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Robert Giambatista

*University of Scranton*, robert.giambatista@scranton.edu

Robert McKeage

*University of Scranton*, robert.mckeage@scranton.edu

Jeremy Brees

*Northern Arizona University*, jeremy.brees@nau.edu

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# Cultures of Servant Leadership and Their Impact



**ROBERT L. MCKEAGE**  
SCRANTON, PA, USA



**ROBERT C. GIAMBATISTA**  
SCRANTON, PA, USA



**JEREMY R. BRES**  
FLAGSTAFF, AZ, USA

## **Abstract**

*Servant Leadership has primarily been studied at the level of individual leaders and their impact, yet Greenleaf, who first formally proposed the idea in 1970, also considered the construct as an important institutional element. Further, because it is values-based, and culture is the organizational mechanism for developing and transmitting shared values, an organizational lens for studying servant leadership is also needed. The current study of three firms examines organizational differences in servant leadership. We found organizational differences in levels of servant leadership, suggesting a cultural explanation. We also found that individual (i.e., supervisor) and organizational (i.e., cultural) servant leadership have different effects on employee outcomes, suggesting a unique asset attributable to a culture of servant leadership. Finally, we found that employees high in core self-evaluation are more likely to identify leaders with a servant leadership orientation, suggesting that such individuals can facilitate cultural transmission of servant leadership in an organization. Implications to theory and practice are discussed.*

## **Introduction**

Servant leadership (SL) continues to attract both scholarly (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018, e.g.) and practitioner (Sinek, 2017, e.g.) attention. Servant leadership has been defined variously as “The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first,” (Greenleaf, Center for Servant Leadership), or “Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge,” (Sinek, 2015) and as “leaders who are best able to motivate followers are those who focus least on satisfying their own personal needs and most on prioritizing the fulfillment of followers’ needs ” (Liden et al. 2014, in characterizing Greenleaf’s 1970 book). Servant leadership bears some similarities to ethical leadership (Center for Ethical Leadership, 2014), authentic leadership (Kruse, 2013), and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985).

However, ethical leadership focuses on an approach to leadership grounded in moral principles and virtue, authentic leadership centers on self-awareness, leading from the heart, and a long-term vision, and transformational behavior focuses on specific leader attributes and behaviors that transform followers, who are seen as instruments towards organizational

ends. This contrasts with the crux of servant leadership, which is an emphasis on followers and their professional and personal growth *as ends in themselves*. Thus, while excellent leaders following a different leadership paradigm might sometimes engage in similar behaviors to servant leaders, the intent or motivation behind servant leadership is distinctive. This distinctive element of servant leadership might help explain why Hoch and colleagues' (2018) meta-analysis found stronger support for servant leadership's efficacy than for ethical or authentic leadership.

A deeper similarity between leadership perspectives such as ethical, transformational, and servant leadership is the importance of underlying values driving the behaviors and intended outcomes. In servant leadership, the crucial underlying values are humanistic in nature. Organizations wishing to instill such values already have a well-known tool for doing so: organizational culture. Organizational culture has been defined as, "the shared set of beliefs, expectations, values, norms, and work routines that influence how individuals, groups, and teams interact with one another and cooperate to achieve organizational goals" (Jones & George, 2018: p. 79). There is a vast literature on organizational culture, far beyond the scope of the current study, but some of the most relevant work here is how cultural values are transmitted and maintained in organizational cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996) and which sources tend to create organizational culture (Jones & George, 2018). These frameworks provide a basis for how an organization interested in building a culture of servant leadership can achieve this end.

Interestingly, Robert Greenleaf, the originator and main early proponent of servant leadership, has long emphasized the importance of culture in servant leadership (Broughton, 2011; "Creating a Service Culture", n.d.; "What is Servant Leadership," n.d.). Yet, empirical research on servant leadership to date has focused nearly entirely on the relationship between servant leadership and outcomes at the level of individual leaders affecting individual followers (e.g., Amah, 2018; Cerit, 2010; Chu, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Liden et al., 2008; Liden et al., 2014; Rauch, 2007; Svoboda, 2008). We suspect that this gap in the literature exists because it is natural for the field to focus first on characteristics of individual leaders and their consequences for individual followers, as this helps validate servant leadership's contribution to theory and practice. Nonetheless, because organizational culture is the most likely starting place for a firm to try move towards increasing its overall servant leadership orientation, we seek to contribute to the literature by focusing more at the organizational level and organizational differences.

In the current study, we extend the study of Tischler, Giambatista, McKeage, and McCormick<sup>1</sup> (2015) to examine the imprint of organizational culture as it relates to cultures supportive of servant leadership. Thus, we explore the following research questions: Do firms differ in levels of servant leadership and related employee outcome variables? Are organizational levels of servant leadership as important as individual servant leadership? Is there an individual difference that helps people discern servant leadership?

We will begin with a brief review of servant leadership, and then review cultural perspectives on servant leadership, then present our theory and hypotheses, our methodology and results,

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<sup>1</sup> The current study employs the same data set and conducts additional analyses aimed at exploring these more nuanced relationships in the context of an organizational culture of servant leadership. The previous study was focused on individual-level outcomes deriving from servant leadership.

and conclude with a discussion of our results and their implication for the field and for practice.

## **Literature Review of Servant Leadership**

Servant leaders ground their style of leadership in developing followers as whole human beings, not just as professionals or as instruments towards organizational goals (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). This foundation is akin to the moral principle of human dignity, which was described by Byron (2006, p.89) as “the bedrock principle of ethics”. Byron goes further to argue that in treating people as ‘resources’ or ‘inputs’, firms implicitly reduce employees to disposable parts, as mere instruments to organizational purposes. Servant leadership instead sees human growth and organizational effectiveness as two symbiotic manifestations of the same pursuit, and is built on an approach that reconciles them. In fact, the values driving servant leadership has been described as being based on humility and respect for others (Russell, 2001).

Servant leaders are characterized by vision, integrity, honesty, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment (Russell & Stone, 20002). More recently, Liden et al. (2008) characterized seven facets of servant leadership as emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. While these are impressive lists of traits, it is easy to see how such attributes may be more indirectly and distally linked to performance than the “4 Is” of transformational leadership. While modeling is essentially the same as idealized influence, performance is more proximal to inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation than some aspects of other leadership models. For example, the virtue of trust is likely to lead to, among other things, individualized consideration, and the virtue of empowerment is likely to lead to intellectual stimulation. Thus, it is not surprising that transformational leadership, whose behaviors are more explicitly proximal to organizational performance, has a more impressive empirical literature associated with it (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011; Tepper et al., 2018). For example, Hoch et al.’s (2018) meta-analysis found 74 studies of transformational leadership and job performance, but only 8 for servant leadership. Still, the authors found that servant leadership accounted for 13% of incremental variance in job performance beyond that explained by transformational leadership.

Servant leadership has been associated with job performance (Ciniara & Bentein, 2016; Liden et al., 2008; Liden et al., 2014), job satisfaction (Amah, 2018; Chu, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Svoboda, 2008; Tischler et al., 2015), organizational commitment (Cerit, 2010; van Dierendonck et al., 2014), organizational citizenship behaviors (Newman et al., 2017), engagement (de Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2014), absenteeism and attrition (Rauch, 2007), trust in the manager (Chan & Mak, 2014), and leader-member exchange (Amah, 2018), and even core self-evaluation (Tischler et al., 2015).

Macro-level outcomes such as secondary school performance (Herbst, 2003; Lambert, 2004), store performance (Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2014), school climate (Black, 2008), organizational climate (Lambert, 2004) and team effectiveness (Irving & Longbotham, 2007; Schaubroeck et al., 2011) have also been shown to benefit from servant leadership. Thus, the efficacy of servant leadership in promoting individual and organizational outcomes is established.

More proximal to the individual study, individual servant leadership predicted job satisfaction and core self-evaluation (Tischler et al., 2015). The current study builds on these findings to predict, given our main thesis that firms differ in servant leadership levels generally, that firms with higher levels of servant leadership will also show greater satisfaction and higher levels of employee core self-evaluation.

### **Servant Leadership: A Cultural Perspective**

Despite the field's focus on individual leaders and their influence on individual followers, Greenleaf himself has strongly asserted the need to also think of servant leadership as a cultural and institutional phenomenon (Greenleaf, 2009). While this idea would seem to inspire much empirical consideration, we could find only one highly-cited empirical article (Liden et al., 2014) that focused primarily on organizational aspects of servant leadership.

Greenleaf<sup>2</sup> saw the development of servant leaders fulfilling another purpose, and that was to promote and develop servant institutions. While organizations generally provide for the welfare of society, Greenleaf observed that many organizations were not caring, oftentimes too powerful, impersonal, and at times corrupt. Thus, he suggested the need for servant institutions. For an institution to become a "servant institution" it must reach "all employees, customers, business partners and communities." He contended that organizations should revamp their hierarchical structures into a flatter model and shift from the hierarchical principle to a "team of equals." Thus, the leader(s) of the organization needs to function as "parimus inter pares – first among equals," and "lead by persuasion not by coercive power." Such a paradigm shift would seem to require a strong culture to support and effect this change in approach. Research suggests that servant leadership significantly affects organizational culture (Sihombing, Astuti, Musadieg, Hamied, & Rahardjo, 2018) reflected by excellent service, innovation, modeling, professionalism, integrity and cooperation.

To build such a culture, one where members possess more creative opportunities to grow and open up their potential to fully become servant leaders, the institution needs to eliminate elements such as coercive power, private gain, and competitive struggles for survival. Greenleaf suggested promoting values such "put others first" rather than "watch out for number one," moving from "survival of the fittest" norms to "we are all in this together," and from "never trust anyone" to "trust everyone unless they prove themselves untrustworthy." Caring for others is the central motivation within servant leadership and researchers have found evidence that servant leadership styles in organizations are positively associated with corporate social responsibility efforts/initiatives (Sengupta & Sengupta, 2018).

Greenleaf went further, suggesting that organizations promote the small things in life, such as "greeting people, speaking kindly, smiling, fostering humor recognizing and rewarding success" and even "celebrating important occasions." Servant institutions thus exhibit a strong sense of community, where members look out for one another and advance strong team building relationships. But how do organizations reach this desired end state? Servant leadership is built upon values, and organizational culture is described as those shared values and assumptions that define the character of a firm (Schein, 1992). Thus, we review the principles of organizational culture to understand determinants of culture and how cultural values are transmitted.

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<sup>2</sup> The many brief quotes in the paragraphs on Greenleaf and organizations are from Greenleaf's (2009) essay, "*The Institution as Servant.*"

Culture and structure derive in part from a firm's environment, their strategy, technology, and human resources (Duncan, 1979). This may be why servant leadership seems especially prevalent in non-profit and religious organizations, as their environment and strategy are highly amenable to the approach. However, the impressive list of employee and organizational outcomes cited earlier clearly point to opportunities for servant leadership in for-profit organizations as well. As for human resources, organizations can attract and retain both leaders and subordinates who value servant leadership and are responsive to its presence. Attributes of the millennial generation such as need for immediate and intensive feedback, anxiety/depression, and external locus of control (Twenge & Campbell, 2008) strongly suggest that younger workers will respond favorably to the approach. Thus, two ways to establish norms of servant leadership are by integrating it into corporate strategy and human resource practices.

Building a culture of servant leadership, given a firm's pre-existing strategy and human resource practices, requires transmission of cultural content. These means have been identified by Deal and Kennedy (1982) as the founding imprint, socialization, symbolic events like rites, rituals, and ceremonies, and communication such as stories, language, and myths. These elements have been linked to organizational flourishing; for example, socialization has been tied to organizational performance (Balci et al., 2016), while rituals have been linked not only to strong organizational culture (Erhardt et al., 2016) but individual performance (Brooks et al., 2016). Storytelling has been linked to employee engagement (Gustomo et al., 2019), and the founding imprint was a factor in explaining how CEO ethical leadership translates to firm performance (Eisenbeiss et al., 2015). Thus, firms can build and transmit a value-adding culture over time generally, and servant leaders are likely to effectively use these cultural elements when they have a leadership history conducive to such leadership, engage in socializing new members to norms associated with servant leadership, use the language of servant leadership in how members communicate with each other, or embed the values of servant leadership into organizational events with symbolic content.

Servant leadership has desirable organizational outcomes associated with it (Black, 2008; Herbst, 2003; Hunter et al., 2013; Lambert, 2004; Liden et al., 2014) and it seems self-evident that organizations cannot expect servant leadership to develop fully and naturally through outside hiring, but rather must cultivate it through organizational values, socialization, reinforcement, top management buy-in, and related means. Yet, we only found one prominent empirical study of servant leadership and culture (Liden et al., 2014). This study found that restaurants whose store managers exhibited servant leadership were associated with a serving culture, which in turn benefitted store performance and individual performance outcomes, specifically job performance, creativity, and customer service behaviors. Our study focuses more deeply on the role of worker attitudes (job satisfaction) and the worker's core self-evaluation and also directly compares the influence of the direct supervisor's servant leadership to that of the overall organizations.

## **Theory & Hypotheses**

Servant leadership contrasts greatly with traditional, top-down approaches to leadership such as transactional leadership (Burns, 1978), directive leadership (House, 1996), or leadership founded in Theory X motivation (McGregor, 1957). It even contrasts with transformational leadership, not only in the style's substance but in viewing followers as ends in themselves and not primarily as means to organizational ends. Because servant leadership is both values-

based and non-traditional, a firm wishing to instill servant leadership is most likely to proactively nurture a culture fostering such values to both attract and develop servant leaders throughout the organization. Absent such a culture, servant leadership is unlikely to take root in an organization, and only be seen sporadically and more or less randomly among a few committed managers and leaders. Some firms are likely to commit to servant leadership as a function of top leadership and culture. Such firms are likely to possess engrained servant leadership throughout the organization. Thus, we expect:

**H1. *Firms differ in the overall level of servant leadership among their managers.***

Previous research has shown that servant leadership has been associated with individual-level job satisfaction (Amah, 2018; Tischler et al., 2015). One of these studies (Tischler et al., 2015) also found an association with individual-level core self-evaluation. Given the validity of these individual-level findings, firms that commit systemically to a culture of servant leadership, manifested through higher levels of reported servant leadership, should possess individual employees who benefit from such leadership and accordingly report higher levels of job satisfaction and core self-evaluation. In other words, findings at the individual level for servant leadership with job satisfaction and core self-evaluation should aggregate to the organizational level of analysis. Thus, when aggregated across employees:

**H2. *Firms with higher levels of servant leadership will be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and core self-evaluation across employees.***

Job satisfaction (JS) and core self-evaluation (CSE) differ as individual difference variables not only in their content domain, but also in their stability over time. Job satisfaction is an attitude, and attitudes have generally been portrayed as readily changeable (Albarracín & Shavitt, 2018; McGuire, Lindzey, & Aronson, 1985). Core self-evaluation has been described as a personality trait (Judge et al., 2003) or similarly as ‘personality-ish’ in that, while relatively stable, it is at least somewhat malleable over time (Kernis & Goldman, 2002; Styvaert, 2011; Tischler et al., 2015). Job satisfaction is likely to vary as a function of regular work interactions (Chen et al., 2011), most of which would involve one’s immediate superior. While we certainly expect that an organizational culture of servant leadership would increase job satisfaction, the relatively ephemeral nature of job satisfaction and the proximity of one’s immediate supervisor to an employee leads us to expect that:

**H3a. *Individual servant leadership will be associated with employee job satisfaction more strongly than will organizational servant leadership.***

On the other hand, since core self-evaluation is less ephemeral, deeper, and more lasting, the prominence of the individual leader’s style and approach will be less important than the employee’s sense of the overall organization’s cultural values regarding servant leadership. Looking more closely at the domain of core self-evaluation, two of its components are generalized self-efficacy and locus of control. An environment enriched with servant leadership will be permeated by leader behaviors conducive to increasing an employee’s self-confidence in successfully completing tasks and projects, and also increasing one’s sense of autonomy and empowerment, conducive to a perceived internal locus of control. Servant leadership also creates psychological safety (Chughtai, 2016), which should reduce anxiety, which in turn should enhance self-reported emotional stability. All of these, however, would be the product of a long and sustained employment experience rich with contacts and networks evidencing and reinforcing a culture of servant leadership throughout the

organization. A few positive interactions with one's immediate supervisor might not be sufficient to "move the needle" on something as personality-like as core self-evaluation. Thus, we expect that:

**H3b. *Organizational servant leadership will be associated with employee core self-evaluation more strongly than individual servant leadership.***

Finally, individuals high in CSE have been shown to also display higher levels of emotional intelligence (Sun, Wang, & Kong, 2014). Thus, people high in CSE are more perceptive and cognizant of the presence of important organizational and leadership behaviors such as servant leadership, and in general, more subtle and discerning. They would be more likely to "see" servant leadership, whereas someone low in CSE might lack the discernment to readily identify what a firm or leader is doing and how it derives (or not) from servant leadership. Further, because the components of CSE are amenable to servant leadership styles (Tischler et al., 2015), high-CSE employees should be more responsive to both individual and organizational servant leadership, as it tends to reinforce and support their self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and emotional stability. This will also benefit organizational culture, as high-CSE individuals are more likely to "buy in" to servant leadership approaches, further strengthening emerging organizational norms supporting servant leadership and creating a virtuous cycle. Thus, we hypothesize:

**H4. *Individuals high in CSE will report higher levels of servant leadership than others.***

## **Methods and Results**

### ***Participants***

Our sample included 511 working adults from three U.S. companies. The three organizations were chosen based on our business contacts. One is a large financial institution and the other two are small technical consulting firms. In return for having their organization participate we offered each company a formal report about their level of servant leadership. We made sure that the survey was sent out by a non-manager (to reduce perceived pressure to bias responses), the survey was done completely anonymously, online, and sent to the holder of the database for the servant leadership instrument we used, not the participants' companies. The survey instrument was sent three times over about three weeks to all employees (including executives) of each firm or to the part of the firm that participated. The response rate was 70%.

Our sample contained 428 workers, 69 managers/supervisors, and 14 executives. Of those who reported gender, 59% were female. Fifty-eight percent of respondents had at least six years of job tenure, and 62% of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49.

### **Instruments**

The survey included two instruments: The Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) (Laub, 1999) and the Core Self-evaluation Scale (CSES) (Judge, et al., 2003).

The OLA was the first servant leadership instrument and has been validated in several studies, even by those who created other servant leadership instruments to find its components (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; van Dierendonck, 2011). Parris and Peachey (2013) reported that no other servant leadership instrument has been cited in more published empirical studies than the OLA. It is a self-report instrument; each member



of an organization rates the leadership of the organization and the organization as a whole. That is, it measures the respondent's *perception* of servant leadership.

The OLA consists of sixty questions to measure servant leadership and another six questions to measure job satisfaction. Each item is on a five-point Likert scale. Thirty-eight servant leadership questions ask about the leader's style and 22 about the organization's climate. Given the literature review above demonstrating that both leader style and behavior and organizational climate can affect individual job satisfaction and performance, and that in each case servant leadership at both levels operate in the same manner, we felt it important to use an instrument that combined both levels of servant leadership.

The OLA is given online through Laub's OLAGroup organization (see OLAGroup.com). All responses are returned to the OLAGroup and the raw data are sent to the researcher. The OLAGroup also produces a formal report about the level of servant leadership for any organization taking the instrument that has 70% or higher participation.

The OLA has been studied and found reliable by several researchers. Laub (1999) found the instrument reliable with  $\alpha = .98$ . Horsman (2001), Ledbetter (2003), Miers (2004) and Thompson (2002) found similarly high alphas. The OLA can be considered to have face validity and concurrent validity given that its results are essentially similar to the results of the other servant leadership instruments (see literature review above) and are closely related to Greenleaf's (1970) theory. Finally, the OLA's face validity combined with its reliability is suggestive of the measure's construct validity.

Although the OLA's six job satisfaction items are original to Laub (1999), Laub found them to have a reliability of  $\alpha = .81$ . Laub's servant leadership and job satisfaction scales have a Pearson correlation of .64 ( $p < .01$ ) (Laub, 1999). Laub (1999) and others tested the relationship of servant leadership to job satisfaction and found reasonably high correlations in different populations (Chu, 2008; Hebert, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Svoboda, 2008; Thompson, 2002).

The CSES (Judge, et.al., 2003) is a brief (12 items) measure of the four dimensions of self-evaluation (self-concept): generalized self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (low neuroticism). These four dimensions were each related to job satisfaction and Judge, et.al. (1997) theorized that combining the four factors would yield a more powerful measure. In a meta-analysis of the four dimensions with both job satisfaction and job performance, Judge & Bono (2001) found that each of the four had a significant impact on both job satisfaction and job performance. In 2003, Judge, et.al. published the CSES instrument to measure core self-evaluation as a single construct.

A later review of the literature (Judge, 2009), after several years of research with the CSES by various authors, and a still later meta-analysis (Chang, et.al., 2012) continued to demonstrate the efficacy of the CSES for both job satisfaction and job performance. In fact, Judge (2009) stated that "... high scores on core self-evaluations ... are related to a broad array of work and no-work criteria, including increased levels of job and life satisfaction, better job performance, higher work motivation, and higher income ..." (p. 59).

### **Variables and Analyses**

Our model employed servant leadership (from OLA, 60 items,  $\alpha = .99$ ), core self-evaluation (CSES,  $\alpha = .84$ ) and job satisfaction (from OLA,  $\alpha = .90$ ) as key variables. Each individual in

the study reported their core self-evaluation, job satisfaction, and the level of servant leadership they perceived.

To test our hypotheses, we employed t-tests for Hypotheses 1 and 2 and regression analysis for Hypotheses 3 and 4. We treated core self-evaluation as somewhat malleable (Tischler et al., 2015), since relationships consistent with CSE correlating to servant leadership would be unlikely to occur unless CSE was not completely fixed over time like a personality trait; instead, we assert that CSE is “personality-ish” but can change somewhat as a function of important predictor variables.

To conduct the regression analysis, we employed several control variables. We controlled for gender, with males coded 1 and females coded 2. and for firm. We also controlled for whether the respondent self-reported as having a supervisory or higher-level management position and treated these as two separate dummy variables.

To reduce concerns about common method variance, we made sure that our H3a model predicting CSE used job satisfaction as a control, and our H3b model predicting job satisfaction used CSE as a control. For H4, we employed both CSE and job satisfaction as controls. We did this because by adding the control variables into the equation first, any such generally-shared variance would be absorbed by the controls, leaving the variance explained by predictor variables much cleaner and less contaminated by any potential common method variance.

## Results

We report our descriptives and correlations in *Table 1*. We did find some significant differences in levels of servant leadership across the three firms in our study. Specifically, firm two respondents reported significantly higher levels of immediate supervisor servant leadership ( $p=.08$ ,  $p<.10$ ) and overall servant leadership ( $p=.07$ ,  $p<.10$ ). Meanwhile, firm three respondents reported lower levels of organizational servant leadership ( $p=-.08$ ,  $p<.10$ ), immediate supervisor servant leadership ( $p=-.16$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and overall servant leadership ( $p=-.13$ .,  $p<.01$ ). These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 1.

**Table 1: Descriptives and Correlations**

Variable	mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Firm 1	.88	.32											
2 Firm 2	.06	.24	-.69***										
3 Firm 3	.06	.24	-.68***	-.06									
4 Gender	1.59	.49	.17***	-.12**	-.11*								
5 Top mgmt	.03	.16	-.16***	.10*	.11*	-.10*							
6 Mgmt	.14	.34	-.23***	.07	.24***	-.11*	-.07						
7 Non-mgmt	.84	.37	.28***	-.11*	-.27***	.14**	-.38***	-.90***					
8 Job Satisfaction	25.30	4.18	.02	.03	-.06	-.08	-.06	-.04	.01				
9 Core Self-evaluations	3.82	.64	.00	.05	-.06	-.01	-.02	.07	-.05	.57***			

10 Org. Servant Leadership	88.76	17.57	.01	.06	-	-.06	.00	-.04	.04	.73	.50		
					.08+					***	***		
11 Supervisory Servant Leadership	149.98	33.38	.06	.08+	-.16	-.06	-.04	-.04	.02	.79	.51	.91	
					***					***	***	***	
12 Total Servant Leadership	238.74	49.95	.04	.07+	-.13	-.06	.03	-.04	.03	.79	.52	.96	.99
					**					***	***	***	***

*N=511*. + indicates  $p < .10$ . \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

We found that job satisfaction showed a higher correlation with immediate supervisor servant leadership ( $p = .79$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than with organizational servant leadership ( $p = .73$ ,  $p < .001$ ), consistent with Hypothesis 3a. Finally, we found that core self-evaluation was correlated with higher levels of organizational servant leadership ( $p = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ), immediate supervisor servant leadership ( $p = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and overall servant leadership ( $p = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 1 examined firm-level differences in reported servant leadership and was tested via unpaired t-tests. While Firm 1 reported lower levels of servant leadership than firm 2 (difference =  $-13.74$ , n.s.), this difference was not significant. The other two firm-level comparisons did yield significant results, however. Both firm 1 (difference =  $27.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and firm 2 (difference =  $41.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ) reported higher levels of servant leadership than firm 3. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 examined firm-level differences in reported job satisfaction and core self-evaluation and was also tested via unpaired t-tests. While only one of the six t-test coefficients for H2 were significant, all of them showed the same pattern as in H1, with the difference between firm 1 and firm 2 being negative and of the least magnitude, the difference between firm 1 and firm 3 being positive and of higher magnitude, and the difference between firm 2 and firm 3 being positive and of the highest magnitude. None of the reported differences in job satisfaction were significant. For core self-evaluation, firm 2 reported higher levels of CSE than firm 3 (difference =  $.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Hypothesis 2 was weakly supported.

**Table 2: T-test results for H1 and H2**

	<b>Firm 1</b>	<b>Firm 2</b>	<b>Firm 3</b>
<b>Observations</b>	450	31	30
Mean Servant Leadership (SL)	239.52	253.26	212.07
SL Standard Error	2.44	4.61	5.42
Mean Job Satisfaction (JS)	25.33	25.81	24.33
JS Standard Error	.20	.62	.81
Mean Core Self-Evaluation (CSE)	3.82	3.96	3.67
CSE Standard Error	.03	.09	.10
<b>Hypothesis 1</b>			
SL Difference between Firm 1 & Firm 2	-13.74		
SL Difference between Firm 1 & Firm 3	27.45**		
SL Difference between Firm 2 & Firm 3		41.19***	

**Hypothesis 2**

JS Difference between Firm 1 & Firm 2	-.47	
JS Difference between Firm 1 & Firm 3	.79	
JS Difference between Firm 2 & Firm 3		1.02
CSE Difference between Firm 1 & Firm 2	-.13	
CSE Difference between Firm 1 & Firm 3	.15	
CSE Difference between Firm 2 & Firm 3		.28*

\* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

Hypothesis 3 examined the role of organizational and supervisory servant leadership in predicting core self-evaluation (H3a) and job satisfaction (H3b). As hypothesized, organizational SL ( $B = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but not supervisor SL ( $B = .03$ , n.s.) predicted core self-evaluation. Also as hypothesized, supervisor SL ( $B = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not organizational SL ( $B = -.01$ , n.s.) predicted job satisfaction. Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 examined the role of core self-evaluation in predicting servant leadership overall. CSE ( $B = .09$ ,  $p < .01$ ) predicted overall servant leadership, as well as predicting organizational SL ( $B = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and supervisory SL ( $B = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4.

**Table 3: Regression Results**

DV	Core Self Evaluation	Job Satisfaction	Overall SL	Organizational SL	Supervisor SL
Hypothesis	H3a	H3b	H4	H4	H4
Firm 1	.05	-.10*	.12**	.03	.17***
Firm 2	.07	-.11*	.13**	.06	.16***
Gender	.04	-.03	-.01	-.01	-.01
Upper Management	-.04	.03	-.01	-.04	.00
Lower Management	.11**	-.05+	.01	-.01	.02
Job Satisfaction	.47***		.72***	.66***	.73***
Core Self Evaluation		.24***	.09**	.11**	.08*
Organizational SL	.18*	-.01			
Supervisor SL	-.03	.68***			
Model R2	.35***	.67***	.63***	.55***	.34***

**Note:** SL is servant leadership

N=511.+ indicates  $p < .10$ . \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Our first hypothesis found that firms do differ in their levels of servant leadership. While this is not direct evidence of servant leadership cultures and their emergence, such cultures would seem to be the primary explanation for how such differences emerge.

While these differences did not translate to significantly higher organizational levels of job satisfaction and core self-evaluation generally, individual differences on these outcomes as a function of servant leadership have been noted (Tischler et al., 2015). Further, we did find that the one firm with the highest levels of servant leadership also reported higher overall core self-evaluation.

We also found differential impacts on outcome variables; supervisory servant leadership was more related to job satisfaction while organizational servant leadership was more related to core self-evaluation, as predicted. Combined with our findings for hypothesis two, our belief

that cultures of servant leadership have transformative and lasting impacts on individuals was supported.

We flipped our perspective in H4 and found that those with higher core self-evaluation reported higher servant leadership, after controlling for other variables. This result provides evidence that some individuals may be more cognizant and attuned to servant leadership than others. The last hypothesis proposes an important mechanism for developing servant leadership cultures – employing individuals who are more likely to be aware of and responsive to its presence. We believe this finding is particularly intriguing, as it suggests the potential for a virtuous cycle between servant leadership and core self-evaluation.

Our research contributes to the literature by demonstrating the potential for looking at servant leadership increasingly from an organizational and cultural perspective. As educators, we regularly work with MBA students who demonstrate basic knowledge about and positive attitudes toward servant leadership. Thus, from a practical standpoint, the primary question is not so much whether servant leadership *works* but rather *how to make it work*.

One way firms can make it work is through top management attitudes and top-down contagion (Liden et al., 2014), but another contribution of our study hints at a bottom-up means to further facilitate servant leadership cultures. Employing individuals with high core self-evaluation creates a receptive environment for the contagion of servant leadership. We believe this to be a promising avenue of future research and encourage scholars to consider related constructs like emotional intelligence as possibly facilitating the spread of such cultures in organizations. But the most important contribution of our work, particularly as evidenced through H1, H3a, and H4, is that a culture of servant leadership matters – and savvy individuals pick up on it, with positive results.

Our study has limitations. The current study was part of a larger program of research in servant leadership rather than solely focused on an examination of culture, thus our findings and research questions arrive at cultural explanations for servant leadership somewhat indirectly. Future scholars should be encouraged to examine culture more directly to learn more about the establishment and transmission of servant leadership norms. Also, while we are grateful for the access we had to three firms, subsequent research would benefit from either access to more firms or to have deeper access (interviews, etc.) to those firms studied to help tap into the role of culture in servant leadership's emergence. Finally, our study is unable to establish causality, and we would also particularly encourage future scholars to consider longitudinal designs. This is primarily because, as a construct in positive psychology, we believe servant leadership's emergence and benefits are likely to have a mutually reinforcing, snowball effect over time.

We close by arguing that servant leadership is ready for the “big time” as a leadership theory. What we mean by this is that business schools and survey texts in management seem to touch on the construct only lightly, if at all. By taking a broader research perspective and examining the antecedents of servant leadership emergence and dissemination, and studying its impacts on the development of employees and organizational effectiveness over time, servant leadership may have the potential to rise in prominence as one of the most indispensable and value-adding leadership ideas of our time.

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## About the Authors

**Dr. Robert C. Giambatista** is an associate professor at the University of Scranton. He received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999. His research interests include group processes, leadership, diversity, and experiential learning. His teaching interests include organizational behavior, ethics and social responsibility, and negotiation. Dr. Giambatista can be contacted at [robert.giambatista@scranton.edu](mailto:robert.giambatista@scranton.edu).

**Robert McKeage, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor, Director of the Business Leadership Honors Program, and Alperin Teaching Fellow at the Kania School of Management, University of Scranton. His research interests are leadership, emotional intelligence, and group dynamics. Dr. McKeage can be contacted at [robert.mckeage@scranton.edu](mailto:robert.mckeage@scranton.edu).

**Dr. Jeremy Brees** is an assistant professor of Management at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. His research interests include attribution theory, accountability, abusive supervision, and various leadership topics. Dr. Brees can be contacted at [Jeremy.brees@nau.edu](mailto:Jeremy.brees@nau.edu).