



## Fostering Work Performance: The Role of Servant Leadership, Work Engagement, and Knowledge Sharing

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### Abstract

Given the important role of leadership and knowledge resources in improving work performance of employees, this paper aims to explore influence of servant leadership on employee engagement, knowledge sharing and work performance. This study has developed a proposal research model and applied Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to investigate the proposed research hypotheses using data collected from 185 participants in 12 Universities in Vietnam. The findings of this study confirm the significant impacts of servant leadership on work performance and reveal that knowledge sharing behaviors has a greater impact on work performance compared to the effects of employee's work engagement on work performance. In addition, work engagement and knowledge sharing of employees significantly mediate the relationship between servant leadership and work performance of employees. This study has advanced the understanding of an effective pathway for higher education institutions to improve work performance of employees. In particular, the study has provided effective mechanisms and specific directions for Vietnamese Universities to promote work performance through various mediating factors.

**Keywords:** Servant leadership; Work engagement; Knowledge sharing; Work performance

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### Introduction

Employee performance has always been an important topic and has attracted much attention from many scholars because it is very important for the competitiveness and survival of an organization in today's competitive environment (Ohemeng et al., 2018; Iskamto, 2020). According to Ohemeng et al. (2018), "in the current rapidly changing environment, effectively managing employee performance has become not only the norm, but the sine qua non, especially in the public sector" (p. 274). As a result, leaders and their organizations are trying to improve the work performance of employees as an effective way to cope with competition and changes in the business environment. Current research indicates that leadership is a key determinant of employee performance because of its direct and indirect effects on employee motivation and behavior such as trust, satisfaction, and work engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Ohemeng et al., 2018; Zeeshan et al., 2021; Rahal &

Farmanesh, 2022). Among different leadership styles, servant leadership has attracted research interest in the field of organizational studies in the last decades with its special attention to the leader's role as a servant, putting the needs of others first to consequently foster work performance and the other key outcomes of an organization (Newman et al., 2017; Saleem et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2021; Rahal et al., 2022). Originating from the important role of servant leadership on the work performance of employees and key outcomes of an organization, this study attempts to explore the effects of servant leadership on work performance of employees in the context of higher education institutions via the mediating role of work engagement and knowledge sharing. This study is expected to bring deeper insight into the effective pathway for organizations to foster work performance of employees by following reasons.

First, existing literature suggests that competition among higher education institutions is becoming increasingly fierce in student recruitment, financial matters, use of technology, and provision of diverse curricula (Yang et al., 2023). To make meaningful differences, educational institutions have continuously researched the right path and strategic direction to promote the human factor to create competitive advantages in higher education. Studies by Edward Godbless (2021), Ahmed et al. (2022) and Alyouzbaky et al. (2024) indicated that leadership and employee engagement are important factors that link employee characteristics and organizational factors to improve job performance and provide competitive advantage for higher education institutions. Therefore, this study will focus on exploring and providing implications to enhance employee performance at Vietnamese higher education institutions through clarifying the roles of servant leadership, work engagement and knowledge sharing.

Second, current literature has spotlighted the influential roles of servant leaders in leadership practice to improve work engagement (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2021; Rahal et al., 2022) and knowledge sharing (Tuan, 2016; Nauman et al., 2022; Haque, Islam & Soh, 2024). However, according to author knowledge, studies to explore the simultaneous influence of servant leadership on work engagement and knowledge sharing behaviors are still very sparse. This limits the understanding of managers and researchers in determining the mechanism and extent of influence of servant leadership on factors related to employee morale and behavior. Moreover, employee engagement and knowledge sharing behavior are important factors in determining the results and competitive advantages of the organization. Therefore, exploring the relationship between servant leadership, engagement and knowledge sharing behavior is very necessary.

Third, previous studies indicated that servant leadership is one of the superior leadership styles in improving employee performance through its positive effects on employees' psychological capital, work motivation, and work engagement because servant leaders always focus on the interests and development of employees first (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2021; Rahal et al., 2022; Haque et al., 2024). However, research and exploration of the impact of servant leadership on work performance through different mediating mechanisms in terms of knowledge sharing and work engagement in the context of universities are still limited. Consequently, to bridge the above research gaps, this study focuses to clarify the effect of servant leadership on work performance through the mediating role of work engagement and knowledge sharing behaviors in the context of Vietnamese SMEs by posing the following research questions as.

*RQ1. Does servant leadership positively impact work performance?*

*RQ2. Does servant leadership positively impact work engagement and knowledge sharing?*

*RQ3. Do work engagement and knowledge sharing behaviors significantly mediate the relationship between servant leadership and work performance?*

To fill the theoretical gaps and clarify the above research questions, the paper will develop an integrated research model to investigate and explain the relationship between the latent factors. The structural equations modeling (SEM) is applied to examine the correlation between the research variables in the proposal research model using the data collected from 185 participants in 12 Universities in Vietnam. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical initiatives on servant leadership practices to foster work performance of employees.

## Literature Review

### Theories of servant leadership, work engagement, knowledge sharing and work performance

#### *Servant leadership*

Servant leadership was first defined by Robert Greenleaf who described servant leadership as a person that wants to serve. Servant leadership focuses on people and engages in moral thinking (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The concept of servant leadership refers to a distinct style of managers with a focus on serving others while simultaneously practicing listening, building consensus, and providing foresight (Saleem et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2021). According to Graham (1991) servant leaders place the interests of those served above their own. Servant leaders emphasize moral obligations with various stakeholders, including society in general. Literature highlighted that servant leaders are ethical, socially responsible, and emphasize the interests and development of their followers (Bao et al., 2018; Zeeshan et al., 2021; Truong & Le, 2025).

#### *Knowledge sharing*

Knowledge sharing is widely accepted as the activities of exchanging knowledge and experience among employees in organization (Islam et al., 2018; Le & Lei, 2019; Ha & Le, 2023; Le & Ha, 2023). Knowledge sharing processes enable employees to provide important information and knowledge to help others, solve problems and develop ideas, and work effectively with others. Knowledge sharing activities not only help employees complement their new and valuable knowledge to address individual tasks but also help them generate breakthrough ideas and solutions to enhance the organization's innovation capabilities (Phong et al., 2018; Le & Le, 2023; Son & Phong, 2023; Tran et al., 2023; Le & Son, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025), work performance (Kang et al., 2008; Henttonen et al., 2016; Deng et al., 2023), and organizational performance (Le & Tran, 2020; Son et al., 2020; Le & Le, 2021).

#### *Work engagement*

Work engagement represents a positive work state that improves organizational performance. It is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Vigor refers to “high levels of energy and mental resilience while working and by the willingness and ability to invest effort in one’s work” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Employees with high levels of vitality typically demonstrate a willingness and persistence in investing effort in performing tasks at work (Karatepe & Demir, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2020; Islam & Alam, 2024). Dedication is characterized by a strong sense of importance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, purpose, and challenge to accomplish goals (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Ahmed et al., 2020). Dedication is like involvement and is conceptualized as a psychological identification that a person has with his or her work (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Ahmed et al., 2020). Absorption is described as a state of complete immersion, in which time passes quickly, and one finds it difficult to detach from the task at work (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Ahmed et al., 2020). It is associated with intrinsic enjoyment, while losing self-awareness while working (Alarcon & Edwards, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2020). Generally, work engagement involves an increased emotional and intellectual connection that employees have with their organization, supervisor, co-workers, or position that causes them to exert more effort when performing tasks (Ahmed et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2024).

#### *Work performance*

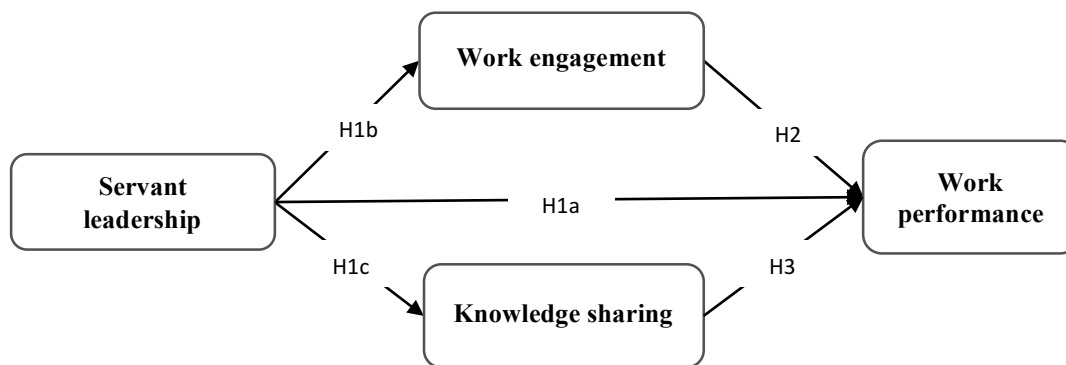
Employee work performance is important because it forms the overall performance of the organization (Berberoglu & Secim, 2015; Çetin & Aşkun, 2018). It is the sum of goals achieved by a given employee (Griffin, 2004; Çetin & Aşkun, 2018). It includes the individual's behavior related to the production of services and goods (Çetin & Aşkun, 2018; Zefeiti et al., 2017). Scholars define work performance as the aggregate result of the employee's positive behavior, ability and effort to complete the job and achieve the organization's goals (Campbell, 1990; Wang et al., 2010; Zefeiti et al., 2017).

## Research Hypotheses

### *The influence of servant leadership on work engagement, knowledge sharing and work performance*

In the work titled “A systematic literature review of servant leadership theory in organizational contexts”, Parris and Peachey (2013) pointed out that servant leaders seek a higher plane of performance and their main motivation in the leadership role is the desire to serve their employees. Therefore, the followers of servant leaders have high levels of commitment and loyalty, which are likely to contribute to higher levels of productivity (Saleem et al., 2020). Many previous studies have identified the positive impact of servant leadership on performance levels, such as team performance (Schaubroeck et al., 2011), corporate performance (Peterson et al., 2012), innovation capability (Truong & Le, 2025), financial performance of organizations (Ruschman, 2002) and individual performance (Jaramillo et al., 2015). In particular, the positive effect of servant leadership on work performance is also confirmed by several recent studies with the motivation that servant leaders provide autonomy and self-sufficiency, leading to higher levels of employee work performance (Gašková, 2020; Saleem et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2024). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis (see Figure 1):

*H1a: Servant leadership positively affects work performance of employees*



**Figure 1. The proposed research model**

Leadership is widely recognized as one of the important antecedents of employee engagement as recognized in previous studies (Shuck & Herd, 2012; Ilyas et al., 2024; Islam, Alam, Somu, Manirajah & Abdullah, 2025). Although previous studies have explored and shown the influence of typical leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, ethical leadership and inclusive leadership on employees’ work engagement (Alamri, 2023; Ilyas et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024), scholars have not paid much attention to explaining the relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement although servant leadership is considered to be more comprehensive, encompassing all aspects of leadership, which has some similarities with those leadership styles (Penger & Cerne, 2014; Schaufeli, 2015; Zhou et al., 2022). However, empirical research has demonstrated the significant impact of servant leadership on employee’s work engagement because servant leaders are committed to providing opportunities for employees to build new skills and knowledge and supporting employees to achieve their goals using their talents and intellectual abilities (Bao et al., 2018; Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). Based on these arguments, this study proposes the hypothesis as follows.

*H1b: Servant leadership positively affects work engagement of employees*

Knowledge sharing involves capturing and acquiring the knowledge that would benefit the organization and sharing it inside the organization through formal or informal channels (Tuan, 2016; Bou et al., 2021; Le & Le, 2023; Than et al., 2023). According to Bou et al. (2021), creating a knowledge sharing climate in organization is possible through strong leadership and a supportive environment. Leadership, therefore, can enhance or detract knowledge sharing intention among employees (Carmeli et al., 2011). As argued by Rafferty and Griffin (2006) Servant leaders go further

than the other employee-centered leadership styles (such as transformational, authentic and ethical leadership) in emphasizing their employees' development and well-being as whole people. The model of servant leadership constitutes a supportive atmosphere at work with empathy for their followers that might foster knowledge sharing among employees (Van Dierendonck, 2011; Bou et al., 2021). In return, employees engage in knowledge sharing among them for the leader's serving behavior. A limited number of studies have examined the impact of a leader's role on knowledge sharing behaviors (Wang & Noe, 2010; Le & Le, 2022; Le & Do, 2024) and linked servant leadership with knowledge sharing among employees in public organizations (Tuan, 2016; Bou et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study attempts to understand servant leadership's role in educational institutions to promote employees' knowledge sharing behaviors by proposing following hypothesis:

*H1c: Servant leadership positively affects knowledge sharing behaviors of employees*

### ***The influences of work engagement and knowledge sharing on work performance***

The concept of work performance generally refers to the level of productivity and effectiveness demonstrated individually in achieving goals in a personal sense (Kartal, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019). Work performance is the result of an employee completing his or her tasks within a certain period of time. Previous studies have highlighted the positive association between work engagement and work performance (Rich et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2019). Bakker et al. (2004) stated that job-oriented employees were rated higher than their counterparts in both primary and supplementary roles, indicating that they performed well on tasks and were willing to advance in their jobs. Wefald et al. (2011) demonstrated that highly engaged employees have proactive behaviors in achieving their work goals. Research on work engagement-work performance shows a consensus that work engagement of employees first affects individual-level performance and then affects organizational-level performance (Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2019). Zhu et al. (2016) indicated that employee work engagement reflected by the willingness to help other dedicated employees has an impact on improving performance in work and organizational contexts. In similar vein, Nguyen et al.'s (2019) study confirmed the positive impacts of work engagement of work performance of employee. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: Work engagement positively affects work performance of employees*

Regarding the knowledge sharing- work performance relationship, there are three main lines of argumentation that support positive link between knowledge sharing and individual-level work performance. Specifically, (1) sharing significant amounts of relevant knowledge typically serves as a function of expert individuals. The sharing of knowledge on relevant issues with other organizational members signals the beneficial utilisation of relevant skills and competencies for improving the work results of individuals (Henttonen et al., 2016). Furthermore, sharing relevant knowledge across organizations signals individuals' expertise in relation to other actors and could open up additional possibilities for utilizing this knowledge in ways that lead to improved job performance; (2) sharing considerable amounts of relevant knowledge in an organizational improvement the organizational embeddedness and influence of that particular actor. In a modern organizational environment where the key value-creating resource is knowledge, these central knowledge "hubs" possess great influence and legitimacy through their networks and, accordingly, have greater potential for higher individual job performance (Henttonen et al., 2016); (3) as social capital theory (SCT), knowledge sharing often leads to reciprocity. This means that employees who share significant amounts of work-related knowledge are also more likely to receive relevant knowledge generated by their colleagues with the result that they can use such knowledge to perform better tasks and improve job performance (Henttonen et al., 2016; Le & Do, 2023). Several recent studies have also provided evidence for the positive impact of knowledge sharing on work engagement (Henttonen et al., 2016; Deng et al., 2023; Alyouzbaky et al., 2024). Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H3: Knowledge sharing positively affects work performance of employees*



### ***Mediating roles of work engagement and knowledge sharing on work performance***

The above arguments show that servant leadership has a positive impact on work engagement and knowledge sharing, which in turn has a positive impact on work performance. This supports the mediating role of work engagement and knowledge sharing in the servant leadership-work engagement relationship. In addition, the studies related to organizational context also confirm that different leadership styles (such as transformational, ethical, responsible, and servant leadership) have direct and indirect impacts on work performance through employee work engagement (Kovjanic et al., 2013; Lai et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020) and knowledge sharing behaviors (Masa'deh et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2020; Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Servant leadership indirectly affects work performance via work engagement and knowledge sharing*

## **Research Methodology**

### **Sample and data collection**

The paper used a survey method to collect data from educational institutions in Vietnam during the period from September to December 2024. We contacted the representatives of the personnel departments of universities directly or via e-mail and asked them to assist in distributing the questionnaire and collecting data. To meet the research objectives, the research participants need to be key employees from the offices of administration, human resources, accounting, training, and science and technology departments to ensure that they regularly interact with leaders and have a full understanding of the research topic. This study distributed 260 questionnaires in 12 Universities in Vietnam and received 235 questionnaires back during the formal data collection, of which 185 questionnaires were valid (79.6% valid).

### **Variable measurement**

All items were measured via five-point Likert-type scales ranging from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree) or from “1” (strongly unwilling to) to 5 (strongly willing to). To measure the perception of employees about their supervisors’ behaviors of servant leadership, this study used seven items developed by Liden et al. (2014). To measure work engagement, this study used nine items adapted from the study of Kaya and Karatepe (2020). To measure knowledge sharing, this study used 10 items adapted from the research of Yang et al. (2018). Finally, to measure work performance, the study used 6 items adapted from the study of Kuvaas (2011) (see Appendix 1).

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### ***Measurement model***

This study examines the individual Cronbach’s alpha ( $C\alpha$ ) of the latent constructs to test the reliability of the measures. Table 1 indicated that the  $C\alpha$  coefficients ranged from 0.95 to 0.97, all higher than the recommended level of 0.7, thus ensuring the reliability of the measures.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis and scale reliability of measurement model

Construct	Items	Loading	t-value	Ca	Reliability
Servant leadership (SL)	SL1	0.876***	17.706	0.95	CR= 0.95 AVE= 0.76
	SL2	0.882***	18.159		
	SL3	0.895***	18.622		
	SL4	0.846***	16.510		
	SL5	0.865***	17.332		
	SL6	0.894***	18.159		
	SL7	0.846***	16.527		
Work engagement (WE)	WE1	0.844***	15.716	0.96	CR= 0.96 AVE= 0.74
	WE2	0.861***	22.708		
	WE3	0.868***	16.639		
	WE4	0.865***	16.542		
	WE5	0.893***	17.686		
	WE6	0.855***	16.146		
	WE7	0.876***	17.686		
	WE8	0.886***	17.396		
	WE9	0.811***	14.575		
Knowledge sharing (KS)	KS1	0.791***	13.439	0.95	CR= 0.95 AVE= 0.67
	KS2	0.832***	14.627		
	KS3	0.836***	14.743		
	KS4	0.771***	12.884		
	KS5	0.838***	14.828		
	KS6	0.854***	15.207		
	KS7	0.834***	14.694		
	KS8	0.827***	14.470		
	KS9	0.850***	15.207		
	KS10	0.770***	12.858		
Work performance (WP)	WP1	0.957***	27.74	0.97	CR= 0.97 AVE= 0.87
	WP2	0.915***	24.909		
	WP3	0.927***	26.371		
	WP4	0.933***	27.221		
	WP5	0.937***	27.740		
	WP6	0.926***	26.305		

Notes: Ca  $\geq$  0.7; CR  $\geq$  0.7; AVE  $\geq$  0.5; (-): Fixed items; \*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

Performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the overall measurement model. Table 1 indicated that the model met the Hair et al.'s (2006) convergent validity criteria because (1) all factor loadings range from 0.770 to 0.957 (*larger than 0.6*;  $p < 0.001$ ); (2) CR values range from 0.95 to 0.97 (*higher than 0.7*); and (3) the AVE values range from 0.67 to 0.87 (*greater than 0.5*).

This study used Fornell and Larcker's (1981) measure of AVE to assess discriminant validity (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and discriminant validity

Constructs	Mean	S.D	SL	WE	KS	WP
Servant leadership (SL)	3.37	0.59	<b>0.87</b>			
Work engagement (WE)	3.38	0.63	0.25***	<b>0.86</b>		
Knowledge sharing (KS)	3.36	0.54	0.31***	0.27***	<b>0.81</b>	
Work performance (WP)	3.38	0.69	0.25***	0.31***	0.30***	<b>0.93</b>

Notes: S.D: standard deviation; Diagonal elements (in bold) are the square root of the AVE.

Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE for each construct (diagonal elements in bold) is greater than the correlations among constructs in the model. It, therefore, provided strong support for the construct reliability, as well as for the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales.

## Results

This study performs structural equation modelling to test the hypotheses using AMOS 22.0 and maximum likelihood estimation techniques. Findings in Figure 2 and Table 3 show that all the standardized path coefficients of direct effects are found to be significant and in line with the stated hypothesis. Specifically:

Table 3. Results of the relationship among the constructs

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	t-value	Results
H1a	Servant leadership → Work performance	0.370***	3.730	Supported
H1b	Servant leadership → Work engagement	0.706***	10.516	Supported
H1c	Servant leadership → Knowledge sharing	0.803***	12.109	Supported
H2	Work engagement → Work performance	0.185**	2.696	Supported
H3	Knowledge sharing → Work performance	0.340***	3.990	Supported

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ .

Hypothesis H1a.b.c relating to the effects of servant leadership on work engagement, knowledge sharing and work performance, results in Table 3 show that the direct effects of servant leadership on work engagement ( $\beta = 0.706$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), knowledge sharing ( $\beta = 0.803$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and work performance ( $\beta = 0.370$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) are meaningful and significant. Hypotheses H1a, H1b and H1c are supported.

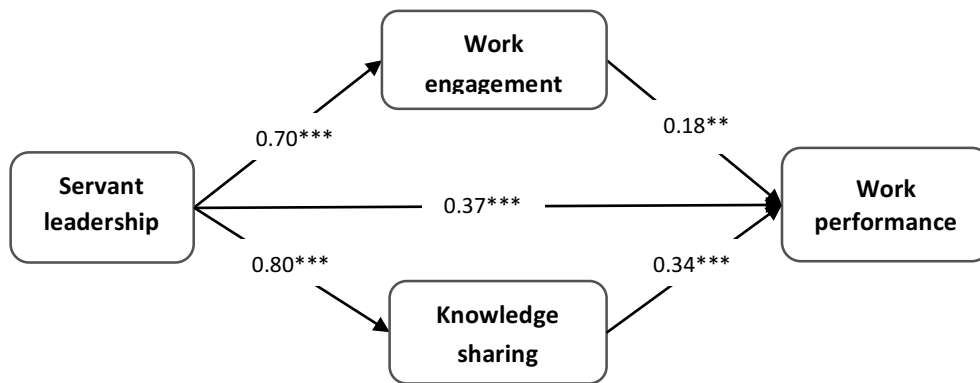


Figure 2. Results of path coefficients in the proposed research model

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$

Relating to H2 and H3, results in Table 3 show that the influence of knowledge sharing on work performance is significant ( $\beta = 0.340$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and greater than the impact of work engagement on work performance ( $\beta = 0.185$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, hypotheses H2 and H3 are confirmed.

Finally, to show the evidence for mediating roles of work engagement and knowledge sharing in the relationship between servant leadership and work performance, this has applied procedure of bootstrap confidence intervals with 2,000 iterations to examine and assert the indirect effects' immensity and statistical significance. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Test for the mediating roles of work engagement and knowledge sharing

Path	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects	Bias-corrected confidence intervals	
				Lower confidence level	Upper confidence level
SL→WE and KS→WP	0.370***	0.403***	0.736***	0.291	0.529

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 4 showed indirect effects of servant leadership on work performance via the mediating roles of work engagement and knowledge sharing ( $\beta = 0.403$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) is statistically significant and lies in the confidence interval. Consequently, hypothesis H4 is significantly supported.

## Discussions and Conclusions

### Discussions

Work performance is considered the most fundamental component of organizational performance, and work performance of employees is the basic component that plays a decisive role in the results and success of the organization (Teece, 2000; Masa'deh et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2020; Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021). The literature shows that performance and competitiveness and superior



advantages of organizations depend on the role of leaders to effectively utilize human resources, knowledge assets, promote employee engagement and enhance organizational innovation capabilities (Teece, 2000; Masa'deh et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020; Le & Vu, 2025; Le et al., 2025; Tuyen & Phong, 2025). By systematizing research works, developing arguments to propose and test research hypotheses, this study has actively contributed to providing insights into solutions and appropriate paths for managers to implement aimed at promoting engagement, enhancing employees' knowledge sharing behavior and improving work performance. Overall, the findings of this article have opened up useful solutions to promote employees' work performance based on internal and "available" resources. The paper has contributed to filling the theoretical and practical gaps in the fields of leadership, organizational behavior and knowledge sharing associated with the context of higher education institutions in Vietnam.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

The findings of this study contribute to enriching the understanding and implications of servant leadership practices to promote work engagement, knowledge sharing and work performance for the following fundamental reasons.

First, this study contributes to the literature by indicating that servant leaders boost employee job engagement and knowledge sharing behavior, and thus, lead to enhanced work performance. Theoretically, in line with social exchange theory, the research findings confirmed that employees being supervised by servant leadership were more engaged with a view to recompense for the organization (Blau, 1964). This implies that in the era of knowledge economy and the 4.0 industrial revolution, when employees' awareness and understanding are increasingly profound and the leader-employee relationship is increasingly equal, monitoring and close supervision are no longer necessary. Instead, facilitating strategies are required to be designed and implemented. In other words, servant leadership practice is considered an optimal choice to enhance employees' work engagement in order to achieve important organizational goals.

Second, the research results show that servant leadership can significantly improve employees' knowledge sharing behavior. In line with the research of Sial et al. (2014) and Kadarusman and Bunyamin (2021), this study implies that practicing servant leadership by caring for employees and encouraging them to actively participate in all organizational activities to create opportunities for employees to experience and develop will promote employees to develop experiments, take risks, and have a positive mentality and behavior to share knowledge with colleagues. This study also opens up a useful solution, emphasizing that through the operation of the servant leadership model in the context of higher education institutions, managers can overcome employees' hesitation and reluctance to share knowledge because personal knowledge and expertise are always considered one of the valuable intangible assets and personal strengths (Phong et al., 2018; Le & Lei, 2019; Le Phong, 2021).

Third, one of the important contributions of the study is to open up a theoretical mechanism in the practice of servant leadership to improve employees' work performance. The empirical results show that servant leadership has a direct and indirect positive impact on the work performance of employees through its effects on work engagement and knowledge sharing behavior. In other words, the research results imply that the principle of always caring for, putting the interests and development of employees first has helped servant leaders truly arouse employee motivation, engagement, and determination as a reciprocal (Kovjanic et al., 2013; Masa'deh et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020; Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021), resulting in enhanced work performance.

Finally, the research findings have important practical implications and meanings in the practice of servant leadership. Specifically, to enhance work engagement, knowledge sharing behavior and work performance, administrators in higher education institutions should focus on practicing leadership in the following basic points: prioritizing and paying attention to the interests and development of employees and the organization; promptly grasping the thoughts, feelings and difficulties in the work of employees to provide timely assistance and guidance to help them complete their assigned work and tasks well; empowering and creating space for employees to have the

opportunity to be autonomous in handling work and difficult situations that arise during the work process; and working in the spirit of service, putting the interests of employees above personal interests and striving to contribute to the development of the community.

### **Research Limitation and conclusions**

Despite the theoretical and practical implications of the study on leadership practices to enhance work performance, certain limitations should be identified for further research. First, the study used a cross-sectional design when examining the relationship between factors at one point in time, so the causal correlation may have differences in the long run. Future studies should conduct longitudinal studies in the long run to overcome this limitation and strengthen the findings. Second, the sample size used in the study was not large, so the results of the study may have certain differences and may not accurately reflect the whole. Future studies should conduct research with larger sample sizes to examine the correlations between servant leadership style, job engagement, knowledge sharing, and job performance to confirm the research findings. Finally, although work engagement and knowledge sharing are considered to be important mediators that help to connect the effects of servant leadership on work engagement, future research should continue to explore and explain the potential mediating role of the other factors such as organizational culture and knowledge management (Do et al., 2019; Tung et al., 2022; Le et al., 2024a) or moderating role of important factors such as market turbulence (Le & Phong, 2023), environmental uncertainty (Le et al., 2024b), knowledge-oriented school culture (Hoang & Le, 2024), and information technology utilization (Le & Ha, 2024) to provide a more thorough understanding and benefits of servant leadership practices in relation to important organizational outcomes, especially in the context of higher education institutions in Vietnam.

### **Conclusion**

This study has actively filled the research gaps and contributed to academic development by proposing a theoretical model, explaining the relationship between servant leadership, work engagement, knowledge sharing and employee performance. The study is significant in explaining the direct and indirect effects of servant leadership on work performance through the mediating roles of work engagement and knowledge sharing. In particular, the findings of this study have contributed to helping higher education institutions in Vietnam identify the key antecedent factors and appropriate paths to improve employee performance through practicing servant leadership.

**Appendix 1. Scale of the latent factors**

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Source</i>
<b>Servant leadership</b>		
SL1	Managers and employees at my organization can tell if something work-related is going wrong	Liden et al. (2014)
SL2	Managers and employees at my organization make employee career development a priority	
SL3	Managers and employees at my organization would seek help from others if they had a personal problem	
SL4	Managers and employees at my organization emphasize the importance of giving back to the community	
SL5	Managers and employees at my organization put others' best interests ahead of their own	
SL6	Managers and employees at my organization give others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that they feel is best	
SL7	Managers and employees at my organization would not compromise ethical principles to achieve success.	
<b>Work engagement</b>		
WE1	At my work, I feel bursting with energy	Kaya and Karatepe (2020)
WE2	At my work, I feel strong and vigorous	
WE3	I am enthusiastic about my work	
WE4	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	
WE5	I feel happy when I am working intensely	
WE6	My work inspires me	
WE7	I am proud of the work that I do	
WE8	I am immersed in my work	
WE9	I get carried away when I am working	
<b>Knowledge sharing (KS)</b>		
KS1	Usually, I do my best and offer suggestions while discussing work-related matters with my colleagues	Yang et al. (2018)
KS2	I am usually willing to share my knowledge and experience with others	
KS3	When my colleagues consult me, I am willing to answer their questions as well as I can.	
KS4	I usually record as much as possible when I am writing a document or a report.	
KS5	If something is hard to explain, I gladly give my colleagues a demonstration	
KS6	I am willing to offer less-experienced colleague opportunities to perform	
KS7	When my colleagues are in need, I do my best to offer them needed information and documents	
KS8	When I can't help my colleagues solve their problems, I tell them where to look for assistance	
KS9	I encourage my colleagues when they are facing difficulties at work	
KS10	When I teach my colleagues, I express my ideas in a way in which they can be fully understood	
<b>Work performance</b>		
WP1	I almost always perform better than what can be characterized as acceptable performance	Kuvaas (2011)
WP2	I try to work as hard as possible	

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Source</i>
WP3	I often expend extra effort in carrying out my job	
WP4	I often perform better than can be expected	
WP5	The quality of my work is top-notch	
WP6	I'm very engaged on doing a job while at work	

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