

# THE INFLUENCE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE INNOVATIVE BEHAVIOR-BASED ON THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE\*

Jingya Li

Ph.D. Candidate, Chinese Graduate School,  
Panyapiwat Institute of Management, Nonthaburi, Thailand

E-mail: 39598874@qq.com

\*\*\*\*\*

## Abstract

In today's increasingly competitive and full of pressure and challenges, for those who have a positive psychological quality and ability of enterprises, to the inevitable difficulties and overcome obstacles in uncertain environment and have the huge thirst for high performance of employees, which makes the staff construction of positive psychological and mental toughness is very important. Servant leadership have a profound impact on employees through their characteristics. Employees fully trust the beliefs and values of the leader, unconditionally accept and obey the leader unconditionally, come along with the leader's behavior, and imitate the employee's strong sense of mission for the organization's goals and sense of responsibility. The unique leadership characteristics of servant leaders are the source of strength that influences employees, and have an important impact on employees' attitudes and innovation behaviors. Leaders should not only influence the behavior and performance of subordinates, but also mobilize their emotions, influence their inner psychology, and create an inspiring atmosphere in which employees are encouraged to contribute their talents to the enterprise more actively and give full play to their innovative potential. Therefore, from the perspective of the role of leadership to subordinates, this paper will explore how does servant leadership ultimately affect employees' ability to innovate by influencing their psychological resilience.

**Keywords:** Servant leadership; Psychological Resilience; Employee Innovative Behavior

## 1. Introduction

The importance of enterprise innovation ability in today's increasingly fierce market competition and constantly upgraded technological innovation is particularly important (Shin, yuan, & Zhou, 2017), and the innovation ability of enterprises comes from the support of employees' innovation ability. Previous studies have pointed out that different leadership styles have a great impact on employees' innovative behavior, and leaders play a guiding role in the process of interaction with employees (Li Wei, Mei JiXia, 2018). However, under the

---

\* ได้รับบทความ: 12 มิถุนายน 2564; แก้ไขบทความ: 1 สิงหาคม 2565; ตอรับตีพิมพ์: 31 สิงหาคม 2565

traditional leadership mode, when employees accept the leadership of others, they will always have a feeling of being ruled or controlled. Leaders command others to improve productivity and make them unable to realize their self-worth. More and more contemporary employees need to feel free and democratic atmosphere in the working environment to better stimulate the development of innovation ability. Therefore, whether in the cultural construction of families, groups, communities or companies, more effective leadership is needed. The thought of service-oriented leadership occupies a unique position in contemporary leadership theory and practice. Followers under the service-oriented leadership model will become "healthier, more independent, more free, more intelligent and capable", and "followers themselves are more and more like service-oriented leaders". Service-oriented leaders expect to cultivate employees into free, healthy, intelligent, capable and independent people, recognize the significance of tolerance and uphold justice, Provide help and support for employees' creative behavior.

According to the Social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), when employees feel the benefits provided by the organization, they will give back to the organization out of the principle of reciprocity. Service-oriented leaders are helpful to employees' personal development and meet the needs of multiple levels, which is of great value to employees (Panaccio et al., 2015). In order to reward service-oriented leaders, employees will actively create conditions for innovative behaviors. Therefore, this paper holds that servant leadership will affect employees' innovation behavior ◦

When studying the effect of servant leadership from the perspective of social exchange theory, it is necessary to consider the different psychological characteristics of employees and their effects. First of all, a servant leader is willing to serve others and needs to care for others. This trait can make his employees feel a healthier and freer working atmosphere. Meanwhile, the psychological resilience of employees refers to the resilience and resilience of employees to their own mentality and situation when encountering adversity. This ability will be enhanced under the leadership style of service-oriented leaders. Employees with higher mental resilience will have more trust in the vision and mission of the enterprise and have more sense of responsibility, and can better deal with negative emotions and influences in the face of adversity. Therefore, it is a support and protection for their innovation ability. Existing studies have shown that the influence of service-oriented leadership on employee behavior and creativity in a team can be realized mainly by influencing the psychological state of employees. Employees with a positive mental state also have more recognition and support for organizational development and leadership style. Therefore, this paper holds that mental

toughness plays a certain role in the relationship between servant leadership and employee innovation behavior.

In this paper, based on the social exchange theory, combined with the staff performance of different psychological factors, build employee Psychological Resilience as intermediary variable research model, discussed how servant leadership by influencing the employees' psychological resilience, in turn, affect the employee innovation behavior, in order to more profound understanding of servant leadership how to promote employees' innovative behavior.

## **2. Theoretical Basis & Research Hypothesis**

### **2.1 Servant Leadership and Employee Innovation Behavior**

Servant leadership is a kind of leadership behavior or way beyond the level of personal interests regardless of personal gains and losses. It more respects the individual value and interests of employees, and puts the core value of leadership on serving others, so as to meet the psychological and emotional needs of employees. Some researches have discussed the influence of servant leadership on employees' innovative behavior and behavior at work. As a leadership style that transcends personal interests, servant leadership emphasizes the positive communication between leaders and employees, helps employees solve difficulties by caring about employees' career development, adheres to principles and puts employees' interests above personal interests (Eva et al., 2019). Companies want employees in the working process of the innovation of ideas or solutions to problems and to put into practice the behavior (Shin et al, 2017), but the staff's innovation behavior is uncertain, may be unable to form the expected output and performance in the short term, even bring adverse to the employee development failure (ying-nan zhao, MinYiJie, road Jiang Chong de-peng liu, 2019), as an important external condition, servant leadership is of great value to employees' innovative behaviors. Servant leaders pay more attention to employees' personal interests, respect employees' ideas, accept employees' unconventional viewpoints and deep differences in working methods, and understand and support employees' out-of-role behaviors (Zhou Jiantao, Liao Jianqiao, 2018). Service-oriented leaders focus on employees' personal development, cultivate employees' working skills and provide substantial resources and services to continuously promote the improvement of employees' skills and resources (Eva et al, 2019). According to the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees will be more actively involved in work and more productive because of the free and democratic working atmosphere provided by leaders and the service-oriented leadership traits conveyed by leaders.

All these show that Servant Leadership has a positive impact on employee innovation behavior. In summary, this study believes that Servant Leadership is beneficial to improving employees' innovative behavior, so the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis H1: Servant Leadership has a positive impact on employees' innovative behavior.

## **2.2 Servant Leadership and Psychological Resilience**

Both servant leadership and psychological resilience are important concepts in the study of organizational behavior. Fehunidah et al. (2008) pointed out in their study that leadership style has an impact on the depressive symptoms of employees and can help employees overcome work stress, while service-oriented leaders focus on providing personal care and spiritual support for employees' development and help or motivate employees to make personal decisions. Thus, employees can obtain satisfaction in the work process. Meanwhile, Malecki et al. (2002) believe that supportive behaviors from leaders can improve employees' social adaptability and prevent them from being hurt by adverse environment. According to Gorman (2005), those who can discover and explore their own potential and then find a good mentor as their "supporter" are more likely to recover from failure and achieve greater success. In Wolin (2005) think a powerful leader in the study generally have higher personal charm, by its own charm to employee values, psychological state, manner of influence and guidance, can help the staff in case of trouble is more effective to deal with the inevitable, can help employees to improve their ability to overcome difficulties, In conclusion, as is shown in make the following hypotheses: Hypothesis H2: Servant Leadership is positively correlated with Psychological Resilience

## **2.3 Psychological Resilience and Employee Innovation Behavior**

Innovation behavior is an important driving force for the survival and development of enterprises, and employees are the main body of enterprise innovation. In the final analysis, enterprise innovation is the innovation of employees. Farr et al. (1990) defined the innovation behavior of employees as "the conscious introduction of new and useful ideas, products or procedures in the role of work". It is an important task for enterprises to study how to promote the innovation behavior of employees. Since innovation is an investment activity with high uncertainty and high risk, those who dare to innovate need to have strong will and tenacious perseverance (Chen Qunlin, 2014). Although everyone is eager to have innovative ideas, thinking, product implementation. Not everyone can be motivated to show innovative behaviors even in the face of innovative behaviors of leaders. A high degree of psychological resilience is an individual's psychological potential and positive internal advantages, which can promote employees to complete the behaviors within their roles and show altruistic behaviors

(Froman, 2010). From the perspective of internal psychological characteristics, this paper analyzes the impact of employees' mental toughness on their innovation behavior. Employees with strong mental resilience can better cope with difficulties and adversity and achieve success (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2006). Chen Hua (2010) pointed out that employees with strong tenacity are more likely to persist in completing their tasks and coping with adversity. Car A (2004) emphasizes that mentally resilient employees often have positive coping methods when dealing with behavioral events at work, especially negative and negative events, and put them into practice and show more creative behaviors. In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis H3: Psychological Resilience is positively correlated with employee innovation behavior. In conclusion, the theoretical model of this study is shown in Figure 1.

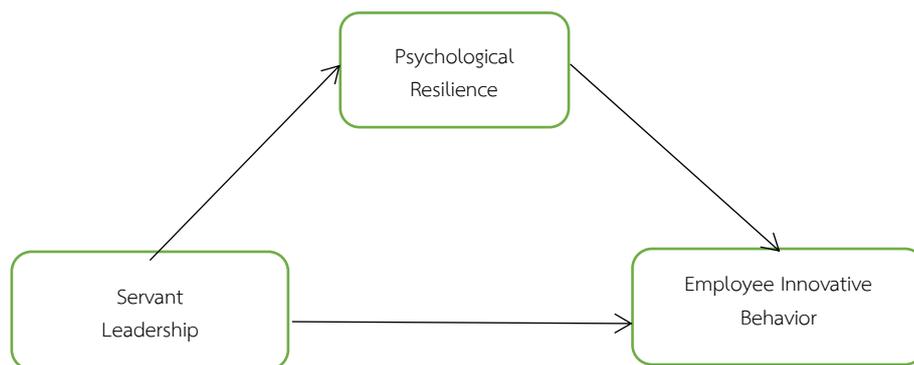


Figure 1 Theoretical Model

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Questionnaire Survey & Sample Data

Questionnaire survey is one of the most commonly used data collection methods in survey. It uses well-designed questionnaires to collect opinions and information about questions. Online questionnaire survey was used in this study .Online questionnaire survey is a survey method that invites participants to participate in the questionnaire survey through the Internet to obtain data and information. It's an online survey that usually takes anywhere from a few minutes to dozens of minutes. The content of the questionnaire was designed according to the measurement scale of each variable. The questionnaire scale was 504 valid questionnaires finally collected. Among them, 501 people came from 19 provinces and cities, and 3 people came from abroad; There are 485 articles submitted by WeChat, 18 articles

submitted by mobile phone and 1 article submitted by computer link. The overall recovery rate is high, which is conducive to the subsequent data analysis.

### 3.2 Measurement of Variables

All of the scales used here are the maturity scales used in the international literature, and all items are quantified using the Six-point Likert Scale. For the measurement of servant leadership, The questionnaire was developed by Liden, RC, Wayne, SJ, Liao, C., & Meuser, JD (2014) to measure .There are 7 projects. The scale of employee innovation behavior adopts the one-dimensional scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994), which has 6 items and adopts Linker six-point scoring method. Grades range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The higher the score, the higher the level of innovative behavior exhibited by employees. The Psychological Resilience Scale is based on the concept of resilience expounded by Luthans, F., & Youssef, C.M. (2007) in the book "Psychological Capital" as a measurement tool, with a total of 6 items.

## 4. Data Analysis and Results

### 4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this research, the independent variable is Servant leadership ,the intermediate variable is Psychological Resilience and the dependent variable is employee's innovative behavior. Add control variables: age, gender, education level, length of service, and time spent with leaders. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient is tested on the scale of each variable. The  $\alpha$  value of 7 items of Servant leadership is 0.899, 6 items of Psychological Resilience have an alpha value of 0.887, and 6 items of employee innovation behavior have an alpha value of 0.917, all of which have high reliability.

**Table 1** Reliability test results Analysis

Variable	$\alpha$
Servant leadership	.899
Employee Innovative Behavior	.917
Psychological Resilience	.887

Using SPSS23.0 for data analysis, the KMO values in this study are all between 0 and 1. KMO and Bartlett test were used for validity verification. It can be seen from the table above: The KMO value was 0.949, and was greater than 0.8, indicating that the validity of the study data was very good. In addition, the KMO value is 0.949, greater than 0.6, which means that

the data has validity. the variance explanatory rates of the three factors were 24.981%,24.765% and 22.116% respectively, and the cumulative variance explanatory rates after rotation were 71.862%>50%. Its means that the amount of information in the study can be extracted effectively.

**Table 2** KMO and Bartlett test

KMO		0.949
Bartlett	$\chi^2$	7564.560
	df	171
	p	0

**4.2 Correlation Analysis**

This study uses SPSS23.0 software to analyze the correlation between the variables, taking into account the calculation of the mean and standard deviation between the various variables and demographic variables, and the relationship between Servant leadership and Psychological Resilience, employee innovation behavior are correlation ( $r=0.590, p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.553, p<0.01$ ); there is a significant positive correlation between Psychological Resilience and employee innovation behavior ( $r=0.684, p<0.01$ ;) )

**Table 3** Mean-Standard Deviation and Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Each Variable

	Age	Gender	Education al	job catego ry	employ ment period	Working time	Servant Leadershi	Psychologi cal	Employee
Age	1								
Gender	- .086	1							
Educational Background	- .331 **	.243* *	1						
job categor y	- .071	.345* *	.479**	1					
employe ment period	.308 **	-.042	-.070	-.003	1				

Working time	.350**	.071	-.180**	.032	.578**	1			
Servant Leadership	.007	.047	.019	-.006	.002	.033	1		
Psychological Resilience	.000	-.003	-.050	-.015	.053	.017	.590**	1	
Employee Innovative Behavior	.032	.014	-.031	.011	.021	-.006	.553**	.684**	1

### 4.3 Regression Analysis

#### 4.3.1 Regression Analysis of Servant Leadership and Employee Innovation Behavior

SPSS23.0 software was used to conduct data regression analysis to verify the influence of Servant Leadership on employee innovation behavior. This study took Servant Leadership as independent variable, employee innovation behavior as dependent variable, M1 as the test control variable and M2 as the test of the influence of Servant Leadership on employee innovation behavior. The regression coefficient value of Servant Leadership is 0.442 (t=11.304, P =0.000<0.01), which means Servant Leadership has a significant positive influence on employee innovation behavior.

**Table 4** Influence of Servant Leadership on employee innovation behavior

Items	Employee Innovative Behavior	
	M1	M2
Items	4.603**	2.729**
Age	.026	.029
Gender	.033*	-.016
Educational Background	-.030	-.014
Job category	.022	.039
Employment period	.028	.041
Working time	-.039	-.064
Servant Leadership		.442**
R <sup>2</sup>	.004	.314
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-.008	.304

F	.319	32.402
Sig	.000	.000

Note: \*\* p<0.01; \*p<0.05

4.3.2 Regression Analysis of Servant Leadership and Psychological Resilience

Data regression analysis is used to verify the influence of Servant Leadership on psychological Resilience, as shown in Table 5. With Servant Leadership as independent variable and psychological Resilience as dependent variable, M3 tests the influence of control variable on psychological Resilience, and M4 tests the influence of Servant Leadership on Psychological Resilience. The regression coefficient value of charismatic leader is 0.406 (t=16.086, P =0.000<0.01), which means Servant Leadership has a significant positive influence on Psychological Resilience.

Table 5 Influence of charismatic leadership on work related flow

	Psychological Resilience	
	M3	M4
Items	4.954**	3.235**
Age	-.031	-.027
Gender	.007	-.038
Educational Background	-.038	-.049
Job category	.010	.025
Employment period	.052	.064
Working time	-.020	-.044
Servant Leadership		.406**
F	.571.	39.609
R <sup>2</sup>	.007	.359
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-.005	.360
Sig	.000	.000

Note: \*\* p<0.01; \*p<0.05

4.3.3 Hypothesis Testing of the Mediating Role of Psychological Resilience

Through data analysis, it is verified that Psychological Resilience mediates the positive correlation between Servant Leadership and employee innovation behavior. As shown in Table 6, taking Servant Leadership as independent variable, Psychological Resilience as mediating variable, and employee innovation behavior as dependent variable, M3 has tested the influence of control variables on Psychological Resilience, and M4 has tested the influence

of Servant Leadership on Psychological Resilience. M5 tests the influence of Psychological Resilience on employee innovation behavior. M4 tests the effect of Servant Leadership on Psychological Resilience,  $\beta=0.406$ ,  $P<0.01$  indicates that Servant Leadership is positively correlated with Psychological Resilience. M5 tests the influence of Psychological Resilience on employees' innovative behavior,  $\beta=0.634$ ,  $P<0.01$  indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between Psychological Resilience and employees' innovative behavior

**Table 6** Regression Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Psychological Resilience

	Psychological Resilience		Employee Innovative Behavior		
	M3	M4	M1	M2	M5
Items	4.954 **	3.235**	4.603**	2.729 **	1.677**
Age	-.031	-.027	.026	.029	.047
Gender	.007	-.038	0.33	-.016	.008
Educational Background	-.038	-.049	-.030	-.014	-.010
Job category	.010	.025	.022	.039	.023
Employment period	.052	.064	.028	.041	.001
Working time	-.020	-.044	-.039	-.064	-.037
Servant Leadership		0.406**		0.442 **	0.185 **
Psychological Resilience					.634 **
F	.571	39.609	.319	32.402	63.211
R2	.007	.359	.004	.314	.505
Adjusted R2	-.005	.360	-.008	.304	.497
Sig	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Note: \*\*  $p<0.01$ ; \* $p<0.05$

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

### 5.1 Research Conclusion

In this study examines the hypothesis between servant leadership and employee innovation behavior, and the results of data analysis show that servant leadership has a significant positive impact on employee innovation behavior. The higher the level of servant leadership, the more it can promote the generation of employees' innovative behavior. Secondly, the hypothesis between servant leadership and Psychological Resilience is tested. The data analysis results show that servant leadership has a significant positive impact on

psychological resilience. Psychological Resilience mediates the positive relationship between servant leadership and employee innovation behavior.

### **5.2 Theoretical Contribution**

Servant leadership as independent variables, this study psychological resilience as intermediary variables, employee innovative behavior as the dependent variable, in theory, classic scale on the basis of questionnaire survey, the hypothesis test data, the conclusion has the following theoretical contributions: first, found the servant leadership impact on the work of the staff, has positive effect on employee innovative behavior. Secondly, finding the mediating effect between the psychological resilience of servant leadership and employee innovation behavior.

### **5.3 Management Implications**

Firstly, the leader should pay attention to employee's state of mind, pay close attention to employees' perception of the safety level of psychological security will affect the choice of the staff innovation behavior and establish a fair competition mechanism, reduce the staff's psychological insecurity factors, let employees to ask questions, expounds new ideas are not subject to the threat, enhance the level of employees' psychological security.

Secondly, strengthen training staff mental toughness. In real life, we live in an "open system" that constantly exchanges material, information and energy with the external environment. We are not in a vacuum. External situations change rapidly, so stress is universal. First of all, we need to make clear that stress is universal, that stressors themselves have no negative impact on life, and that adaptation to stress is an ongoing process. In jobs that require creativity, high levels of work are common (Bowers, 2007, Wall et al., 2007) and resilience plays an important role in stress management and management. Mental resilience can effectively apply the content of positive psychology to positive organizational behavior. As the positive psychological capital that can be effectively measured and developed, it is extremely important for the cultivation of employees' innovation ability.

### **5.4 Limitations and Prospects**

First, Due to the limited resources and time, the sample selected in this study is single, which may not be applicable to some enterprises and organizations. This article selects the investigation object is high-tech enterprise employees, staff work technology content is higher, its technical level is also very strong, the enterprise is strong demand for innovation, enterprise leadership role on employees' innovation ability will significantly this study selected the cross section data, the data are difficult to test causal relationships.

Secondly based on trait theory, due to individual differences, some employees have higher innovation ability than others. In this case, it is necessary for enterprise managers to play a role in cultivating good external factors to stimulate employees' innovative behavior. Therefore, the influence mechanism of external factors is still of great value and can be further discussed in the future according to this research direction.

Finally, In addition to the variables discussed in this study, there are many environmental factors that affect employee innovation behavior. Future research can further identify and examine the influence of other environmental factors on the process of observing the innovative behavior of learning ability employees. We can consider the risk propensity of group innovation as a variable in the progressive study. It is also possible to consider the impact of team-level innovation risk propensity atmosphere and psychological resilience on individual level.

## References

- Akgiin, A.E., Byrne, J., Keskin, H., Lunn, G.S., & Imamoglu, S.Z. (2005). Knowledge networks in new product development projects: A transactive memory perspective. *Information & Management*, 42, 1105-1120.
- Conger Jay, A., & Kanungo Rabindra, N. (1994). Charismatic leadership in organizations: Perceived behavioral attributes and their measurement. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 15(5), 439-452.
- Eisenberger, R., Jones, J.R., Stinglhamber, F., et al. (2005). Flow Experiences at Work: For High Need Achievers Alone?. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, (26): 755-775.
- Gomman, C. (2005). The importance of resilience. *Time*, 165(3), A52-A55.
- Janssen, Onne., & Van, Yperen., Nico, W. (2004). Employees' goal orientations, the quality of leader-member exchange, and the outcomes of job performance and job satisfaction. *Academy of management journal*, 47(3), 368-384.
- Lovelace, K., Shapiro, D.L., & Weingart, L.R. (2001). Maximizing cross functional new product teams' inventiveness and constraint adherence: a conflict communications perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 779-793.
- Luthans, F., Noman, S., Avolio, B., & Avey, J. (2008). The mediating role of psychological capital in the supportive organizational climate-employee performance relationship. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(2): 219-248.
- Luthans, Fred., Youssef Carolyn, M., & Avolio Bruce, J. (2006). *Psychological capital Developing The human competitive edge*: Oxford University Press.

- Malecki, C.K., Demaray, M.K. (2002). Measuring perceived social support: Development of the child and adolescent Social support scales. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(1).
- Mongrain, Myriam., & Anselmo - Matthews, Tracy. (2012). Do Positive Psychology Exercises Work? A Replication of Seligman. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 68(4), 480-485.
- Schneider, S.K., & George, W.M. (2011). Servant leadership versus transformational leadership in voluntary service organizations. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 32(1): 6077.
- Sosik, J.J., Godshalk, V.M. (2004). Transformational leadership, learning goal orientation, and expectations for career success in mentor-protégé relationships: A multiple levels of analysis perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*.