and team-level outcomes of servant leadership (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021). In addition, another meta-analysis focused on three leadership styles: authentic, ethical and servant leadership (Hoch et al., 2018).

The mainstream research on servant leadership is still very fragmented. Scholars investigate servant leadership from multiple standpoints, which adds to the field's dispersed state (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; Gui et al., 2021; Peachey et al., 2018). Despite the rising concern from both industry and scholars, the majority of scientific studies on servant leadership (SL) are still fairly limited (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Its actual value to businesses and workers is yet to be unveiled (Hunter et al., 2013). Numerous intellectuals reveal compelling arguments in support of cultivating and fostering investigation on servant leadership (Liden et al., 2014)

A call for more research is needed on servant leadership, a "promising new field of research" (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Another research contemplates servant leadership "at an early stage of theoretical development" (Liden et al., 2014). For this reason, there is a compelling need to conduct a bibliometric analysis of servant leadership. Importantly, Bibliometric analysis is still in its infancy in a business investigation and is frequently not utilized to its maximum potential. This happens when investigators only have access to a subset of available bibliometric data and methods, which is supposed to lead to a simplistic knowledge of the

topic (Brown et al., 2020). Surprisingly, servant leadership is a partially limited and under-researched field in existing literature (Kauppila et al., 2022).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Servant Leadership

Greenleaf postulated that the servant leadership philosophy could be applied to organizations, not just its leaders. Greenleaf encouraged businesses to serve customers and society. Unlike other leadership styles, servant leadership incorporates society (Greenleaf, 1970). Although Greenleaf's pragmatic approach, relying on his long career, resonated with private industry managers, even though SL applies to all sectors (Hartmann, 2013).

More importantly, the notion of servant leadership can be traced back to the earliest days of the Bible, where seven different Greek words—*diakonos*, *doulos*, *huperetes*, *therapon*, *oiketes*, *sundoulos*, and *pais*—are used to refer to leaders in the capacity of "servanthood" (Getz, 1984). However, the theory of servant leadership has also been supplemented by other religious and non-religious concepts (Fry, 2003; Hicks, 2002). Similarly, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism are just a few examples of faiths that teach their believers the significance of "service" (Kurth, 2003) and ideologies that aren't based on any specific religion, like moral philosophy, Siddha yoga, and Taoism.

Given the above similarities, traditional literature indicates that servant leadership is about both doing and being a servant (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). For instance, leaders who adopt the role of a servant and the essence of a servant, as demonstrated by their full devotion to serving others, radiate a great sense of belief and character (Jaworski, 1998).

2.2 The Role of Servant Leadership at the Workplace

Previous research developed a multidimensional scale to assess servant leadership by using multi-level assessment (Liden et al., 2008). Leader-member exchange (LMX) shows leaders has good social relationships with their subordinates at the workplace as to create viable working culture, they also demonstrated attractive behaviours among their juniors (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), the core idea of this LMX theory suggests leaders and followers are able to access the various benefits to build mature relationship. Their research revealed at the micro level, servant leadership continues to add something new to the discussion beyond transformative leaders and LMX whenever it pertains to explaining things such as society citizenship behaviours, in-role performance, and commitment to the organization. Importantly, their findings demonstrate that the concept of servant leadership has potential as a way to comprehend how leaders impact the actions and thoughts of their followers. Leadership research pointed at micro and macro levels separately (Dinh et al., 2014). Indeed, they examined the current theoretical trends and changing perspective on leadership at the workplace. Another research shows servant leaders influences employee behaviour and their creativity (Neubert et al., 2008). Servant leadership towards organizational citizenship behaviour though mediating effect of procedural justice climate and service climate (Walumbwa et al., 2010). They examined both employee-supervisor levels to get better understanding of both perspectives.

During the past couple of years, servant leadership and innovative work behaviour in the service sector have been investigated at the micro level from the employee point of view (Iqbal et al., 2020; Kül & Sönmez, 2021; Reslan et al., 2021; Zhu & Zhang, 2020). Conversely, few critical studies assessed servant leadership with organizational citizenship behaviour at the organizational level in non-profit organizations' context (Aboramadan et al., 2022; Neubert et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2015; Sun, 2013). In a systematic review, factors like agreeableness, extraversion, core self-evaluation, mindfulness, narcissism, and organizational identification were discovered to be significant predictors of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019). Prior research examined servant leadership with team service, how well they do their jobs, and how an organization treats its citizens at team-level analysis in a manufacturing company (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018).

It has been suggested to conduct a bibliometric analysis on servant leadership to address the methodological gap (Eva et al., 2019). By doing so, this study attempts to highlight a research gap to conduct a bibliometric analysis to analyze and visualize the historical background of servant leadership, its present state of knowledge structures and emerging trends. Due to the recent interest in the subject, the outcomes of this bibliometric analysis will help progress the state of knowledge and point the way toward promising new avenues of investigation. For this reason, this review was done to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How servant leadership research is progressing in terms of citations, publications, most influential authors and articles?

RQ2: What are the gaps in the research stream of servant leadership which can lead towards future research questions?

3. Methodology

In the past few years, bibliometric analysis has witnessed a rapid rise in recognition in business research studies (Donthu et al., 2021). The bibliometric analysis has been carried out in several recent studies on leadership topics (Tal & Gordon, 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). Surprisingly, there is limited research on servant leadership using bibliometric analysis, and there is more need to analyze it to enrich the knowledge of servant leadership. This way, we used bibliometric analysis, and data were extracted from the Web of Science database (WoS). Indeed, the WoS database was used for its international reputation for quality research publications and double-blind peer-reviewed processes (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004).

We searched the keywords “*servant leadership*” in the “Social Science Citation Index” category, and the query generated 414 articles. After that, we used search criteria to limit it to only “article”, so we received 344 articles. Finally, we applied search criteria according to our field of “management”. Our final sample size was 214 peer-reviewed articles for bibliometric analysis. From the WoS database, four files were downloaded for further analysis (2 Microsoft Excel formats and 2 Tab Limited Text files). Microsoft Excel for descriptive analysis and VOS Viewer for bibliometric analysis (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) were employed to analyse bibliometric data for the current study. First, citation and publication trends are presented to see how servant leadership research progresses. Secondly, most articles were identified. Thirdly, knowledge structures were generated using bibliographic coupling. Finally, future research questions were proposed.

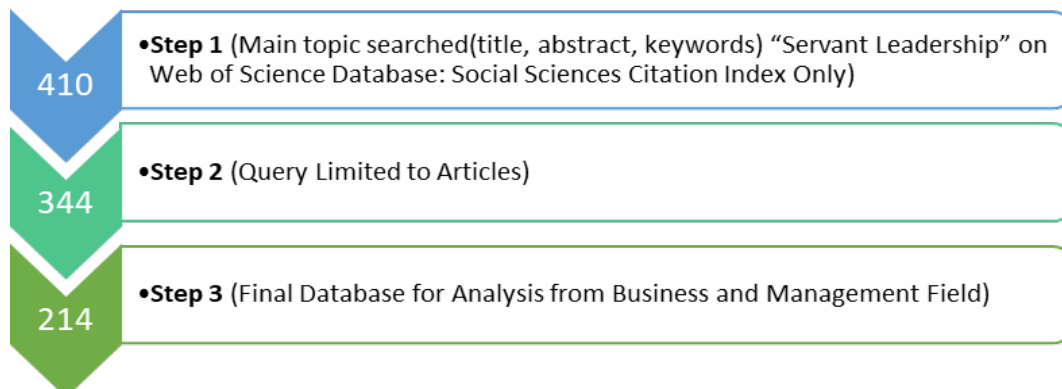


Figure 1: Process of Data Collection Source: authors based on data from Web of Science database

4. Results

The trend analysis on servant leadership shows in Figure.2. This trend indicates the present citation and publication status of servant leadership in the leadership field. Notably, servant leadership originated in this research stream in the year 2011. The trend shows a rapid rise in servant leadership studies from 2020 to 2021, and surprisingly, there is a gradual decline in the research on servant leadership in 2022.

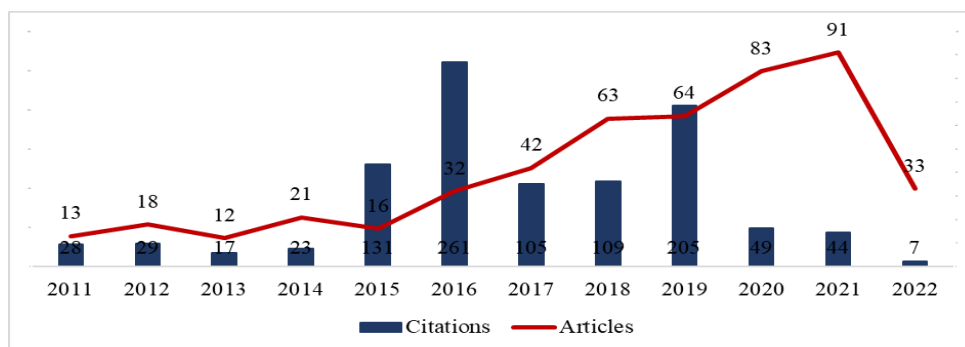


Figure 2: Servant Leadership-Citation and publication trends

Table 1: Earlier Reviews on Servant Leadership

Scholars	Method	Key findings	How this review is different?
Vogel et al. (2021)	Bibliometric (n=2390)	Three themes of Leadership Development (Leadership styles and seminal, Learning and elements of leadership and intra-person mechanisms)	Focused on literature, covered 2004 to 2022 with sample of 214 documents. Focused on measurement of servant leadership (SL) and key theories. Employed bibliometric analysis to identify publication, citation, most influential journals and bibliographic coupling, and future research questions. Using large number of sample 214 documents to provide a fresh look on SL at micro-macro and meso levels. Focused on antecedents and consequences of SL
Zhao et al. (2021)	Bibliometric (n=1432)	Seven Clusters were identified (i.e., board characteristics, responsible leadership, emerging country context, team efficacy, CEO pay fairness, shareholder wealth, and cross-sector social partnership)	
Bavik, (2020)	Systematic review (n=106)	Identified SL attributes (i.e., trust, integrity, honesty, care, servant behaviour, listening and community focus.	
Parris & Peachay, (2012)	Systematic review (n=39)	SL is a tenable theory. It is viable and valuable on an individual and an organization level.	
Lee et al. (2019)	Meta-analysis (n=130)	SL has incremental predictive validity on transformational, authentic and ethical leadership at individual-team-level behavioural outcomes.	

Source: authors based on data from WoS database

Table 2: Servant Leadership –Most influential authors

Author/Year	Aim	Citation	Journal and Ranking in ABS
Liden et al. (2008)	Scale development of Servant leadership	676	Leadership Quarterly (ABS:4)
Harrigan Jessica E. Dinh (2014)	Role of Leadership	537	Leadership Quarterly (ABS:4)
Nubert et al. (2008)	Servant leadership on employee behavior	417	Journal of Applied Psychology (ABS:3)
Walumbwa et al. (2010)	Servant leadership with organizational citizenship behavior	415	Journal of Applied Psychology (ABS:3)
Hoch et al. (2018)	Role of moral leadership styles	367	Journal of Management (ABS:4*)
Barbuto & Wheeler, (2006)	Scale development on servant leadership	366	Group and Organization Management (ABS:3)

Author/Year	Aim	Citation	Journal and Ranking in ABS
Liden et al. (2014)	Leader-follower behaviours	353	Academy of Management Journal (ABS:4*)
Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011)	Multidimensional scale on servant leadership	279	Journal of Business and Psychology (ABS:3)
Hu & Liden, (2011)	Servant leadership and team performance	254	Journal of Applied Psychology (ABS:3)
Hunter et al. (2013)	Servant leaders and followers	217	Leadership Quarterly (ABS:4)

Source: authors based on data from WoS database

4.1 Servant Leadership- Clusters

According to our bibliometric analysis of 214 studies on servant leadership (SL). SL has mostly been examined at the micro and macro levels such as employee and organizational levels of analysis (Searle & Barbuto Jr, 2011). There is a pressing need to view servant leadership at the institutional level, which scholars in the existing literature neglect. I developed three clusters on servant leadership after a constructive content analysis. Table 3 provides further details of those clusters.

4.2 Cluster 1- Servant Leadership and Innovativeness

Servant leadership pushes firms to adopt innovativeness in their working practices (Broch et al., 2020). Innovativeness is an essential for organizations to survive during cut-throat competition in the industry. A recent survey research found that technological leadership can be source of innovativeness and knowledge sharing at the workplace (Shaikh et al., 2023).

4.3 Cluster 2- Servant Leadership With Employees' Extra-Role Behaviours and Personality Traits

There is a corpus of research on servant leadership with personality traits in the workplace (Sun & Shang, 2019). Significantly, priors research shows that employees are motivated by engagement in servant leadership (Aboramadan et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence is a good personality trait for servant leadership to keep stability in the workplace. Importantly, extra-role behaviours lead to business excellence.

4.4 Cluster 2- Attitudinal and Behavioural Employee Outcomes Such as Emotional Labour, Ethical Followers

Emotion management is an emerging technique in the workplace for researchers. Previous research demonstrates that affective trust significantly impacts emotional labour more than cognitive trust regarding servant leadership (Lu et al., 2019). Servant leaders push employees to perform ethically in the workplace (Lemoine et al., 2019).

Table 3: Servant Leadership-Clusters

Cluster	Themes	Findings	Future Research	Sample Studies
Cluster 1 (86 studies) Servant leadership and innovativeness	Servant leadership, Innovativeness, Job autonomy	SL can promote IWB and Knowledge sharing through mediating effects of thriving and job autonomy	Cross country on Innovation	(Iqbal et al., 2020; Kül & Sönmez, 2021; Reslan et al., 2021; Zhu & Zhang, 2020)



The present review aims to present a holistic view of servant leadership in the leadership field. Given the importance of conceptualization of servant leadership and its role for business excellence. This review examined 224 peer-reviewed articles. The results revealed innovation is an important field to be explore with servant leaders due to upcoming digital transformations and industry 5.0. Another interesting aspect personality traits of employees and servant leadership. Finally, this review found employee behaviours

considered a crucial for organizations to their development and training as per dynamic changes in the industry. This is limited only Web of Science database. Future scholars can use data from several database such as Scopus and Ebsco as get diverse outcomes.

6. Future Research Agenda

This bibliometric review provides a fresh avenue for future researchers to address a new aspects in the servant leadership domain. The table 4. Shows future research questions.

Table 4: Servant Leadership –Future Research Questions

Clusters	Future Research Questions
<i>Servant leadership and innovativeness</i>	How servant leadership foster and enhance innovativeness at the workplace?
	What is role of servant leadership in promoting culture of innovativeness in organization?
<i>Servant leadership with employees' extra-role behaviours and personality traits</i>	How servant leadership pushes employees' extra-role behaviours and personality traits for organizational effectiveness at multi-sector perspective?
	How does agreeableness and openness affect employee outcomes?
<i>Attitudinal and behavioural employee outcomes such as emotional labour, ethical followers</i>	Does attitudinal and behavioural employee outcomes promote ethical culture at individual, team and organizational levels?
	How servant leadership nurture ethical followers to engage and play their role at workplace?

Source: Own research

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