Influence of Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity on Academicians' Work Performance in Higher Education Institutions of Saudi Arabia

Alsaiari Taleb Mohammed N
Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Johor, Malaysia
Email: Taleb.14@hotmail.com

Siti Aisyah Panatik Abdul Rahman
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Johor, Malaysia
Email: saisyah@utm.my

Amalina Ibrahim
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Johor, Malaysia
Email: amalina.ibrahim@utm.my

Abstract
Previous studies consistently reported a well-established relationship between servant leadership and work performance. However, the majority of these studies have been conducted in developed Western countries, resulting in a limited body of research in the academic sector, specifically among academicians in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Consequently, this study aims to address this gap in two ways. Firstly, it examines the influence of servant leadership dimensions (namely, emotional healing, empowerment, assistance to subordinates, prioritizing subordinates, creating value, conceptual skills, and ethical behaviour) on work performance (comprising task performance and Organizational Citizenship Behaviours). Secondly, it aims to explore the mediating role of employee creativity on the work performance of Saudi academic members. Rooted in the social exchange theory, this study asserts that servant leaders cultivate relationships with followers beyond economic incentives or positional authority. The study utilized a quantitative research design, employing a survey method to gather data. A cross-sectional survey collected primary data from 394 academic staff working in KSA's universities. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS was employed to empirically and statistically test the conceptual model. Findings revealed that certain servant leadership dimensions significantly influenced task performance, such as behaving ethically, creating value, and helping subordinates. However,

dimensions like emotional healing, empowerment, putting subordinates first, and conceptual skills showed a non-significant influence on task performance. Direct paths between servant leadership dimensions had an insignificant influence on OCB. All servant leadership dimensions significantly influenced employee creativity, except for conceptual skills and empowerment. Furthermore, hypotheses testing using bootstrapping revealed that employee creativity mediated the relationship between emotional healing, behaving ethically, creating value, helping subordinates, and putting subordinates first with task performance. Additionally, employee creativity only mediated the relationship between behaving ethically and OCB. In conclusion, the study's findings offer valuable insights for KSA's university leaders and policymakers, encouraging the development of servant leaders in influential positions.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Work Performance, Employee Creativity, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Faculty Members

Introduction

Higher education refers to universities that strive to attract talented, well-trained, and enthusiastic employees dedicated to their work by conducting research and training to develop humanity (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Lew, 2009). Higher education institutions need to enhance and improve their performance to accomplish a sustainable competitive advantage, preserve their ranking, and compete in this ever-changing and volatile market environment. Accordingly, higher education institutions must find useful contemporary management tools to keep pace with competition and globalization (Carvalho et al., 2010; Ng & Forbes, 2009). This management tool requires servant leadership to utilize its capabilities to enhance and compete with international universities and colleges to reach excellence in all fields (Al Hila & Al Shobaki, 2017).

Work performance or job performance is reflected as a combined value to an organization by the behaviours that an employee contributes in both forms directly and indirectly to the organization's goals (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Kell et al., 2014). Scholars agree, for example, that performance is a multi-dimensional notion (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993b; Campbell et al., 1993; Roe, 1999b; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Work performance is also a function of in-role (task) and extra-role (out-of-role) performance (contextual behaviour) (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Viswesvaran, 2001). Scholars have distinguished between the team and organizational-level outcomes. At the team level, servant leadership has been linked with team-level organizational citizenship behaviour-OCB (Amah, 2018; Hu & Liden, 2011), task-focused and person-focused OCB (Hunter et al., 2013), service-oriented OCB (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016), helping and conscientiousness-focused OCB (Ehrhart, 2004),. Further, servant leadership team research has demonstrated increased levels of team effectiveness (Irving & Longbotham, 2007), team psychological safety (Schaubroeck et al., 2011), and team-level creativity and innovation (Yang, Liu, & Gu, 2017; Yoshida et al., 2014). At the organizational level, servant leadership positively relates to firm performance through service climate (Huang et al., 2016) and operational performance through organizational commitment (Overstreet et al., 2014). As a result, to a significant extent, this interaction between the management of an organization and its employees is the concept of servant leadership, in which the leader's ultimate goal is to strengthen relationships so that Subordinates can be the best they can be (Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership seems to be the most promising and most investigated over the last decade, mainly due to the holistic

approach and broad focus adopted compared to the other philosophies and their essential role in affecting individual and team-level outcomes, such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, job performance, and job satisfaction (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021).

Leadership style is a critical factor that enhances universities' role due to its effect on academicians' performance (Lew, 2009) and fostering employees' creativity (Yoshida et al., 2014). Higher education institutions face several significant challenges: leadership style, maintaining academic quality, and improving university faculty members' performance (Drew, 2010). Improving the academic staff members' performance is considered the backbone of boosting universities' management efforts to enhance academicians' performance and ensure a high quality of education and research to serve local and national society. Leadership style is a method to achieve the university's objectives by the leaders' effect on the followers to create motivation, leading to high performance (Alshery & Ahmad, 2016).

Previous literature examined the effect of servant relationships on various outcomes. For example, Peterson et al. (2012) revealed that servant leadership style positively relates to performance. Chiniara and Bentein (2018) found a positive relationship between the servant leadership style and team service-oriented OCB-team members' support for other groups. A study by Walumbwa et al. (2018) revealed that servant leadership enhances overall team performance by facilitating team members' collective thriving at work. Accordingly, servant leadership is a potential performance factor and a promising style for higher education (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Servant leadership is a constructive leadership style that extends to many contexts and has grown remarkably in the last decade (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

In response to the efforts of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to support the research and innovation system, it was translating its pivotal role in the transformation towards a sustainable knowledge-based economy and meeting the goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. MOHE initiated the National Transformation Program (NTP 2020). It is a vital enabling strategy for achieving the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) Vision 2030 (KSA, 2016a). The NTP plan includes academic staff training and development, increasing the effectiveness of scientific research, and improving the learning environment for creativity and innovation (KSA, 2016a). Vision 2030 aims to reposition KSA institutions to have at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 internationally.

According to the Saudi Ministry of Finance (SMOF), the budget for the year 2022 is (SR955 billion -US$254.6 billion). 19.37 percent (SR185 billion -US$49,264 billion) goes to education (Arabnews, 2022). The budget for state universities is US$25,298 billion (Arabnews, 2022). Further, the Global Competitiveness Center (GCC), affiliated with the International Institute for Management Development (IMD), reported in 2022 that the KSA is the first country in the world to spend on education (IMD, 2022). The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) stated that the Scimago Index (powered by Scopus), the scientific citation articles counted from journals classified by the Scopus database, Saudi Arabia ranked 25th globally in the number of scientific and technical journal articles for the year 2022 (Scimago, 2021; SPA, 2022).

However, this enormous expenditure on public universities does not reflect the international ranking of the KSA's universities. According to QS World University Rankings for 2022, only

two Saudi universities, King Abdulaziz University (KAU) and King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals (KFUPM), are among the top 200 universities. Meanwhile, King Abdulaziz University-KAU only ranks among the top 200 universities for 2023 (QS, 2022). KAS's state universities have achieved a notable increase in published scientific research. For example, the number of published articles has increased from 48,307 in 2021 to more than 57,000 in 2022 (Scimago, 2021; SPA, 2022). Nevertheless, this figure for improving scientific research outputs does not capture KSA's massive investment in the higher education sector, especially in state universities (US$25,298 billion), and the first country in the world to spend on education (IMD, 2022).

As a result, these facts indicate significant challenges to KSA's higher education sector. This sends a strong message for KSA's public universities to move forward by changing or revamping their management styles and the autocratic leadership style they have followed for a long time, as they are no longer helpful or workable in today's situations. The situation calls for even more action as globalization and fierce competition affect every industry and environment, including the higher education sector. Therefore, for higher education institutions in KSA to achieve their objectives and maintain a competitive edge in the current market, they must implement modern management methods sustainably (Abdel-Qader et al., 2013; Abu Quleh et al., 2013; Al-Otaibi & Ismail, 2020; Gonaim, 2019). Thus, this study examines the relationship between servant leadership and work performance, specifically task performance and OCB.

The university's academic staff has an important role and contributes to society in terms of teaching and conducting scientific research that increases the university's and society's efficiency (Dhillon et al., 2015; Ghabban et al., 2018). Leadership style is the backbone of enhancing universities' management's efforts to strengthen universities' academic staff's performance to ensure high-quality education and scientific research to serve local and national society (Alshery & Ahmad, 2016; Mathew, 2010). Previous literature examined the effect of servant leadership on university academic members' performance (e.g., Al-Husseini et al., 2021; Graham, 2015; Jameel & Ahmad, 2020; Jouda et al., 2016; Kenny, 2017; LiLin, 2018).

However, several scholars debated that empirical studies focusing on leadership universities are scarce, in their infancy, under-developed, and still relatively new to the higher education sector (Zacher & Johnson, 2015). Further, previous studies focused on the performance of employees in the business sector, and few studies have examined the performance of the academic staff at universities (Ghabban et al., 2018; Muda et al., 2017). Besides, these studies have not shown meaningful progress, particularly at the individual level (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Alshery & Ahmad, 2016; Altrasi, 2014; Esen et al., 2018; Gonaim, 2019; Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015). For example, Newman et al. (2017) argued that the individual-level processes underlying the relationship between servant leadership and work performance are unclear and not well understood. Further, Eva et al. (2019), in their comprehensive systematic literature review, call for more research on the conceptualization and measurement of servant leadership and its relationship to other important variables.

Therefore, this study proposes that the servant leadership style is a significant predictor of academic performance in higher education that enhances productivity and scientific research

quality. several empirical studies have found the servant leadership–creativity relationship in several contexts. Specifically, employees working with leaders who score higher on servant-leaders are more creative and achieve higher task performance. Existing literature has shown that servant leadership enhances employees' task performance by satisfying their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Neubert et al. (2008) indicated that servant leadership first evokes employees' promotion focus, which is the orientation towards seeking pleasure, such as growth, gains, and attainment of aspirations and ideas, which enhances employees' creativity. Liden and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that servant leadership positively affects employee task performance and creativity.

Although previous studies demonstrate a significant relationship between servant leadership and followers' creativity, a dearth of studies remains on the underlying mechanisms through which servant leaders' behaviours impact followers' creativity (Eva et al., 2019; Hunter et al., 2013; Thao & Kang, 2018). Moreover, most previous studies investigated the servant leadership-creativity relationship and examined employee creativity as an outcome of servant leadership-performance linkage (e.g., Neubert et al., 2016; Neubert et al., 2008; Thao & Kang, 2018; Wang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2017; Yoshida et al., 2014).

In addition, despite the significance of a leader's characteristics in stimulating employees' creativity, there is still an extensive range of issues left unanswered, among which is whether a leader's behaviours for creativity play a significant role in followers' creativity dynamic that impacts their performance (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Aboramadan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Eva et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Accordingly, this suggests that further investigation of the underlying mechanisms of this relationship would be both ideal and significant. Therefore, this study attempts to unlock the servant leadership–creativity relationship by closely examining the role of employee creativity as a mediating factor. The current research suggests that the mediated effect of employee creativity is most substantial when the leader encourages and supports the employees' creativity, which, in turn, enhances their performance.

Literature Review and Hypotheses
Overview of the Higher Education Institution in KSA
Education plays a significant role in the growth of a nation's economy and works as a resource for other sectors (Singh & Singh, 2015). Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the KSA have shown rapid growth in recent years in increasing numbers of students seeking post-secondary education. According to the Ministry of Education, the KSA administered 30 public and 14 private universities. The total university capacity in KSA increased dramatically from 850,000 in 2009 to 1.7 million students in 2016. On the other hand, there are 71,347 academic staff in 30 public universities and 16,197 in 14 private universities (MoH, 2020). These data indicate a tremendous increase in students seeking higher education in Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom's higher education institutions face considerable challenges and barriers to implementing the Kingdom's Vision 2030, which places them in charge of developing the essential human resources for development (Alshuwaikhat et al., 2016; Khan, 2016). As a result, for higher education institutions in the KSA to fulfil their objectives and preserve educational quality while earning a competitive edge in the present market, they must

successfully use new management approaches (Abdel-Qader et al., 2013; Abu Quleh et al., 2013).

Vision 2030 aims to reposition KSA higher education institutions to have at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 internationally by adopting a contemporary curriculum centered on rigorous literacy, numeracy, skills, and character development. The vision's second focus is to create an education system that matches higher education outputs with market demands, benchmarks professional certifications across all sectors, and keeps track of students from kindergarten to higher education (KSA, 2016b). Vision 2030 will also track progress and publish a sophisticated range of education outcomes, showing year-on-year improvements. Further, working closely with the private sector ensures higher education outcomes align with the market's needs.

The National Transformation Program 2020 - NTP 2020 - is a vital enabling strategy for achieving the KSA Vision 2030 (KSA, 2016a). This program was developed "to help fulfil Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and identify the challenges government bodies face in the economic and development sectors" (KSA, 2016a, p. 10). The Ministry of Education is an essential part of the NTP 2020 investigation. The NTP 2020 outlines eight methods for the Ministry of Education to attain the overarching Vision 2030 based on the recognized difficulties in KSA education. These goals aim to improve educational quality in Saudi Arabia (KSA, 2016a). The plans include academic staff training and development, increasing the effectiveness of scientific research, improving the learning environment for creativity and innovation, upgrading curricula and teaching methods, providing industry-relevant education, and involving the private sector in education (KSA, 2016a).

Work Performance
According to (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993a; Campbell et al., 1993; Roe, 1999a). Performance is a multi-faceted notion that may separate the process element of performance, i.e., behavioural interactions from an expected output on a fundamental level. The behaviour element describes the actions people take to complete a task, whereas the outcome aspect describes the result of an individual's work behaviour (Campbell, 1990). John P. Campbell (1990, p. 704) defined work performance as "a total of behaviours or actions relevant to the organization's goals." Hence, employee work performance focuses on employees' behaviours or actions rather than the results of these actions. Similarly, Motowidlo and Kell (2013) defined employee work performance as "the cumulative estimated value to the institution of the different behavioural activities that an employee carries out over a typical period." Other scholars (e.g., Hellriegel et al., 1999; Karakas, 2010) defined employee performance as "an individual's work achievement associated with meaningful jobs, an attractive profile, and a caring workforce." Despite the great efforts related to the employees' work performance and job performance as an outcome measure in empirical research, relatively little practical previous research has been carried out to clarify the performance concept (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Several scholars reported that tremendous employee performance studies had been carried out. However, different approaches examine employees' work performance (Beaton et al., 2009; Schultz et al., 2009).

Over the past three decades, work performance has received significant scholarly research attention; research has dealt with the predictors and effects of employee achievement in

various disciplines (Koopmans et al., 2016). Notably, Scholars believe that performance should be seen as a multi-faceted notion (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993b; Campbell et al., 1993; Roe, 1999b; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Therefore, this study deeply reviews the literature's conceptual frameworks to identify the conceptual framework of work performance. Murphy and Kroeker (1988) and Campbell (1990) clarified the range of work performance by addressing the main dimensions of universal work performance. According to Murphy and Kroeker (1988), the scope of work performance constitutes the following four dimensions: (i) task behaviour, (ii) interpersonal communication, (iii) withdrawal behaviour, and (iv) harmful behaviour. Meanwhile, Campbell (1990) suggested eight work performance dimensions in his framework; he claimed that these dimensions are sufficient to describe performance's latent constructs. Campbell (1990) includes job-task proficiency, (2) non-job-task proficiency, (3) interpersonal communications, (4) establishing effort, (5) sustaining personal discipline, (6) collaboration with individuals and team performance, (7) supervision, (8) top management. In their review studies, Viswesvaran and Ones (2000) and Rotundo and Sackett (2002) categorized work performance frameworks into three comprehensive work performance dimensions (i) task performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, and counterproductive work behaviour. The employee's contribution to the organization's performance is covered by task performance. It refers to acts that are part of the formal reward system (i.e., technical core) and address job criteria (Williams & Karau, 1991). Task performance generally refers to actions that convert materials into goods and services for the company or allow for effective operation (Motowidlo et al., 1997).

Campbell (1990) also noted that employees' work performance has received much attention as a core concept within work and organizational psychology, and understands its fundamental structure. Thus, he emphasized task performance concerning the agreement's fulfilment between the employer and employee. Usually, employee work performance focuses on task performance, which is defined as the proficiency (i.e., competency) with which individuals perform the core technical tasks central to their central job tasks (Campbell, 1990). Other researchers defined task performance as job-specific task proficiency (Campbell, Charlotte H, et al., 1990; Griffin et al., 2007; Rollins & Fruge, 1992; Wisecarver et al., 2007), technical proficiency (Campbell et al., 2001; Campbell, McHenry, et al., 1990; Lance et al., 1992), or in-role performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Maxham III et al., 2008). It includes, for example, work quantity, work quality, and job knowledge (Campbell, 1990).

On the other hand, contextual performance does not directly contribute to organizational performance but enhances the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core functions. Scholars differentiate between task performance and contextual performance. First, contextual performance includes activities not formally part of the job description. Second, it indirectly contributes to an organization's performance by facilitating task performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993b; Sonnentag et al., 2008). The third dimension, counterproductive work behaviour, refers to behaviour that harms the organization's well-being (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). It includes absenteeism, off-task behaviour, theft, and substance abuse. Koopmans *et al.* (2011) integrated the existing conceptual frameworks and formulated a heuristic conceptual framework for individual work performance. Thus, Koopmans and her colleagues proposed that Figure 1 illustrates a heuristic framework for understanding workers' job performance construct. The latent component of employee performance occurs at the first level. Workers' job performance is

shown in four dimensions at the second level. As a result, Koopmans et al. (2011) offered examples of each dimension based on the frameworks identified in the boxes in Figure 1.
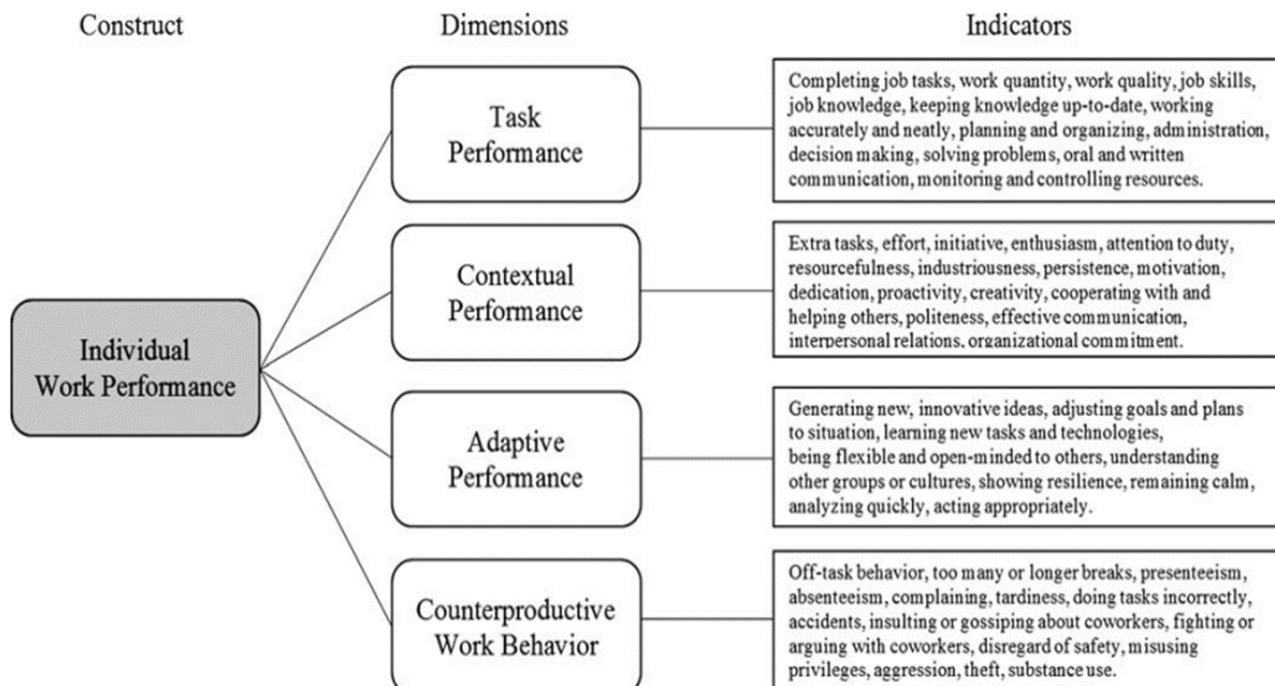

Figure 1. Heuristic framework of work performance (Koopmans et al., 2011)

Servant Leadership
Northouse (2019) described servant leadership as a contradictory statement of service and influence regarding how the management can provide assistance and impact. In other words, "how a person could be a leader and a servant simultaneously." Even though servant leadership challenges the traditional image concerning leadership, it is considered an approach that provides a distinctive leadership standpoint (Northouse, 2019). The concept of servant leadership was coined by (Greenleaf 1970, 1972, 1977). Greenleaf claimed that servant leadership is a new leadership style prioritizing service (Spears, 2010). A servant leader, for example, is concerned about servicing their people (Greenleaf, 1977; Russell & Patterson, 2004). Consequently, leadership becomes the ability to serve others, and serving and leading become nearly identical terms.

Furthermore, the servant leader strategy offers possibilities to assist followers in their development (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). In other words, servant leadership requires the leader's willingness to "serve others" (Parris & Peachey, 2013, p.380). According to Greenleaf (1977), servant leaders are characterized by "going beyond one's self-interest" (p.7). Furthermore, servant leaders rely on their moral authority and prospective power rather than their official authority. They understand that people pay attention to, agree with, and admire leaders who wield genuine power and conduct responsibly (Serrat, 2014).

According to Eva et al. (2019), servant leadership is a complete leadership method that incorporates Subordinates in numerous facets (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual), motivating followers to become who they want to be. The goal is to build followers based on leaders' altruistic and ethical guidelines. (Greenleaf, 1977). When the followers

are given priority, they become more committed to their work and more productive, whereas servant leaders consider themselves corporate stewards (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Unlike performance-oriented leadership approaches that often "sacrifice people on the altar of profit and growth," servant leaders also focus on improving the personal development of their followers. Servant leaders focus on sustainable performance over the long run (Sendjaya, 2015, p. 4).

According to Spears (2010), servant leaders empower people in decision-making, practice ethical and caring behaviour, and boost employees' growth while increasing organizational compassion and quality of life. According to Patterson (2003) and Franklin (2010), servant leadership is defined as leadership that prioritizes followers over organizational concerns. To put it another way, servant leadership prioritizes the well-being of followers (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Servant leaders have a variety of traits, one of which is that they prioritize their employees. Greenleaf (1977), a pioneer in defining servant leadership, argues that a leader who practices servant leadership prioritizes serving others' needs. According to Ebener and O'Connell (2010), servant leaders foster a firm service culture by influencing employees' attitudes, assumptions, values, and behaviours. Wong and Davey (2007) state that servant leaders are willing to train staff to become future leaders. Apart from that, servant leaders' commitment to serving attempts to address the requirements of their followers in all areas (Sun & Wang, 2009). Servant leaders will empower employees as they are trained to become leaders (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Employee Creativity
Creativity is the ability to create novel and valuable ideas and new solutions to workplace challenges (Amabile, 1988, 1996). Oldham and Cummings (1996) defined creativity as novel and valuable products, ideas, or procedures that can help organizations develop and succeed. Shalley and Perry-Smith (2001) also defined creativity as developing novel and potentially valuable ideas, and George (2007) defined it as employees proposing new ideas to improve workflow and enhance efficiency. Creativity is the intellectual process of generating new and potentially valuable ideas (Hon & Lui, 2016).

Most previous studies focused on organizational innovation, while research on employee creativity has remained in its early stages until recently; in the last decade, employee creativity began to receive increasing attention (Hon & Lui, 2016; Tierney & Farmer, 2011; Zhou, 2021). Employee creativity has been considered critical for firms to gain long-term competitiveness (Hon & Lui, 2016; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Wikhamn, 2019). Therefore, most organizations invest heavily in finding effective ways to encourage employee creativity (Liu et al., 2012).

Creativity depends on the individual and the context in which the employee works (e.g., job characteristics, resources, goals, work environment), with the context shaped by leaders (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). This means leadership emerges as an inescapable contextual predictor of individual creativity (Amabile et al., 2004; Shalley et al., 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003). Similarly, Mumford et al. (1991) debated that creativity is primarily a cognitive process. Thus, providing employees with the requisite skills and expertise through training and development leads to motivating employees to engage in the creative process and yields enhanced performance in various settings (Ligon et al., 2012).

Shalley and Gilson (2004) argued that leadership influences followers' creativity, usually by satisfying the followers' need to feel not restricted or limited and even strongly supported when suggesting solutions to problems and thinking divergently. While feeling unconstrained or supported is significant in providing new ideas and solutions (Shalley et al., 2004), having a strong interest in helping others might play a more substantial role (Forgeard and Mecklenburg, 2013).

Servant Leadership and Work Performance
In reviewing the literature, servant leadership has been associated with job performance (e.g., Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Liden et al., 2014; Liden et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2015; Schwarz et al., 2016). The academic literature on servant leadership consistently relates it to followers' performance metrics (e.g., Eva et al., 2019).

Researchers have differentiated between task performance and OCB behaviours in studying the link between servant leadership and work performance. Organizations explicitly acknowledge and fix task performance through job descriptions (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Williams & Anderson, 1991). On the other hand, OCB is discretionary and has no apparent relationship to an organization's official compensation structure to steer employees' actions (Podsakoff et al., 2009).

Previous empirical studies have established the uniqueness of servant leadership, demonstrating that it explains more variance in influential people (Xu et al., 2020). For example, Liden et al. (2008) found that the seven dimensions of servant leadership (SL-28 scale) function as unique predictors of task performance at the personal level. Another recent study by Dulebohn and Wu (2018) presented that servant leadership, on average, explained 12% more variance in individual performance. Giambatista et al. (2020) claimed that the features of servant leadership of Liden *et al.* (2008) are indirectly and distally linked to performance. Similarly, recent research by Lemoine and Blum (2021) indicated that servant leadership had more substantial indirect effects on the performance of followers, with 109 team supervisors of 415 employees in six multi-organizational samples.

Several scholars confirmed the benefit of servant leadership to organizations pertains to enhancing employees' performance and creativity (e.g., Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Jaramillo et al., 2015; Liden et al., 2014; Ling et al., 2017; Neubert et al., 2016; Neubert et al., 2008; Newman et al., 2017). Specifically, leaders who score higher on servant-leaders are more creative and achieve higher task performance. In addition, existing literature has shown that servant leadership enhances employees' task performance by satisfying their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Further, Liden et al. (2014) established that servant leadership positively affects employees' task performance.

Servant leadership also benefits organizations by increasing employees' altruistic, pro-social, and proactive behaviours and reducing antisocial behaviours. One of the most examined pro-social behaviours is employees', as mentioned previously, Organization Citizenship behaviour (OCB). Hence, followers led by servant-leaders exhibit higher levels of OCB primarily because they tend to imitate servant-leaders service-oriented behaviours and want to reciprocate their good treatment by doing good deeds for colleagues, leaders, and the organization.

Research abounds regarding these positive relationships (e.g., Bavik et al., 2017; Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Donia et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2017; Walumbwa et al., 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2018; Zou et al., 2015). For example, Walumbwa and colleagues (2010) found that servant leadership encourages OCBs by enhancing self-efficacy (i.e., individuals' self-confidence in performing specific tasks well), creating a service climate at work, and establishing a fair workplace.

Further extending the prior investigations, Ling et al. (2017) and Wang et al. (2018) revealed that besides low-level supervisors, servant leadership by high-level managers also positively affects frontline employees' in-role extra-role performance directly or indirectly. Scholars (e.g., Cameron, 2012; De Luque et al., 2008; Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Luthans et al., 2015; Nohria & Khurana, 2010) claimed that organizational members prefer leaders who value ethics and relationships. Thus, work more effectively for leaders, and such leadership is essential to building more sustainable organizations and stronger societies. Chiniara and Bentein (2016) discovered that servant leadership indirectly impacts task performance; servant leaders promote autonomy and self-sufficiency to their people, resulting in greater performance. Other research has found that servant leadership favours team and individual performance (Jaramillo et al., 2015; Schaubroeck et al., 2011). While the current study associates leadership with improved performance at the organizational level, the leader as a supervisor of employees is also predicted to impact the individual level directly. As a result, this research will focus on individual performance.

Servant leadership is supposed to positively impact various people, groups, and organizations (Yoshida & Cooper, 2014). According to previous research, servant leadership has a desirable impact on different attitudes, behaviours, and performance results (Parris & Peachey, 2013). For example, servant leadership has affected key attitudinal states such as leader and organizational commitment, work engagement, organizational trust, and job satisfaction (Chan & Mak, 2014; Newman et al., 2018; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Rami, 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Furthermore, servant leadership has influenced behavioural outcomes, including organizational citizenship, employee turnover, and innovation (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010).

Servant leadership might also account for a considerable variation in Subordinate in-role performance as judged by supervisors. In-role performance was most strongly linked to the servant leadership attribute of "behaving morally." The ideas of leader ethical behaviour and trust have previously been related in the leadership literature (Bass & Steidlmeier, 2006). As a result, this study expects that servant leaders' behaviours will be seen favourably by their Subordinates, based on the mechanism in the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Consequently, followers will reciprocate by displaying favourable job-related outcomes such as employee work performance and engagement.

According to the previous studies presented above, the current study found that there is still a research gap in using servant leadership to improve work performance in the academic sector of Saudi universities. Therefore, the current study attempts to examine the relationship between servant leadership and work performance in the context of the academic sector of Saudi universities. Based on the past research discussed above, it leads to propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Servant leadership positively influences the faculty members' work performance in Saudi universities.

H1: Emotional healing influences the faculty members' work performance in Saudi universities.

H2: Empowering positively affects faculty members' work performance in Saudi universities.

H3: Helping Subordinates grow and succeed positively affects faculty members' work performance in Saudi universities.

H4: Putting Subordinates first positively affects faculty members' work performance (task performance and OCB) in Saudi universities.

H5: Creating value for the community influences the faculty members' work performance in Saudi universities.

H6: Conceptual skills influence the faculty members' work performance (task performance and OCB) in Saudi universities.

H7: Behaving ethically influences the faculty members' work performance (task performance and OCB) in Saudi universities.

H8: Servant leadership influences the faculty members' work performance (task performance and OCB) in Saudi universities.

Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity
With the expansion of globalization, competitiveness, and rapid technological developments, organizations have severe competition, raising the attention to information, knowledge, and creativity. Organizations today operate in an unpredictable business environment, requiring increased effort to accomplish organizational Creativity (Tierney & Farmer, 2011).

Creativity is the ability to develop new and valuable ideas, products, or services (Amabile, 1988; Neubert et al., 2008; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Employees are motivated to collaborate when they are allowed to express themselves creatively. Collaboration is encouraged throughout the creative process. Businesses must create a constant learning attitude among their staff, pushing them to seek new information, expertise, and innovative ways of doing things (Zada et al., 2022).

According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the leader provides more benefits or respect than costs to the followers who, in exchange, help him achieve the organization's goals (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Servant leadership style significantly influences employee creativity (Yoshida et al., 2014). Servant leaders help encourage and develop a culture of creativity among employees (Faraz et al., 2019; Iqbal et al., 2020). Williams and his colleagues (2017) pointed out that employees find new ways to perform their roles in a cooperative environment without considering failure and fears. Besides, employees who work under servant leadership are encouraged to challenge the wrong system and try new techniques that boost employee creativity (Williams et al., 2017).

Several studies have shown that servant leadership is positively associated with employee creativity (Aboramadan, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Neubert et al., 2008; Thao & Kang, 2018; Wang et al., 2022). For example, a study by Thao and Kang (2018) of a sample of 148 leader-follower in a Vietnamese engineering firm found a positive relationship between servant leadership and followers' creative behaviour. A recent study by Chen et al. (2022) used data

from 242 employees and 57 managers in Chinese public companies; the results confirmed the positive relationship between servant leadership and employees' creativity. Another recent study by Wang et al. (2022) used a sample of 252 full-time employees in the United Kingdom who were recruited onlyne. The results revealed that servant leadership positively impact the employees' creativity

According to Panaccio et al. (2015), scholars predict that servant leaders' behaviours significantly affect Subordinates' creative behaviours in three stages. First, servant leaders support and encourage followers by delegating them, fulfilling their needs, and maximizing their full efforts. As a result, servant leaders contribute to improving followers' motivations for engaging in creative actions. Second, servant leaders show explicit concern for the interests and needs of their followers instead of their own (Chen et al., 2022; Eva et al., 2019; Huning et al., 2020; Liden et al., 2015). Therefore, they create an atmosphere of mutual trust and safety (Yoshida et al., 2014). Third, followers who perceive their leaders as servants are more likely to share and care for each other through a mutual support exchange, thereby strengthening their emotional security (Liden et al., 2015). Subsequently, the risk of seeking creative problem-solving methods would be reduced, which is salutary for fostering followers' creativity (Liden et al., 2014).

Podsakoff et al. (2003) pointed out that servant leadership comprises important characteristics that provide constant stimulation and encourage Subordinates to evaluate things from a new perspective and reconsider how to do their job. Servant leaders inspire their Subordinates through their visions. To ensure everyone is working toward a single objective, you need a visionary leader who conveys their idea clearly and passionately (Tuan, 2020). Servant leadership is essential for good performance because it coordinates an employee's effectiveness and other resources in the organization. Servant leaders motivate employees, increase their job performance and commitment, and bring creativity to their task roles (Wang et al., 2021). Employees who work under a servant leader are more likely to explore new and better methods to do their jobs (Chen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, servant leaders help employees develop a more creative self-image (Van Dierendonck and Rook, 2010). Consequently, employees should feel more comfortable trying new ways to formulate innovative ideas. However, although researchers have sought to investigate the possible links between servant leadership and followers' creativity, there is still no consensus on how servant leadership affects creativity (Newman et al., 2017). Based on the above argument, the study hypothesizes the following:

H9:   Servant leadership influences faculty members' creativity in Saudi universities.

Employee Creativity as a Mediator
While academic research on servant leadership is still limited, a growing body of empirical studies shows that servant leadership is related to significant organizational outcomes (eg., Ehrhart, 2004; Liden et al., 2008). However, this research has been largely voided of clarifying the psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions in which servant-leader behaviours influence follower well-being and associated outcomes (Avolio et al., 2009; Liden et al., 2008; Yukl, 2006). Service leadership prioritizes subordinates' needs over managers (Ehrhart, 2004) and provides them with resources (van Dierendonck, 2011; Liden et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, servant leadership encourages Subordinates' interests rather than focusing on managers' interests (Hoch et al., 2018). The leader must help employees succeed and grow, providing sufficient resources for creativity and challenge without fear of resource loss. In previous studies, servant leadership was related to group creativity (Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2017) and promoted creativity through a servant attitude (Ruiz-Palomino & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2020). Servant leadership also encourages workplace spirituality, which enhances employee creativity (Williams et al., 2017). Servant leadership enhances employee creativity with self-efficacy as a mediator (Yang et al., 2017).

Creativity prospers when leaders and the organization support their employees. To build a culture of innovation, leaders may help their Subordinates try new things, develop, and proceed (Cheung et al., 2020; Piyathasanan et al., 2018). Employees are more engaged at work and are more likely to try new approaches to solving issues when their workplace is more open to taking risks connected to creativity (da Costa et al., 2018; Tantawy et al., 2021). Further, the problem-solving abilities of employees are enhanced under servant leadership. Leaders inspire and assist their followers in gaining new skills, absorbing new knowledge, and learning from others by demonstrating openness to learning, feedback, and other people's fresh ideas (Li et al., 2020).

Several empirical studies have confirmed the servant leadership–creativity relationship in several contexts. Specifically, employees working with leaders who score higher on servant-leaders are more creative and achieve higher task performance. Existing literature has shown that servant leadership enhances employees' task performance by satisfying their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Neubert et al. (2008) indicated that servant leadership first evokes employees' promotion focus orientation towards seeking pleasure, such as growth, gains, and attainment of aspirations and ideas, which enhances employees' creativity. Liden and his colleagues (2014) demonstrated that servant leadership contributes positively to employees' task performance and creativity by creating a serving culture and consequently increasing their identification with their group.

In a study by Yoshida et al. (2014), based on two samples from Indonesia and China, 154 teams operate in various industries (e.g., finance, heavy manufacturing, and telecommunications). Yoshida et al. (2014) found that servant leadership promotes individual, relational identification, and collective prototypicality with the leader, which, in turn, fosters employee creativity. Further, a study by Williams et al. (2017) examined the effect of servant leadership on a sample of 280 graduate and undergraduate students from a U.S. public university. The study's findings demonstrated that servant leaders positively affect employee creativity by fostering an environment that promotes workplace spirituality.

Previous studies have suggested that the servant leadership–creativity relationship is mediated by several factors, including promotion focus and job satisfaction (Neubert et al., 2008), creative self-efficacy and team efficacy (Yang et al., 2017), workplace spirituality (Williams et al., 2017), leader identification, and prototypicality (Yoshida et al., 2014), workplace spirituality and political skill (Williams et al., 2017). and serving culture (Liden et al., 2014), psychological safety climate and employee well-being (Wang et al., 2022), Shared leadership (Wang et al., 2021), self-efficacy and power distance (Yang et al., 2017), and

competence (Thao & Kang, 2018). For instance, empirical evidence from a range of sources suggests that servant leadership exerts a positive effect on employees' creativity (e.g., Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Liden et al., 2014; Liden et al., 2015; Ling et al., 2016; Neubert et al., 2016; Neubert et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2017; Yoshida et al., 2014). Based on the above discussion, this study proposes the following:

H10: Employee creativity mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work performance (task performance and OCB).

Research Model

This study proposes a theoretical model based on a comprehensive literature review and theories. Figure 2 presents a research framework composed of three variables: servant leadership (SL), employee creativity (EC), and work performance (WP). The research framework shows that servant leadership is an independent variable (employed as exogenous variables) would be linked with employee creativity as mediator variables and work performance as a dependent variable (used as an endogenous variable). The research framework explains that servant leadership is expected to be positively associated with employee creativity, which is subsequently expected to be positively associated with work performance.
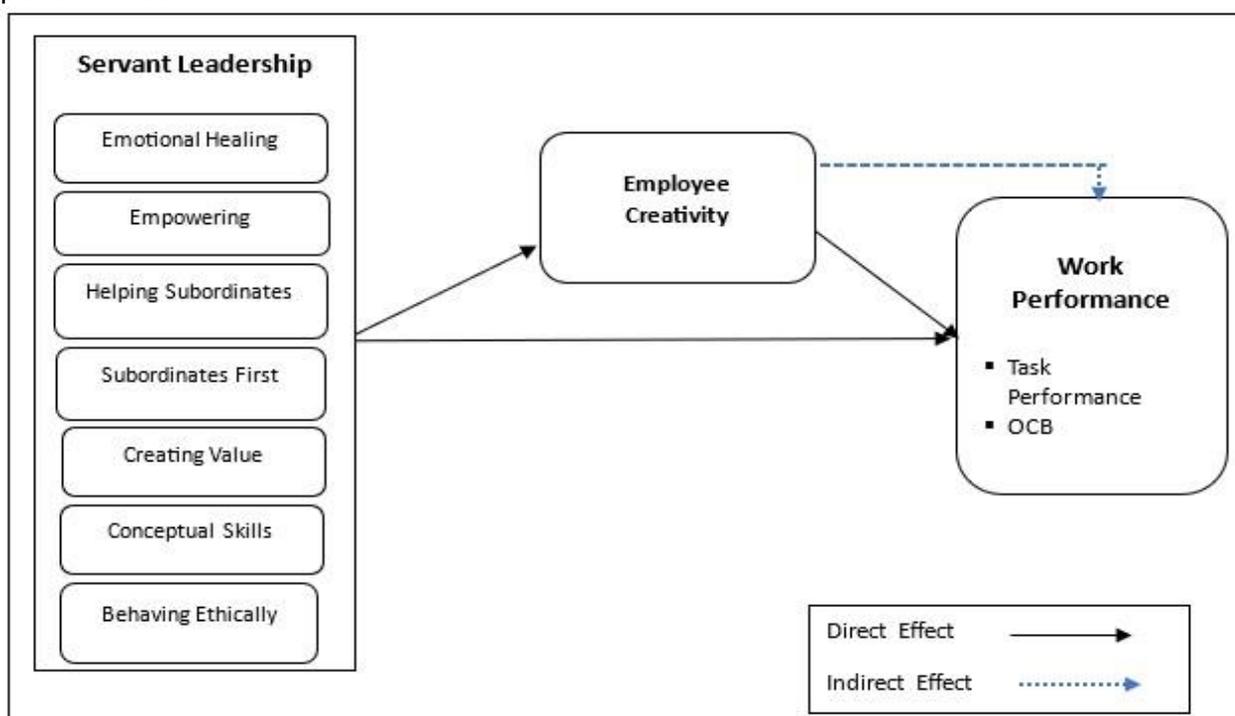

Figure 2. Conceptual Research Framework

Methodology

Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

The web-based Questionnaire (WBQ) tool using Google Forms was used in this study. Among the 413 questionnaires collected from the academic staff of the five selected Saudi public universities, 394 questionnaires were returned for analysis, contributing to a response rate of 95.4%. The current study investigates work performance on an individual level as the unit of analysis. The majority of distributions of respondents' ages are between 31 - 40 years (n=158; 38.3%), followed by the age group of 25 - 30 (n=128; 31%), while the 41- 50 (n=90; 21.8%), the age group of 51 – 65 (n=33; 8%). Most respondents were female (n=213; 51,6%), while

the males (n=200; 48.4%). Regarding the respondents' level of education, they hold master's Degrees (n=256; 62%), while the academicians possess PhDs (n=157; 38%). The distribution of the respondents' Academic positions revealed that most of the study's respondents are lecturers (n=178; 43.1%), followed by Assistant Professors (n=130; 31.5%). The Associate Professor represents (n=78; 18.9%). At the same time, the full Professor represents (n=27; 6.5%).

Measures

This study used a measurement scale for servant leadership (SL) consisting of 28 items adopted from (Liden et al., 2008). Reliabilities scale factors of SL are as follows: conceptual skills (α=.86); empowerment (α=.90); helping Subordinates grow and succeed (α=.90); putting Subordinates first (α=.91); behaving ethically (α=.90); emotional healing (α=.89); and creating value for the community (α=.89). To measure servant leadership construct, this study used ordinal data based on five points Likert scale showing the level of agreement/disagreement, of the respondents, with options from 1 = Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5 = Strongly agree. The scale measurement for work performance consists of two dimensions (Task Performance, five items and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour – OCB, six items) adapted from (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Further, this study measured Employee Creativity using Neubert et al. (2016) three-items and Scott and Bruce (1994) four-items. These items were also rated on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis
Assessment of the Measurement Model
Common Method Variance
The researchers in this study have taken several steps to reduce the common method variance (CMV). Initially, all measurement items in the study were adopted from scales validated in previous studies. Secondly, in addition to the use of previously validated scales, the research instrument was reviewed by seven experienced (senior) academics and one professional (Higher Education Expert). Additionally, the research instrument was further pre-tested among a sample of likely respondents to ensure clarity and adequate understanding. Finally, the recommended statistical test (Harman's one-factor test) was conducted on the returned questionnaires to check and correct for possible common method bias in the data. Since the researchers used Harman's one-factor test, the results must satisfy two primary conditions to be certified free from common method bias. First, there must be more than one factor with an Eigenvalue greater than 1. Second, no one single factor must account for more than 50% of the total variance emanating from an EFA analysis conducted on the scale items (Fuller et al., 2016; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results of the EFA conducted on the scale items for this study. The two conditions were fully fulfilled in this study. A total of 9 factors emerged with Eigenvalue >1, and the principal factor accounted for only 38.050 percent of the total variance, which is less than 50%. Consequently, the results show a lack of variation in this dataset and confirm the absence of common method bias.

Convergent Validity
In Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), the construct analysis involves assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement model. One of the critical elements in the measurement model is the analysis of factor loadings or outer loadings (Hair

et al., 2016). The current research follows the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014) suggested that the items with factor loadings less than 0.40 should be removed from the scale, and the items with factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be considered for removal only when deleting the indicator, which leads to an increase in the AVE value above the proposed threshold. This study has run the PLS Algorithm to evaluate the model item loading. Following Hair et al. (2014), 2 items with low factor loading were subsequently removed.

The average variance extracted (AVE) was used in this study to confirm the convergent validity of the reflective model in PLS-SEM. Hair et al., 2014, recommend outer loadings of 0.70 or higher for indicators and a minimum AVE of 0.50 for each construct. AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates that the construct explains more than 50% of the variance of its indicators (items) on average. In other words, these values provided evidence of convergent validity as they exceed 50 percent of the extracted variance for every construct in the study model (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2014; Kline, 2011). On the other hand, an AVE less than 0.50, on average, indicates the existence of error in the items, thus requiring the deletion of the offending items, provided such deletion will improve the AVE beyond the minimum threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 1 presented Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). In this study, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ranges between 0.54 - 0.74, Composite Reliability (CR) ranges between 0.84 - 0.95, and Cronbach's Alpha ranges between 0.71 - 0.94. This indicates that the measurement error is less than the variance explained by the constructs, accordingly providing evidence for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). All the constructs have fulfilled the convergent validity with AVE values above 0.50, composite reliability above 0.70, and Cronbach's Alpha above 0.70. Therefore, the significance of the item loadings, sufficient CR, and AVE values suggest that all indicators and first-order latent constructs have demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Table 1
Results of Validity and Reliability Test

Construct	Indicators	Loading	Alpha	CR	AVE
Servant Leadership	BE1 <- Behaving Ethically	0.81			
	BE2 <- Behaving Ethically	0.76	0.81	0.87	0.64
	BE3 <- Behaving Ethically	0.83			
Behaving Ethically	BE4 <- Behaving Ethically	0.77			
Conceptual Skills	CS1 <- Conceptual Skills	0.74			
	CS2 <- Conceptual Skills	0.79	0.76	0.84	0.58
	CS3 <- Conceptual Skills	0.75			
Creating Value	CVC1 <- Creating Value	0.83			
	CVC2 <- Creating Value	0.80	0.82	0.88	0.65
	CVC3 <- Creating Value	0.79			
	CVC4 <- Creating Value	0.79			
	PSF1 <- Subordinate First	0.84	0.88	0.91	0.74
	PSF2 <- Subordinate First	0.88			

Put Superordinate First	PSF3 <- Subordinate First	0.88			
	PSF4 <- Subordinate First	0.82			
Helping Subordinate	HGS1 <- Helping Subordinate	0.86	0.86	0.90	0.71
	HGS2 <- Helping Subordinate	0.85			
	HGS3 <- Helping Subordinate	0.80			
	HGS4 <- Helping Subordinate	0.83			
Empowering	EM1 <- Empowering	0.83	0.81	0.87	0.64
	EM2 <- Empowering	0.80			
	EM3 <- Empowering	0.84			
	EM4 <- Empowering	0.70			
Emotional Healing	EH1 <- Emotional Healing	0.73	0.71	0.84	0.63
	EH2 <- Emotional Healing	0.83			
	EH4 <- Emotional Healing	0.82			
Employee Creativity	EC1 <- Employee Creativity	0.77	0.88	0.91	0.59
	EC2 <- Employee Creativity	0.75			
	EC3 <- Employee Creativity	0.79			
	EC4 <- Employee Creativity	0.76			
	EC5 <- Employee Creativity	0.72			
OCB	OCB1 <- OCB	0.70	0.85	0.89	0.57
	OCB2 <- OCB	0.75			
	OCB3 <- OCB	0.80			
	OCB4 <- OCB	0.76			
	OCB5 <- OCB	0.77			
	OCB6 <- OCB	0.75			
Task Performance	TP1 <- Work Performance	0.70	0.80	0.87	0.63
	TP2 <- Task Performance	0.73			
	TP3 <- Task Performance	0.85			
	TP4 <- Task Performance	0.80			

Assessment of the Structural Model
Hypotheses Testing for Direct Relationships
The next step examines the hypotheses of this study using a structural model. This study uses path assessment to explore the relationship between constructs. To examine the influence of servant leadership style on the work performance of academic staff in KSA's universities. The current study simultaneously tested the direct path between Servant Leadership (i.e., emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, conceptual skills, putting subordinates first, creating value for the community, and behaving ethically) and the work performance of the Saudi public universities. Table 2 presents the results of hypotheses testing for direct relationships.

Table 2

Results of Hypotheses Testing for Direct Relationships (Servant Leadership and Work Performance)

Path Relationships	Std. Beta (β	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics	P-values	Result
Behaving Ethically -> OCB	0.007	0.064	0.112	0.911	Not Accepted
Behaving Ethically -> TP	0.242	0.073	3.326	0.001	Accepted
Conceptual Skills -> OCB	-0.029	0.072	0.409	0.682	Not Accepted
Conceptual Skills -> TP	0.07	0.065	1.077	0.282	Not Accepted
Creating Value -> OCB	-0.071	0.065	1.090	0.276	Not Accepted
Creating Value -> TP	0.133	0.065	2.032	0.042	Accepted
Helping Subordinates -> OCB	0.057	0.076	0.756	0.450	Not Accepted
Helping Subordinates -> TP	-0.169	0.071	2.382	0.017	Accepted
Putting Subordinates First -> OCB	0.009	0.051	1.781	0.075	Not Accepted
Putting Subordinates First -> TP	-0.05	0.054	0.916	0.360	Not Accepted
Emotional Healing -> OCB	0.032	0.049	0.646	0.518	Not Accepted
Emotional Healing -> TP	0.082	0.049	1.687	0.092	Not Accepted
Empowering -> OCB	0.013	0.066	0.192	0.848	Not Accepted
Empowering -> TP	-0.090	0.06	1.495	0.135	Not Accepted

Behaving Ethically (BE), Conceptual Skills= CS, Creating Value= CV, Emotional Healing=EH, Employee Creativity= EC, Empowering=EM, Helping Subordinate=HGS, Organizational Citizenship Behaviour=OCB, Put Subordinate First= PSF, Task Performance= TP,

***p<0.01, (two-tails) All the hypothesized direct relationships are significant at less than 1% significance level. **p<0.05, (two-tail) All the hypothesized direct relationships are significant at less than a 5% significance level (p<0.05)

This study also examined the direct relationships of servant leadership on employee creativity. According to the findings in Table 3, there is a substantial (p<0.05) correlation between employee creativity and the hypothesized direct linkages between acting morally, adding value, fostering emotional healing, supporting subordinates, and prioritizing subordinates, in that order, these Hypotheses were approved. Two of the model's seven direct links are statistically insignificant. In particular, because the t-value was below the threshold, the direct relationships between conceptual skills and empowering employee creativity were not significant. As a result, Hypotheses were not accepted. Table 3 presents the results of hypotheses testing for direct relationships.

Table 3

Results of Hypotheses Testing for Direct Relationships (Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity)

Path Relationships	Std. Beta (β	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics	P -values	Result
Behaving Ethically -> Employee Creativity	0.251	0.061	4.105	0.000	**Accepted**
Conceptual Skills -> Employee Creativity	0.110	0.058	1.884	0.060	Not Accepted
Creating Value -> Employee Creativity	0.147	0.058	2.516	0.012	**Accepted**
Emotional Healing -> Employee Creativity	-0.113	0.043	2.656	0.008	**Accepted**
Empowering -> Employee Creativity	-0.003	0.062	0.052	0.959	Not Accepted
Helping Subordinates -> Employee Creativity	0.222	0.073	3.028	0.002	**Accepted**
Putting Subordinates First -> Employee Creativity	0.199	0.052	3.856	0.000	**Accepted**

Testing the Mediation Effect

The bootstrapping approach was used to estimate particular indirect effects to perform the significance test of mediation effects among latent variables following methodological standards. In particular, 95% confidence intervals and 5,000 bootstrap samples were used in the bias-corrected bootstrap technique. Based on the outcomes of the bootstrapping process, Figure 3 displays the indirect hypothesis testing utilizing the bootstrapping statistical approach for the 28 indirect associations that are displayed in Table 4.

Since each indirect relationship's t-value is higher than the cutoff point, or ±1.96, 6 of the 14 are statistically significant and were accepted. These relationships between EH -> Employee Creativity -> TP, HGS -> Employee Creativity -> TP, BE -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, BE -> Employee Creativity -> TP, CVC -> Employee Creativity -> TP, PSF -> Employee Creativity -> TP.

In contrast, the other 8 indirect hypothesized relationships were statistically insignificant and were not accepted, at more than 0.05 as their respective t-values are less than the threshold value, i.e., ±1.96. These are the relationships between CVC -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, CS -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, CS -> Employee Creativity -> TP, EM -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, HGS -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, EH -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, PSF -> Employee Creativity -> OCB, EM -> Employee Creativity -> TP. H55 were not accepted. A summary of the hypotheses' mediating testing is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The Mediation Effect of Employee Creativity

Path Relationship (β)	Std. Beta (β)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics	P-values	Result
CVC -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	0.032	0.018	1.773	0.076	Not Accepted
EH -> Employee Creativity -> TP	-0.032	0.015	2.127	0.033	**Accepted**
HGS -> Employee Creativity -> TP	0.065	0.028	2.316	0.021	**Accepted**
CS -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	0.019	0.015	1.314	0.189	Not Accepted
BE -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	0.053	0.026	2.086	0.037	**Accepted**
CS -> Employee Creativity -> TP	0.029	0.02	1.419	0.156	Not Accepted
EM -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	0.003	0.014	0.177	0.860	Not Accepted
HGS -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	0.044	0.024	1.850	0.064	Not Accepted
BE -> Employee Creativity -> TP	0.079	0.03	2.625	0.009	**Accepted**
CVC -> Employee Creativity -> TP	0.047	0.023	2.019	0.044	**Accepted**
EH -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	-0.022	0.013	1.737	0.082	Not Accepted
PSF -> Employee Creativity -> OCB	0.034	0.017	1.943	0.052	Not Accepted
PSF -> Employee Creativity -> TP	0.050	0.022	2.315	0.021	**Accepted**
EM -> Employee Creativity -> TP	0.004	0.020	0.185	0.853	Not Accepted

Behaving Ethically (BE), Conceptual Skills= CS, Creating Value= CV, Emotional Healing=EH, Employee Creativity= EC, Empowering=EM, Helping Subordinate=HGS, Organizational Citizenship Behaviour=OCB, Put Subordinate First= PSF, Task Performance= TP,
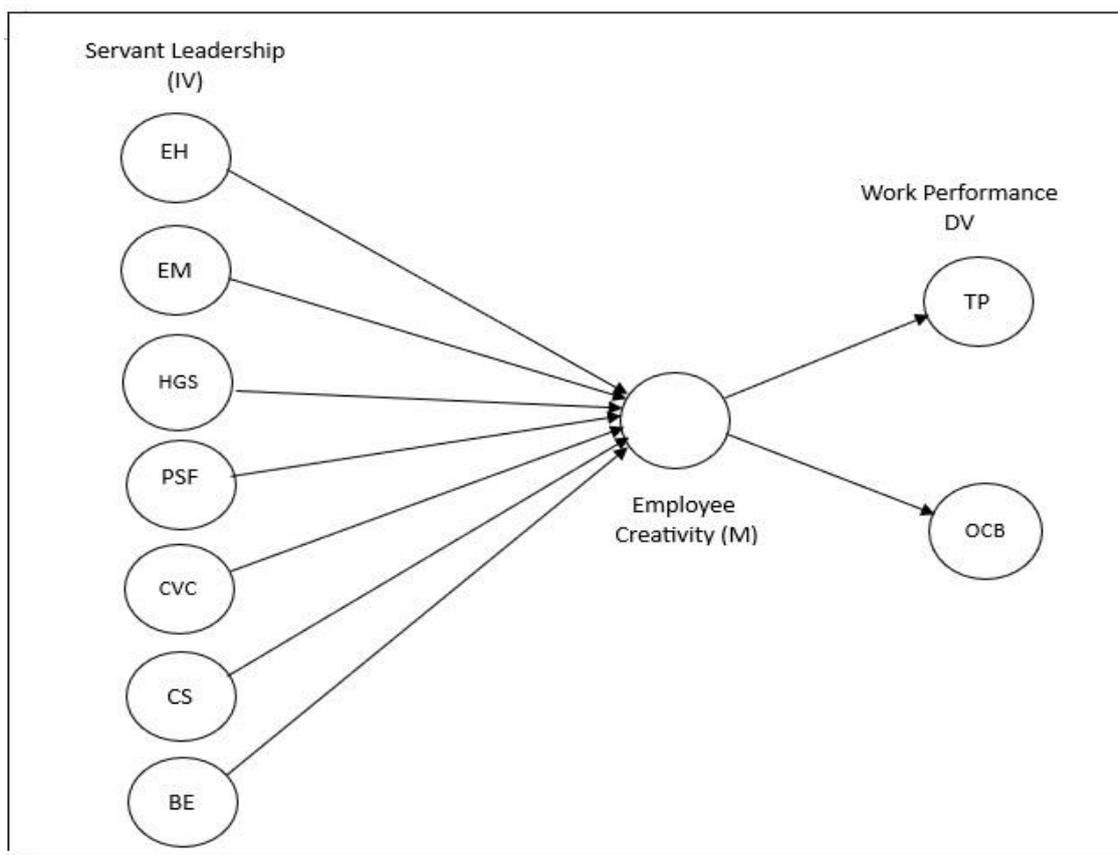
Figure 3. The Mediation Effect – Indirect Effect

Discussion

This study intended to assess the degree to which leaders exhibited behaviours characteristic of servant leadership according to the employees' perspective. This study used ordinal data based on a 5-point Likert scale based on the servant leadership (SL) scale consisting of 28 items adopted from Liden et al. (2008), which was used to measure each of the seven areas corresponding to a different servant leadership behaviours (i.e., behaving ethically, conceptual skills, creating value for the community, emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates, and putting subordinates first). This study formulated (9) hypotheses to test the direct relationships between the study variables, and (1) mediating indirect relationships towards achieving the research objectives and proposed a research framework. The study simultaneously tested the direct effects of exogenous constructs on endogenous constructs by running the PLS algorithm to produce the path coefficients (β) (the structural model relationships). The results showed that some hypotheses were accepted, and some were not. The findings show that ethical behaviour is positively significantly associated with employee work performance. In other words, the hypothesized direct relationship is significant at less than 5% significance level (p<0.05) as a single construct. This result is similar to the findings of the study by Jaramillo et al. (2015), and (Qasim et al., 2020). The findings for the second hypothesis indicated an unexpected result that a negative significant influence between creating value and task performance. As creating value for the community increases, task performance decreases. The negative significant influence of creating value on task performance in Saudi Arabian universities can be attributed to role conflict, resource constraints, and cultural factors. Faculty and staff are increasingly expected to engage in value-creation activities, such as research and community engagement, alongside their core

responsibilities. This aligns with findings from Alshammari (2021) and Alghamdi and Al-Mahrouqi (2022), which highlight the challenges of role overload and role conflict in Saudi universities. To address these challenges, universities should provide adequate training, resources, and support to help employees integrate value creation into their daily tasks without compromising performance.

Similarly, the results also show that helping subordinates negatively and significantly influences task performance. This finding is consistent with role conflict theory, which posits that competing demands can lead to reduced effectiveness in one or more roles. Additionally, resource allocation theory explains how the diversion of resources to helping behaviours can detract from core tasks. In contrast, the other eleven (11) hypotheses showed a direct relationship, indicating a higher cut-off ratio (p<0.05). Hence, these hypotheses were not accepted. To conclude, the findings of testing the direct hypotheses to achieve the first objective in this study showed that 3 out of 14 structural model relationships were significant, considering a p-value <0.05. Some of the independent variables in the model had a significant positive coefficient, indicating that better work performance can be achieved with a high level of servant leadership practices. These hypotheses were examined by testing the direct path between the Servant Leadership style (i.e., emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, conceptual skills, putting subordinates first, creating value for the community, and behaving ethically) and employee creativity.

To achieve the second research objective in this study, to investigate the influence of servant leadership on employee creativity of academic staff in KSA's universities, seven (7) direct hypotheses were established. Five out of seven dimensions of servant leadership style confirmed a direct relationship with employee creativity. These factors are behaving ethically, creating value, emotional healing, helping subordinates to grow and succeed, and putting subordinates first. (Behaving Ethically -> Employee Creativity, Creating Value -> Employee Creativity, Emotional Healing -> Employee Creativity, Helping Subordinates -> Employee Creativity, Putting Subordinates First -> Employee Creativity). This result is consistent with the findings of previous studies, e.g. Zada et al. (2023), Kumar et al. (2024), and Cengiz Ucar et al. (2021).

On the other hand, the indirect hypothesized relationship of employee creativity mediates the relationship between servant leadership, including emotional healing, and work performance (task performance and OCB), (Emotional Healing) EH -> Employee Creativity -> TP, demonstrating a negative significant relationship. The fifth and last objective of the study is to investigate employee creativity as a mediating factor in the relationship between servant leadership and work performance (task performance and OCB). The mediation analysis assesses the indirect effects of employee creativity on this relationship based on running 5000 consistent bootstrapping. A mediation process has been validated through 14 hypotheses. Six of the 14 hypotheses were accepted. The indirect hypothesized relationship of employee creativity mediates the relationship between servant leadership, including emotional healing, and work performance (task performance and OCB). This result is steady with previous studies. For example, Zada et al. (2023), Jaiswal and Dhar (2020), Chen et al. (2022), and Aboramadan et al. (2022).

Practical Implications

To effectively enhance academic staff performance, the KSA's university leaders can adopt strategies that align with the study's findings. This study recommended the following empirical strategies that can help KSA University's leaders enhance employees' creativity:

1. Leaders' Behaving Ethically:
- **Promote Ethical Leadership for Staff Well-being:** Ethical leadership practices help increase job satisfaction by nurturing staff well-being. University leaders should demonstrate integrity and transparency to create trust and loyalty among academic staff (Ahmad et al., 2018).
- **Integrate Ethical Decision-Making Workshops**: Conduct training sessions focusing on ethical decision-making, highlighting real-world scenarios. This enhances leaders' skills and sets a standard for ethical behaviour that trickles down to all staff members (Putranta, 2020).

2. Create a Supportive Environment to Foster Innovation and Engagement:
   Ethical leadership has a positive influence on innovative work behaviour and work engagement. By fostering supportive relationships and valuing staff contributions, leaders can enhance organizational creativity and productivity (Jia et al., 2022)

3. Encourage Growth and Community Citizenship Behaviour:
   Leaders who behave ethically and support subordinates' success can increase employee engagement and community involvement among staff. Such approaches promote an environment where academic staff contribute positively to their institution and the broader community (Jia et al., 2022)

4. **Leverage Emotional** Healing for Enhanced Commitment:
- Emotional healing and effective leadership behaviours are linked to higher organizational commitment among staff. Therefore, university leaders should be trained to develop their staff's emotional healing, which can improve their ability to offer emotional support and foster stronger team cohesion (Nordin, 2012)
- Provide Emotional Support Mechanisms: the KSA University leaders should offer psychological support services, such as counselling and peer-support networks, to help academic staff manage stress and work-related challenges. This reinforces a culture of care and emotional healing (Crawford & Johns, 2018).

5. Helping Subordinates to Grow and Succeed
- : The KSA University leaders should support Staff holistically by prioritizing professional development opportunities, mentorship, and collaborative research to help faculty grow and succeed. They should pay more attention to the staff's well-being through policies that ensure emotional healing and support. This can include regular feedback, counselling services, and a caring culture that recognizes personal challenges (Crawford & Johns, 2018).

6. Develop Tailored Professional Development Programs:
- The KSA University leaders should implement programs supporting academic staff's continuous professional and personal growth, such as workshops, mentorships, and seminars on leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and teaching innovation. This helps staff feel valued and fosters a culture of lifelong learning (Komarraju et al., 2010).

7. Recognize and Reward Ethical Behaviour:
- Establish recognition programs that reward staff members who exhibit strong ethical behaviour and contribute to a positive work culture. Such incentives motivate others to

emulate these practices, fostering an ethical and supportive environment (Shareef & Atan, 2019).

8. Facilitate Workplace Friendships and Collaboration:
- Encourage collaborative projects and social interactions among staff to strengthen workplace friendships. These relationships enhance job satisfaction and support a positive response to ethical leadership (Liu et al., 2013).
9. Empower Academic Autonomy:
- Support staff autonomy by involving them in decision-making processes related to their roles and the curriculum. This approach boosts motivation, engagement, and a sense of ownership in their work (Shareef & Atan, 2019).
- Organizations can enhance engagement by involving employees in decision-making and respecting their input. This participatory approach improves morale and leads to better decision outcomes as employees feel more invested in the organization's success.

Limitation and Future Studies
Like other studies, this study has several limitations during the research process. These limitations should be considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings. The identified limitations provide worthwhile opportunities for further studies.

Limited Context
This study is confined to a specific context within the academic sector (Higher Education institutions) in the KSA. Subsequently, the results may not apply to other cultural contexts, geographical regions, or industries. Therefore, to enhance the reliability and applicability of the findings, future research should aim to replicate this study in a range of settings encompassing diverse cultural backgrounds, geographical locations, and industries. Such an approach will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and facilitate a broader generalization of the findings. Future studies should include governmental and nongovernmental organizations and the private sector to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the servant leadership-performance relationship.

Data Collection Methodology
The data collection for this study relied solely on online surveys, which can introduce potential biases and limitations. Using a single data collection method may limit the depth of participant insights. In future research, employing mixed-method approaches or gathering data from various sources is advisable to ensure the findings' validity, reliability, and richness. Combining quantitative data with qualitative insights can lead to a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the servant leadership-performance link (Ren & Shen, 2024).

Data Analysis Methods
The data was adopted using a cross-sectional design and analysis method. The cross-sectional design may limit the generalizability of the results. Therefore, longitudinal research is recommended (Aslam & Sahibzada, 2023). Conducting a longitudinal study examining how servant leadership, work engagement, and employee creativity change over time can help to understand the complex relationship between servant leadership and performance.

Mediating Factor

While this study primarily examines the mediating role of employee creativity between servant leadership and employee performance, the possibility of other mediating factors remains unexplored. Future research should investigate additional promising mediator variables that deserve further attention and might contribute to the relationship's complexity. For example, the impact of the innovation atmosphere within an organization could be a relevant mediating factor. Exploring multiple mediators can offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate mechanisms underlying the observed relationships, providing a more holistic perspective.

Further, the mediating effect of moral identity. This variable can mediate the relationship by emphasizing how servant leadership shapes employees' sense of moral responsibility, influencing ethical behavior and performance. Additionally, helping behavior as a mediator variable and servant leaders' culture of support and care can increase employees' cooperative and helping behaviours, enhancing team and organizational performance. Finally, examine the mediating influence of emotional intelligence and resilience. Servant leaders can build emotional resilience and intelligence within their teams, which helps meditate the impact on both creative and performance outcomes.

Conclusion

This empirical study seeks a deeper and broader understanding of the link between servant leadership and employee performance, specifically in the KSA public universities. Also, this study attempted to fill the gap in the existing theoretical literature by investigating the mediating effect of employee creativity on the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance among academic staff in KSA universities. The study model has been developed and proposed based on the previous literature to expand the view of the present situation. The model integrates several interrelationships, including the nature of the link between servant leadership, employee creativity, and employee performance. Finally, this study has successfully achieved its main goal of directly enriching the body of knowledge. This study is expected to offer insights to other researchers to explore and for practitioners to develop and maintain the effective implementation of servant leadership practices and provide approaches to offer employees a higher degree of a creative environment to improve employees' performance. Additionally, the findings of this study have allowed the researchers to fill the research gaps to carry out further research interrelated with effective servant leadership activities, and employee creativity as a mediator variable to improve employees' performance.

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