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Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior Among Civil Servants: The Mediating Role Of Work Meaningfulness

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ABSTRACT

Public sector organizations vision is what prompts civil servants to engage in innovative work environment in order to enhance quality of public service. Servant leadership considered as leadership style that consistent within public sector values to help others, thus employees encouraged to engage in innovative work behavior if they find purpose and meaning in their work. This study aims to examine the role of *work meaningfulness* as a mediator in the relationship between *servant leadership* and *innovative work behavior* of civil servants Data collection for the study was conducted online involving 270 civil servants from various fields. Participants were recruited by purposive sampling method. Instrument of this study consist of the *Servant Leadership Behavior Scale-6 (SLBS-6)*, *Innovative Work Behavior Scale* and *The Work and Meaningful Inventory (WAMI)*. The data analysis in this study using *Simple Mediation Analysis*. The results showed that work meaningfulness significantly had a mediating effect on *servant leadership* on innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.523$; $p < 0.001$). These results demonstrated that having employees' meaningful experiences during working would increase the role of contextual factors (servant leadership) toward innovative work behavior of civil servants

INTRODUCTION

Innovation in public organizations can be assessed based on improving the quality of public services, efficiency or suitability for government and its objective (Hartley, 2005). Ministry of Administrative Reform and Bureaucratic Reform Circular, in order to foster innovation, improve performance and effectiveness in public service, established a policy to foster innovative work environment. Core values "BerAKHLAK" as a

foundation for public service, which is service-oriented, accountable, competent, harmonious, loyal, adaptive, and collaborative. Core values are required to build a work culture that is adaptable to change and develop innovation in order to improve quality of public service (Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform Strategic Plan, 2020).

Innovative work behavior is the process of creating, introducing, and implementing new ideas

in work, groups or organizations to improve the performance role of the individual, group or organization (Janssen, 2000). Several studies indicate the antecedents of innovative work behavior includes individuals (Siregar et al., 2019; Jong, 2007), innovation climate (Shanker et al., 2017; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Other studies showed that leaders as important determinants of innovative work behavior. (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Khan et al., 2012). government institution influenced by politics and interventions from authorities, and non-profit orientation (Rainey & Bozeman, 2001). thus, leaders in public sector play an important role to stimulate public servants innovative work behavior (Bos-Nahles, et al., 2017).

Several research related to employee work innovation behavior focused on the influence of transformational leadership (Hammond, et al., 2011; Muchiri, et al. 2020), however servant leadership style is considered to be the most appropriate leadership style and aligned with the primary goals of public sector organizations to help others (Nguyen, et al., 2023). Therefore, servant leaders main concepts of "serving" and "altruism" are the main focus that has the potential to positively influence the organization (Karatepe, et al., 2019). Servant leadership provides a holistic perspective on leadership style that meets the needs of employee and community, whereas transformational leadership emphasized on organizational performance and achievement

(Clercq, et al., 2014). Moreover servant leader considered to be applied to various types of organizations (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Servant leadership emphasized on employee growth and development, enabling them to believe they could reach their full potential (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Supervisor provided opportunities to involved in decision-making (Sendjaya et al., 2008). indeed, even the smallest decision made by government institution impact others' life. When employees believe that their opinion and idea are considered on decision making process, they will perceive their work significant and experience meaningful at work (Steger et al., 2012). Employee who experience positive feelings at work serve as an internal source of motivation, encouraged them to reciprocate expected behaviors, including *extra-role behaviors* such as innovative work behaviors (Liden et al, 2014; Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leader nurture continuous personal transformation and development among employee, thereby fostering positive change within organizations and societies (Sendjaya et al. 2008).

So, the this Research Question is how to Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior Among Civil Servants: The Mediating Role Of Work Meaningfulness.

Literature Review

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a leader who prioritizes efforts to assist employee growth to achieve maximum potential and career (Greenleaf, 1995). Sendjaya, *et al.* (2008) stated that *servant leadership* has six behavioral dimensions: (1) *voluntary subordination*, willingness to take up opportunities to serve others. (2) *Authentic self*, capable of leading authentically and genuine, display humility, accountability, and integrity. (3) *Covenantal relationship*, shapes and affects relationship with others. (4) *Responsible morality*, meaning leader employ are morally legitimized, thoughtfully reasoned, and ethically justified. (5) *Transcendental spirituality*, leaders together meaning and purpose in employees' life by spiritual values. (6) *Transforming influence*, influenced employee transform through visioning, modelling, mentoring, and empowering

Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative work behavior is the process of creating, introducing, and implementing new ideas in work, groups or organizations to improve individual, group or organizational performance roles (Janssen, 2000). Janssen (2000) identified the process of innovative work behavior as consisting of three tasks: *idea generation*, the stage where individuals recognize problems and identify solutions; then *idea promotion*, the stage where

individuals seek sponsors and build coalitions to support new ideas; and *idea realization*, the stage where individuals complete the process when they feel they have enough support to implement new ideas.

Work Meaningfulness

Work meaningfulness is work experienced particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). According to Dik & Duffy (2009), *work meaningfulness* has 3 aspects that is (1) *positive meaning*, the work that has been completed is important and meaningful; (2) *meaning-making through work*, work makes employees understand themselves and their environment, and supports self-development; (3) *greater good motivation*, the work that has been done is beneficial to the employee himself (Steger & Dik, 2009).

Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative behavior involves navigating risky situation and requires careful consideration until employees feel safe enough to exhibit innovative behavior (Husheger, *et al.*, 2009). The climate created by supervisor such as security, trust, and benevolence, encourage employees to engage innovative behavior (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Sendjaya, *et al.* (2008) stated that servant leaders willing to accept employees unconditionally even

when their subordinates make mistakes at work, which inspire workers to take risks and attempt new things without fear. According to Khan (2020), *servant leadership* enhanced employee trust to their supervisor, which in turn provide positive outcomes, such as increasing creativity and innovation.

The servant-leader is servant first (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leader practice on employee-centered approach, which is primarily focused on employees growth and development (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Servant leaders provide information to subordinates (Page & Wong, 2000), involve employees in decision making and listen to their ideas (Sendjaya, et al., 2008; Page & Wong, 2000), support and encourage through mentoring, empowerment, and autonomy (Liden, et al., 2008; Sendjaya, et al., 2008). Shared decision-making, autonomy, delegation, and support in case of failure influence employees' propensity to engage in innovative work behaviors (Jong & Hartog, 2007). Servant leader offer helpful direction and guidance to generate and implement innovative ideas (Sendjaya, et al., 2008; Gao, 2017), this situation leads to innovative work behavior.

Mediating Role of Work Meaningfulness

Work meaningfulness can be defined by defining the words "meaning" and "meaningfulness" (Baumeister, 1991). "meaning" as a physical activity that provides the resources

needed for life. "Meaningfulness" refers to the positive and significant meaning of an activity (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Several previous research found positive role of work meaningfulness on work-related outcomes (e.g. work engagement, performance, productivity, and creativity) and work-place well-being (Rai et al., 2023; Allan et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2019). Allan et al (2019) emphasized that meaningful work affected employee behavior due to motivational mechanisms. Work meaningfulness as an intrinsic motivation encourage employee to engage in positive work behaviors, such as innovation behavior.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) states that achieving intrinsic motivation requires the fulfillment of psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and connection (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010). Autonomy means individual feels they have the opportunity to choose and take full responsibility for their work. Competence indicates that individuals can increase their capacity and feel competent and effective in the social environment. Connection related to feeling accepted and building meaningful relationships with others, both work-related and personal (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Servant leader has more concern on followers growth thus they encourage a more democratic to decision making (Liden, et al., 2008), delegating tasks (Patterson, 2003), and involve employees in the

decision-making process (Sendjaya, et al., 2008; Page & Wong, 2000).

In the end, servant leaders' action fulfilled followers' needs for autonomy and competence, then followers enhanced sense of belonging in the organization and they believe that their competencies useful for others (Autin, et al., 2022). Kahn (1990) stated that meaningfulness is the experience of individuals receiving something as a result of their investment and feeling valuable, useful, and worthwhile because they are doing something different and not taken for granted. As a result, employees will engage in creative and innovative activities that benefit others. employees who have meaningful work experiences have a strong desire to continue to develop competencies, so they tend to be more engaged in innovative behavior (Al-Omari et al., 2019). Servant leadership gives rise to work innovation behavior when employees feel their work is significant and meaningful (Cai, et al., 2018). employees who have meaningful work experiences have a strong desire to develop their competencies, then they tend to engaged in innovative behavior (Al-Omari et al., 2019).

Hypothesis: *Work Meaningfulness mediates the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior.*

METHODS

Data Collection

The research approach used is a quantitative study with a survey method to obtain information about attitude or opinion from a sample of the population. The sampling technique was *purposive sampling* which is participant selection based on predetermined characteristics or criteria. Participants criteria in this study were Civil Apparatus in government agencies who had worked for at least one year experience with the assumption that the participant has personally experienced and received leader support. The study's data was obtained online by distributing the study's information through social media.

The study's participants consisted of 270 individuals. Based on demographic data, 115 participants (42.5%) were male and 155 participants (57.4%) were female. Based on educational background, 32 participants (12%) had a high school education, 21 participants (7.7%) had a diploma, 176 participants (65%) had a bachelor's degree, 40 participants (14.8%) had a master's degree, and 1 participant (0.03%) had a doctoral degree. Based on the type of institution, there were 214 participants (79.2%) from the central government, 20 participants (7.4%) from the provincial government, and 36 participants (13.3%) from the city/regency government. There were 31 participants in the age range of 20-24 years old, 219

participants in the age range of 25-44 years old, and 20 participants in the age range of 45-64 years old.

Research Instruments

This study utilized a psychological scale to collect the data. The innovative work behavior measure in this study was the adaptation scale from previous research by Etikareina and Muluk (2014) which had been developed by Janssen (2000). This scale consists of 9 item *likert* that represent three main dimensions, namely *idea generation*, *idea promotion*, and *idea realization*. The reliability coefficient value of this scale was 0.963 with four answer responses from the range of "1 (*Very Unsuitable*)" to "5 (*Very Suitable*)".

Servant leadership was measure using the *Servant Leadership Behavior Scale-6 (SLBS-6)* scale developed by Sendjaya, et al. (2017). The number of items on this scale totals 6 *Likert* scale items that describe the six dimensions of *servant leadership*, namely *voluntary subordination*, *authentic self*, *covenantal relationship*, *responsible morality*, *transcendental spirituality*, *transforming influence*. The reliability coefficient value of the scale in this study was 0.927 with four answer responses from the range "1 (*Very Unsuitable*)" to "5 (*Very Suitable*)".

Work meaningfulness was measured using *The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI)* developed by Steger *et al.* (2012) which has been adapted by Kurniawan & Indrayanti (2023). This scale consists

of 10 item *Likert* scale items to measuring 3 dimensions of *work meaningfulness*, being *positive meaning*, *meaning making through work*, and *greater good motivations*. The reliability coefficient value of *The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI)* was 0.895 with four answer responses from the range of "1 (*Very Unsuitable*)" to "5 (*Very Suitable*)".

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis consists of two stages, classical assumption test and hypothesis testing. Assumption test consists of normality, linearity and multicollinearity test. Hypothesis was aimed to examine the mediator variable role variable in mediating independent variable and the dependent variable in this study using *Simple Mediation Analysis* to test the role of the mediator .The normality test aims to look at the distribution of research data. The linearity test aims to see the relationship between research variables. The multicollinearity test aims to test for symptoms of multicollinearity between independent variables in this study. Data analysis utilized *Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP)* data processing application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data that has been collected is tested for assumptions before hypothesis testing. Multicollinearity assumption test is done by looking

at the *Tolerance* and VIF values. The *Tolerance* value is 0.99 (greater than 0.10) and VIF is 1.01 (less than 10) so there is no multicollinearity in the two independent variables. While examination of the *scatter plot of predicted vs. residual* shows no deviation from the assumption of homoscedasticity, and examination of the *Q-Q plot* shows the fulfillment of the *linertias* assumption test. The normality test with *Saphiro-Wilk* showed that the data of the three research variables were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). The statistical procedure in this study uses the *bootstrapping* method so that it is considered strong enough, and does not have to meet the requirements of the normality test (Field, 2013). After the assumption test, the hypothesis test was carried out which is shown in Figure 1.

Picture 1. *Mediation Effects of Work Meaningfulness on the Association Between Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior*

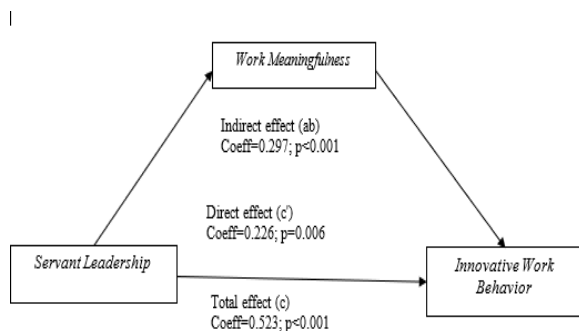


Figure 1 shows that the direct effect of *servant leadership* on innovative work behavior had an estimated value of 0.226 with a *p-value* of 0.006. From this results, it was concluded that servant

leadership is directly related to innovative work behavior. The results also show the indirect effect of *servant leadership* on innovative work behavior through work *meaningfulness* with an estimated value of 0.297 and *p-value* <0.001. based on these results it can be concluded that servant leadership through work meaningfulness has a significant effect on innovative work behavior. Total effect as an accumulation of direct and indirect effects with a total effect coefficient of 0.523 and *p-value* <0.001. These results can be concluded that servant leadership partially plays a role in innovative work behavior through work meaningfulness.

This study aims to prove the mediating role of work meaningfulness on the effect of servant leadership on innovative work behavior in state civil apparatus. The results showed that work meaningfulness is able to provide a mediating effect in the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior. Servant leaders will encourage innovative work behavior of their subordinates because they experience work meaningfulness. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is accepted. Several previous studies had also found that work meaningfulness mediates the role of leaders on organizational behavior outcomes (Cai et al, 2018; Tummers & Knies, 2013).

The findings suggest that the important role of work meaningfulness as a psychological mechanism that explain how servant leadership can influence innovative work behavior. Civil servants tend to has

strong desire to make positive impact on others peoples' live, thus employees may develop a stronger sense that their work is meaningful and important (Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020). Servant leaders involve employees in decision-making and opportunities for autonomy at work, and increase competence so as to increase employees' feelings of worth and well-being in the workplace. Work meaningfulness is an intrinsic motivation that encourages public servants to innovate, leaders need to pay attention to employee well-being by providing opportunities for autonomy, involvement in decision making, and growth. Employees who feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when they believe their work benefits others, encourage them to exhibit positive work behaviors (Kubiak, 2022). employees that possess intrinsic motivation may be inclined to drive into exerting effort (e.g. generating, promoting, and realizing innovative activities) with the intention of helping the organization accomplish its goals through innovation (Amabile et al., 2004). The following further discusses the contributions and implications of this study of theory and practice.

This study contributes to examining additional theoretical framework related to the mediating role of meaningful work on leadership and innovation behavior. Servant leadership plays a partial role on innovative work behavior through work meaningfulness. Leader has an important role in government institutions, but this study found that

public servants in Indonesia tend to have a sense of worth and a belonging, contribute to society, which encourage employee to go the extra mile for the organization. Innovative work behavior in many countries is considered as *extra-role* behavior by public servants so that it requires certain compensation *rewards*, but public servants tend to be more motivated by intrinsic motivation to serve than by external compensation. Theoretically, intrinsic motivation is the dominant factor in driving innovation behavior (Georgellis, et al., 2011) and meaningful work is another way of motivational mediation that links contextual factors (e.g., leadership) with employee innovation behavior outcomes (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Cai et al., 2018). Future study suggested to assess antecedents of motivational mechanism affect innovative work behavior or other work outcomes.

Based on this study, there is an important managerial implications that are specifically intended for the leader of public sector organization and training facilities in government institution. Organization could roll out training program focusing on developing leader to put the people they lead first, help them develop their capacities. The servant leader enhance the ability to identify their subordinates performance and growth, and in turn they know how to help and assist their subordinates (Eva et al., 2019). Supervisor may improve mentoring and coaching skills in order to enhance employees' well-being, particularly in relation to

their sense of meaningful work. In addition, organization needs to develop leaders with “servant” mindset (e.g. emphasizing concerns for followers) and adopt servant leader requirements for manager. Organization can develop safe work environment to apply new idea and continuous learning environment that promotes work meaningfulness and innovative work behaviors.

CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at identifying the mediating effect of Work meaningfulness in the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior. The results of showed that work meaningfulness has positive and significant mediating effect in the role of servant leaders to innovation behavior of public servants.

This study has limitations regarding participants distribution, specifically when the authors were unable to differentiate the data from various public service sectors of the civil servants, such as legal, social, education, and other fields. There lies the assumption that differences of the organizational culture based on the field of work even though it is regulated in government institutions with values applied in the public service sector. Nonetheless, future study is recommended to enrich the data based on employment sectors in various fields in order to obtain more in-depth analysis can be carried out.

The information in this study was based on self-report to measure employees' perceptions of their supervisor, which might introduce for bias. Public sector organizations have a more rigid hierarchical structure, there might be inevitable to completely avoid bias in filling out questionnaires related to followers' perceptions about their supervisor. Even though the questionnaire has been included an explanation regarding the principle of confidentiality, there should be an additional method to prevent potential bias when collected data. Therefore, future studies recommended to collect information from supervisor and subordinates to gather general understanding of the supervisor-subordinates relationship.

For future studies, it is recommended to examine other variables that are thought to be job resources and personal resources for *work meaningfulness* so as to enrich the study of antecedents or predictors for *work meaningfulness*, especially in employees in the public sector.

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