The Intellectual Structure and Evolution of Servant Leadership: Trends, Themes, and Future Research Directions

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ABSTRACT

To chart the intellectual facet of servant leadership research, its developmental trend, and future research strategies, this paper focuses on a bibliometric-based Review of servant leadership research. Based on 1,865 peer reviewed journal articles indexed by the Scopus database between 1977 and 2025, the analysis utilizes Biblioshiny to assess the trends in publications, sources and authors whose works have the most significant impact, patterns of collaboration, and conceptual frameworks. The results indicate that there has been a continuous development of the servant leadership field, and one can witness the growing collaboration among different countries and the presence of strong representation in the leadership, psychology, ethics, and sustainability-focus journals. The thematic and key word analysis show that the major focus is on employee-oriented results, psychological processes, and comparisons with other value-driven leadership approaches, and new themes are appeared regarding sustainability, healthcare, and green servant leadership. The development of the themes also reflects the transition to the conceptual work based on foundations to the context-focused and result-based studies. The combination of bibliometric mapping and conceptual synthesis of the research makes the study consolidate fragmented knowledge, improve the clarity of the theory, and present a future-oriented agenda to direct future servant leadership research.

Keywords: Servant Leader, Servant Leadership, Bibliometric, Conceptual Understanding, Thematic Mapping.

Introduction

The various stakeholder demands in the society have led to a general shift toward values and ethically informed paradigms in leadership scholarship to meet the increasing expectations of sustainability, inclusivity, and accountability to stakeholders. One of these paradigms is servant leadership, which has become one of the most outstanding and permanent leadership styles that introduces a new interpretation of the role of leadership, with service to followers, communities, and the society as the foremost priority (Greenleaf, 1977). As opposed to traditional, leader-focused models that adopt authority, control or charisma, servant leadership develops a follower-focused logic where leadership performance is evaluated by the long-term development, welfare and empowerment of the led (van Dierendonck, 2011).

Servant leadership has experienced a tremendous growth in the last twenty years and has spread across various fields including management, organizational behavior, education, healthcare, hospitality, and public administration. Empirical investigations have continuously attributed favourable results to servant leadership that are not only numerous but also job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, trust, citizenship behavior, ethical climate, and sustainable performance

(Liden et al., 2008; Eva et al., 2019). Later research has further placed servant leadership as an essential tool in responding to modern issues in organisations in terms of sustainability, employee welfare, stakeholder governance and responsible management (Eva et al., 2019; van Dierendonck et al., 2014). Consequently, servant leadership has evolved into a more advanced research domain featuring a large number of empirical foundations.

Though a number of narrative and systematic reviews have compiled subsets of the literature, little evidence-based mapping on how the research on servant leadership has evolved over the years. Bibliometric analyses of servant leadership are thus far few and far between, especially those ones that combine performance patterns, conceptual knowledge, themes, and future research trends into one coherent picture.

This research paper provides a thorough bibliometric based review of servant leadership literature. Based on a substantial body of peer-reviewed articles, the paper aims to (a) trace the development trends and pattern, (b) synthesize the conceptual perspective of servant leadership as conveyed in the literature, (c) draw prevalent and emergent research themes using the method of thematic analysis, and (d) phrase theoretically informed and empirically pertinent future research directions. This work fulfils a gap that exists between descriptive reviews and evidence-based reviews since it presents a systematic, conceptual, and thematic synthesis of the servant leadership topic by incorporating bibliometric techniques into the review process.

This study has three-fold contributions. First, it conceptualizes servant leadership to cross-disciplinary and temporal extents. Second, it offers a review of research trends, patterns and thematic clusters disclosing the intellectual roots and the changing priorities of the servant leadership research. Third, it builds a future research agenda that outlines areas of understudied mechanisms, contextual limits and methodological possibilities to provide future directions to empirical and theoretical research.

Methodology

In this paper, a Bibliometric-based Literature Examination has been utilized to map and synthesize the intellectual framework and development of the servant leadership research. Bibliometric analysis provides a strict and impartial way of filling these gaps. Bibliometric methods allow scholars to determine the publication trends, the most influential journals and authors, intellectual structures, collaboration networks, and the development of themes in a research area by conducting the systematic analysis of large amounts of published research through quantitative methods (Donthu et al., 2021). Bibliometric analysis can be used with conceptual synthesis and thematic mapping as a strong instrument to promote theoretical transparency, establish gaps in research, and suggest sound research agenda of the future.

Scopus database was chosen as the source of data because it is a significant source of high-quality peer-reviewed periodicals in the field of management, business, psychology, and social sciences. The systematic search was performed with the help of the keywords servant leadership, Servant leader and servant manager which was entered in the title, abstract, and keywords fields to make sure that only the studies that have an explicit and substantive interest in servant leadership are included. There was no time limit in order to reach the broadest possible coverage and reflect the entire historical history of the field. In line with the international standards of publications, the search was restricted to journal articles that were published in the English language.Following the duplicate elimination and the filtering of the records, which was done according to these criteria, a final dataset of 1,871 journal articles was retrieved to undergo bibliometric analysis.

The data was exported from Scopus and analyzed with Biblioshiny, the web-based interface of the Bibliometrix package available in R, since it is the most transparent, offers solid analysis, and in high quality bibliometric research, it is gaining more and more acceptability.

The study involved conceptual synthesis and thematic interpretation in addition to bibliometric mapping in order to provide deeper theoretical insight. In order to enhance the conceptual knowledge and give evidence to theory-based interpretation, and to formulate future research directions high impacts studies that are published in ABDC-ranked and FT50 journals were purposely selected and reviewed. These articles enriched the synthesis of the conceptual background of servant leadership and enabled a subtle approach to the identification of thematic clusters.

Conceptual Understanding

Servant leadership is a normative, a relational leadership paradigm that reconstructs the purpose of leadership by giving precedence to the service to the followers, stakeholders, and the society as its guiding principle. Stated originally by Greenleaf (1977), the leader-centric and authority-based approaches with the assumption that the legitimacy of leadership is achieved when an individual has a fundamental dedication to serve others, as opposed to the formal power and hierarchical status. It is based on this, that leadership success is not only judged based on short-term performance results but on long-term growth, independence, and health of followers, which makes servant leadership a very moral and developmental type of leadership.

Servant leadership has its foundations in ethical theory, humanistic values, and stewardship logic. The initial theoretical constructions proposed a series of attributes of empathy, listening, healing, foresight, persuasion, stewardship, and community building as some of the fundamental characteristics of servant-oriented leadership (Spears, 1995). Later research enhanced these premises by theorizing servant leadership as a multidimensional behavior construct. The leading models characterize servant leadership by such behaviors as emotional healing, empowerment of followers, supporting the subordinates to grow and succeed, ethical behavior, placing the interests of followers first, conceptual skills, and generation of value to the community (Liden et al., 2008; Liden et al., 2015). The other conceptualizations are complementary and focus on altruistic calling, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship which will support the perception that servant leadership is a mix of moral intent and relational influence with strategic ability (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006).

One of the main peculiarities of servant leadership, determining its theoretical validity, is the difference in its conceptualization with other value-based leadership styles. Transformational leadership largely mobilizes the development of followers towards organizational goals, but servant leadership views the development of followers as an end in and of itself, organizational performance being considered a by-product and not its main focus (van Dierendonck, 2011). Ethical leadership focuses more on normatively suitable behavior and ethical regulation, whereas servant leadership goes beyond what is moral to being proactive, to the well-being of stakeholders and the creation of communal value. True leadership is self-conscious and congruent with the leader where servant leadership is other-focused which focuses on stewardship and responsibility to various stakeholder constituencies.

Modern syntheses on integrative thinking do further theorize servant leadership in terms of a holistic and multilevel leadership strategy that functions at individual, team, organizational, and social levels. Servant leadership helps to sustain the development of human and social capital and promotes the long-term viability of the organization by building trust, promoting psychological safety, empowerment, and meaningful work. Recent review studies consider servant leadership as followers-oriented leadership style, which is reflected in the consideration of the needs of followers, support of their development, and the external extension of care to the community (Eva et al., 2019). These framing places servant leadership directly in the emerging discussions of sustainability, stakeholder governance and responsible leadership, and points to its usefulness in dealing with the modern organizational and societal issues.

Overall, servant leadership can be viewed as a multidimensional, ethical, and relational leadership concept redefining conventional hierarchies in the leader–follower relationships with service, stewardship, and follower development as the main principles of leadership practice.

Trends and Patterns

- **Description of Extracted Documents**

The bibliometric analysis is conducted on the research of servant leadership topics, published within 1977 to 2025; it includes 1,865 documents of 804 sources, which means the wide spread of the sphere through the academic channels. The rate of annual growth in the literature is 3.34, which indicates the academic stability of the literature. Servant leadership research has an average document age of 5.39 years and 31.29 citations per article, which proves its topicality and significant role in the scholarly community. Conceptual variety of the field is represented by 4,000 author keywords and 1,633 Keywords Plus. The patterns of authorship indicate a high level of collaborative orientation, where 3,882 authors/people and 2.9 co-authors/paper on average with 25.36 per cent foreign co-authors indicates that the research was global and interdisciplinary. The literature is saturated by journal articles (1,765 articles) with 100 review studies, which suggests a mature and more integrative research field.

Table 1: Description of the Database

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1977:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	804
Documents	1865
Annual Growth Rate %	3.34
Document Average Age	5.39
Average citations per doc	31.29
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	1633
Author's Keywords (DE)	4000
AUTHORS	
Authors	3882
Authors of single-authored docs	336
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	400
Co-Authors per Doc	2.9
International co-authorships %	25.36
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	1765
review	100

Sources: Authors' Compilation

- **Publication Trends**

The trend in annual publication shows a clear evolutionary path in the area of servant leadership. The era between 1977 and mid-1990s can be described as extremely low rates of scholarly production, as it is a period of conceptual development and normative establishment of the field after its initial expression. After the decreasing research activity of the late 1990s, the research activity has grown more slowly and finally, there is the start of systematic academic interest and preliminary empirical study around the mid-2000s. A stronger development period then follows between 2009 and 2011 as the scale development grew, which was followed by an empirical validation and cross-disciplinary adoption of servant leadership.

The largest growth comes after 2018 following an increase in the number of publications, which reaches its peak during 2021-2025. This influx is an indicator of increased academic interest as a result of the increased interest in ethical leadership, employee welfare, sustainability and responsible managerial practices.Overall, the temporal pattern suggests that servant leadership has transitioned from a nascent conceptual framework into a mature and rapidly expanding research domain with strong contemporary relevance.

Figure 1: Publication Trend
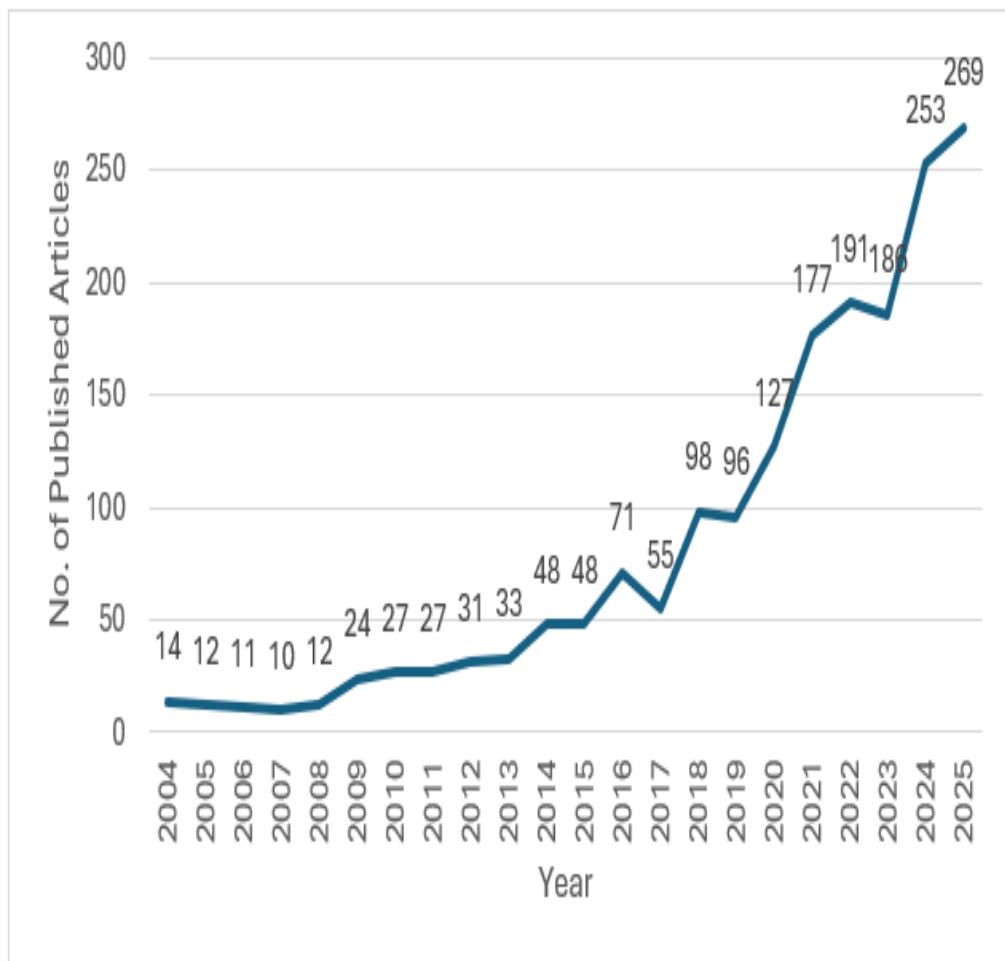
Sources: Authors' Compilation

- **Leading Journals**

    Leadership and Organization Development Journal is the leading one with 66 articles, highlighting its leading position in the development of empirical and conceptual studies of modern leadership paradigm. Second is Frontiers in Psychology with 52 publications because it shows the deep psychology underpinning of the servant leadership research, especially with regard to the well-being, motivation, trust, and leader follower interaction of the employees. This underscores the growing role of psychological theories and approaches in the study of servant leadership. The 36 articles in the Journal of Business Ethics also illustrate the ethical and normative basis of the servant leadership that places the construct in the wider discussions of moral leadership, stakeholder responsibility, and values-based management.

Table 2: Top 20 Leading Journals

Sources	Articles
LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL	66
FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY	52
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS	36
CURRENT PSYCHOLOGY	26
SUSTAINABILITY (SWITZERLAND)	26
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	22
HTS TEOLOGIESE STUDIES / THEOLOGICAL STUDIES	18
SAGE OPEN	18
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	16
PERSONNEL REVIEW	16
COGENT BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT	15
JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES	15
SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY	15
JOURNAL OF MANAGERIAL PSYCHOLOGY	14
LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY	14
ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES	13
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND PUBLIC HEALTH	13
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH	13
JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP STUDIES	12
PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES IN MANAGEMENT	12

Sources: Authors' Compilation

The fact that journals like Current Psychology and Sustainability (Switzerland) added 26 articles each is an indication that the field is taking the direction of individual-based psychological outcomes and sustainability-based organizational behaviors. The fact that there is Sustainability means that an increasing number of scholars are interested in the connection between servant leadership and sustainable development, social responsibility and value creation over the long term. On the same note, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (22 articles) and International Journal of Hospitality Management (16 articles) demonstrate the relevance of servant leadership in service intensive settings where relational and people-based leadership is paramount.

The inclusion of servant leadership as a part of the organizational research is demonstrated through the traditional management and human resource journals such as Personnel Review (16 articles), Journal of Managerial Psychology (14 articles), and Journal of Business Research (13 articles). According to high-impact journals related to leadership like The Leadership Quarterly (14 articles) and Journal of Leadership Studies (12 articles), servant leadership has established credibility in the mainstream of the leadership literature although it was initially normative.

All this distribution implies that research on servant leadership is conceptually varied, and that there is a growing entrenchment of this leadership research in the literature of existing leadership, ethics, psychology, and sustainability.

Influential Authors

Dirk van Dierendonck has the largest number of publications and the highest fractional contribution, as he has been actively and significantly involved in the conceptual establishment, differentiation, and empirical support of the idea of servant leadership.

Robert C. Liden is in second place and has published 18 articles, which are highly informative about the operationalization and measurement of servant leadership. The multidimensional scale development and empirical studies carried out by Liden have made a huge contribution to the methodological rigor and legitimacy of servant leadership studies. Omar M. Karatepe and Pablo Ruiz-

Palomino who have published 15 papers have had a significant role in broadening the scope of servant leadership researches in service, hospitality, and ethical leadership settings, focusing on employee outcomes, well-being, and organizational behavior.

Table 3: Top 20 Influential Authors

Authors	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
VAN DIERENDONCK D	25	9.98452381
LIDEN RC	18	5.93333333
KARATEPE OM	15	5.41666667
RUIZ-PALOMINO P	15	4.66666667
KHAN MM	14	3.28571429
NA NA	14	14
SENDJAYA S	14	4.18333333
AHMED SS	13	2.95238095
ISLAM T	13	3.00238095
ABORAMADAN M	11	4.41666667
EVA N	11	3.05
MUBARIK MS	11	2.41904762
WANG Z	11	3.17619048
ZHANG Y	11	2.79285714
NEUBERT MJ	10	2.78333333
ARIZA-MONTES A	9	1.77738095
DAMI ZA	9	2.71666667
LUU TT	9	8.25
QIU S	9	3.16666667

Sources: Authors' Compilation

The field shows the conceptual and cross-cultural orientation of the field as reflected in the articles by authors like Sen Sendjaya and Muhammad M. Khan who have each added 14 articles. The contribution by Sendjaya has especially been helpful in the perfection of the philosophical and moral aspects of servant leadership and the work by Khan emphasizes the applicability of the construct in new economies and in various organizational environments. The existence of the likes of Nathan Eva, Michael J. Neubert and Becca E. Winston are further indicators of the maturing of servant leadership scholarship with integrative reviews, meta-analytical understanding and empirical elaborations.

The collaborative aspect of the field can also be noted through the distribution of the productivity of authors. Some of the contributors have moderate publication counts with significant fractional contributions, which is likely to indicate the high degree of co-authorship and interdisciplinary collaboration. Also, the variety of author backgrounds, including management, psychology, ethics, hospitality, and healthcare, shows how universal servant leadership can be applied in different fields.

- **Influential Countries**

In United States, the highest number of publications is 303 which constitutes 16.25% of total publications. The relative number of these publications is high at 262 (single-country publication) which implies a well-established domestic research base and a long history of scholarly interest in servant leadership among US institutions. However, it is also significant that the number of multi-country publications (MCP = 13.53) is relatively high (41).

China is in the second position (224 publications, 12.01 per cent) and has a significantly different profile of collaboration. Almost 41.52 percent of the Chinese publications are multi-country partnerships, with the China being well integrated into the global research networks and increasing its contribution to the cross-cultural servant leadership research. Likewise, the degree of international

cooperation in Pakistan is high, with 60.56 percent of its 71 publications engaging more than one country, implying that the servant leadership studies in this country are deeply integrated into the international academic alliances.

A number of the emerging and developing economies contribute to the literature significantly, where the relational, ethical, and collectivist models of leadership are well-received, is underscored by Indonesia (80 publications), India (61), and Malaysia (56). Although these countries are comparatively higher on proportions of single-country publications, Malaysia stands with a high MCP rate of 58.93 which means a lot of international interaction. South Africa (65 publications) also shows a mainly domestic research orientation where only 3.08% MCPs meaning localized scholarly growth in the African leadership setting.

Table 5: Top 20 Influential Countries

Country	Articles	Articles %	SCP	MCP	MCP %
USA	303	16.2466488	262	41	13.5313531
CHINA	224	12.0107239	131	93	41.5178571
INDONESIA	80	4.28954424	76	4	5
PAKISTAN	71	3.80697051	28	43	60.5633803
SOUTH AFRICA	65	3.48525469	63	2	3.07692308
INDIA	61	3.27077748	56	5	8.19672131
MALAYSIA	56	3.00268097	23	33	58.9285714
UNITED KINGDOM	56	3.00268097	34	22	39.2857143
AUSTRALIA	54	2.89544236	36	18	33.3333333
KOREA	44	2.35924933	35	9	20.4545455
SPAIN	42	2.25201072	33	9	21.4285714
TURKEY	41	2.19839142	29	12	29.2682927
NETHERLANDS	29	1.55495979	23	6	20.6896552
CANADA	28	1.50134048	20	8	28.5714286
THAILAND	19	1.01876676	10	9	47.3684211
GERMANY	17	0.91152815	13	4	23.5294118
SAUDI ARABIA	16	0.85790885	9	7	43.75
IRAN	15	0.80428954	12	3	20
ITALY	13	0.69705094	3	10	76.9230769

Sources: Authors' Compilation

European nations portray the average publication levels with high levels of international partnership. MCP rates in the United Kingdom (56 publications), Spain (42), Turkey (41), and the Netherlands (29) are between around 20 and 39 which means that the countries have a good academic integration across the borders. Smaller players like Belgium, Finland, Italy, and France portray a significantly high percentage of MCP which means their research on servant leadership is more collaborative in character.

In general, country-wise distribution shows that the research on servant leadership is spread all over the planet with great contributions made by the North American continent, Asia, and Europe. The difference in global patterns of collaboration also indicates that although certain countries act as the research behinds, others make major contributions in terms of cross-national scholarly networks.

- **Influential Publications**

The citation analysis finds a list of the most influential publications that influenced the theoretical and empirical framework of the research on servant leadership. The article by Avolio et al. (2009) is one of the most popular ones, with 1,774 total citations and high citation per year rate, which demonstrates its

wide-ranging impact on the leadership theory and values-centered leadership paradigms. van Dierendonck (2011) is considered one of the cornerstone sources that provide one of the most comprehensive conceptual reviews and syntheses of servant leadership, which contributes to the strengthening of its theoretical uniqueness.

Table 6: Top 20 Influential Articles

Paper	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
AVOLIO BJ, 2009, ANNU REV PSYCHOL	1774	104.352941	15.9162617
VAN DIERENDONCK D, 2011, J MANAGE	1433	95.5333333	9.98219814
LIDEN RC, 2008, LEADERSH Q	1280	71.1111111	5.72920552
EVA N, 2019, LEADERSH Q	1109	158.428571	23.1594518
EHRHART MG, 2004, PERS PSYCHOL	929	42.2272727	7.89199029
HOCH JE, 2018, J MANAGE	895	111.875	19.9886053
LIDEN RC, 2014, ACAD MANAGE J	730	60.8333333	11.2056284
SCHAUBROECK JM, 2011, J APPL PSYCHOL	720	48	5.01547988
BARBUTO JEJ, 2006, GROUP ORGAN MANAGE	650	32.5	8.29466357
WALUMBWA FO, 2010, J APPL PSYCHOL	649	40.5625	10.3076471
NEUBERT MJ, 2008, J APPL PSYCHOL	643	35.7222222	2.87803059
PARRIS DL, 2013, J BUS ETHICS	615	47.3076923	10.2344932
GREGORY STONE A, 2004, LEADERSH ORGAN DEV J	595	27.0454545	5.05461165
RUSSELL RF, 2002, LEADERSH ORGAN DEV J	566	23.5833333	7.63718141
VAN DIERENDONCK D, 2011, J BUS PSYCHOL	546	36.4	3.80340557
LIDEN RC, 2015, LEADERSH Q	498	45.2727273	9.28671329
FRY LW, 2005, LEADERSH Q	465	22.1428571	3.78561737
LEMOINE GJ, 2019, ACAD MANAGE ANNALS	449	64.1428571	9.37654992
SENDJAYA S, 2008, J MANAGE STUD	443	24.6111111	1.98284222
GRAHAM JW, 1991, LEADERSH Q	422	12.0571429	2

Sources: Authors' Compilation

The underlying empirical progress can be traced to Liden et al (2008), which proposed a multidimensional scale of servant leadership and one of the most methodologically significant studies in the topic. More recent integrative studies, especially Eva et al. (2019), exhibit extremely high normalized and yearly citation rates, which implies that it is at the core of the literature merging and establishes future research directions. Other studies such as Hoch et al. (2018) and Liden et al. (2014) have also made a significant contribution by empirically distinguishing between servant leadership as compared to other leadership approaches based on values.Ehrhart (2004) and Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) have given the groundwork towards the association of servant leadership and organizational climate and behavioral results. Together, these well-discussed publications indicate that the science of servant leadership has made a leaps forward in articulation and scale expansion of the concept to the differentiation of theory, empirical support, and synthesis. The enduring reference effect of the older and newer research justifies the cumulative and dynamic nature of the research field of servant leadership as a fully grown and potent field.

- **Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis**

Themost commonly used terms are the constructs of servant leadership and leadership, and this proves the centrality of the construct to the general leadership literature. The prevalence of human-based words like human, humans, employee, and adult suggests a high degree of consideration of the field to the outcomes on the individual level and the leader-follower relationships in the field. The terms that have been used most often as the outcomes related keywords such as job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, the performance are evidence of the fact that the study of servant leadership has been focused to a large extent on the attitudes and behavioral implications of employees.

Table 7: Top 50 Authors' Keywords

Words	Occurrences	Words	Occurrences
servant leadership	1145	middle aged	38
leadership	518	empowerment	37
human	274	controlled study	36
article	181	higher education	36
humans	165	surveys and questionnaires	36
na	144	covid-19	35
female	103	ethics	35
male	101	performance	33
job satisfaction	99	united states	33
adult	98	ethical leadership	32
transformational leadership	86	leadership styles	31
psychology	77	psychological safety	31
work engagement	69	burnout	30
questionnaire	60	leadership style	30
employee	56	psychological empowerment	30
organization	50	nurse	29
organizational culture	50	nursing	29
workplace	50	employment	28
trust	49	job performance	28
organization and management	45	leadership development	28
organizational citizenship behavior	44	review	28
china	41	theoretical study	28
human experiment	39	cross-sectional study	26
motivation	39	organizational commitment	26
authentic leadership	38	pakistan	26

Sources: Authors' Compilation

The fact that methodological terminologies like questionnaire, survey, cross-sectional study and controlled study were used may imply a high dependency on quantitative research designs. The keywords like transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and authentic leadership refer to current comparative and differentiation practices in the value-based leadership scholarly approach. There are also newly introduced themes associated with such issues as psychological safety, empowerment, burnout, COVID-19, which indicates an increase in interest in the well-being of staff and circumstantial difficulties. In general, the key wording demonstrates a well-developed intellectual domain with high levels of psychological underpinning, predominantly people-oriented results, and the growing interest in the modern organizational problems.

- **Thematic Network Structure**

The thematic visualization of the network represents the conceptual framework and relationship dynamics of the research on servant leadership by visualizing the co-occurrences of keywords into separate yet related clusters. The servant leadership is depicted as the most dominant and central node and is the most widely networked node at the center of the network which validates the position of the servant leadership as the central organizing construct around which the literature is arranged. Its high connections with other variables that include job satisfaction, work engagement, job performance, organizational commitment and organization citizenship behavior show that servant leadership studies have been largely outcome-focused and employee attitudes and behavior have been under a lot of emphasis.

Figure 2: Keyword Co-occurrence
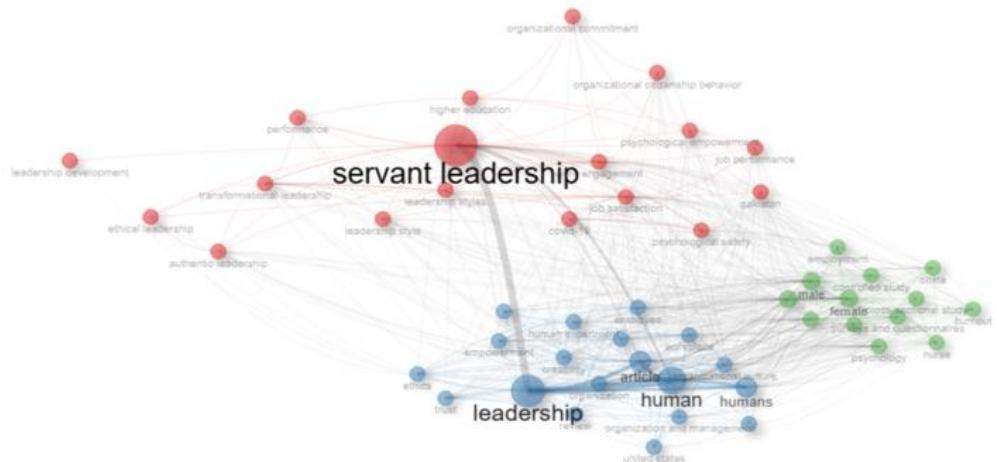
Sources: Authors' Compilation

The prevailing theme of the leadership outcomes and the leadership style that is dominant and is reflected by the red cluster is the combination of servant leadership with other types of leadership, including transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership, and the concepts of psychological empowerment, psychological safety, and performance. This cluster brings to the fore the continued attempts to locate servant leadership in the wider value-based leadership discourse as it analyzes its specific impacts.

The blue cluster focuses on the domains of leadership, human, and organizational context, which entail the methodological and foundational levels of the literature. The presence of such keywords as organization, organizational culture, trust, and review implies the preference of theoretical consolidation, governance, and mechanisms at the organizational level.However, green cluster focuses on methodological and contextual aspects, such as cross-sectional studies, surveys, gender, nursing, psychology, and country-specific circumstances, such as China, due to the practical and context-sensitive aspect of servant leadership research.

In general, the network exposes a developed but developing area that is highly theoretically integrated, has strong employee-focused results, and is becoming more methodologically and contextually diverse.

- **Thematic Map**

Servant leadership, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior become very central and well-developed themes in the motor themes quadrant, which means that the modern research is very engaged in the quest to comprehend how servant leadership and the motivation of employees and optional workplace actions happen. This is proven by the high occurrence of keywords and the centrality scores, which affirm they are the dominant ones in the literature structure.

Transformational leadership, authentic leadership and ethical leadership fall under the basic themes quadrant. These themes have a high centrality and a relatively low internal density that indicates that they are used as reference points upon which servant leadership is often compared instead of being core constructs. Likewise, leadership, leadership styles and empowerment have the central places, which indicate the integrative role of these themes in various thematic clusters.

Themes like job satisfaction, trust, and leadership style are found close to the central boundary but have moderate density which means that the concepts are saturated, and the number of empirical

tests is large. Green servant leadership, environmentally specific servant leadership, and leadership development, on the other hand, lie in the emerging or declining themes quadrant, identifiable as nascent but underdeveloped research streams with an increasing relevance.

The cluster statistics also reveal that the most frequent and central to the network are the keywords associated with servant leadership, then the ones that have a leadership and those with job satisfaction. Altogether, the results suggest a full-fledged field based on the staff-centered results, and more chances of theoretical development towards sustainability-related and situation-dependent leadership studies.

Figure 3: Thematic Map
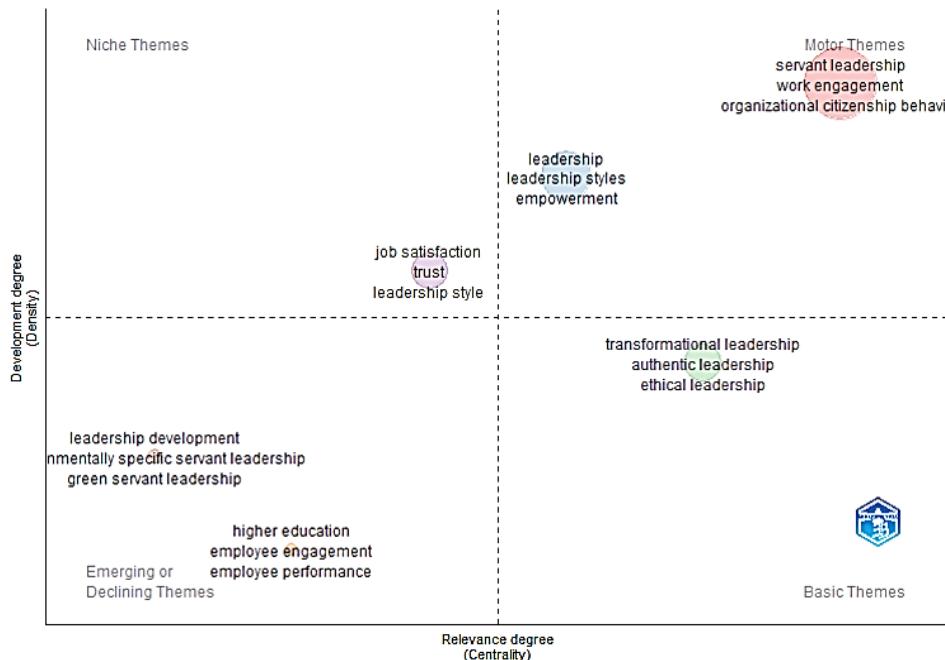
Sources: Authors' Compilation

- **Thematic Evolution**

In the 1977-2010 period, most of the literature was foundational in nature with the themes of leadership, servant leadership, job satisfaction and transformational leadership taking early conceptualization and exploratory action. During the 2011-2015 period, there was an expansion to ethical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the field which suggested progress in the level of theoretical sophistication and variety.

The major change is witnessed in 2016-2020, when the two variables of servant leadership and job satisfaction move into motor themes, which are highly relevant and internally developed. It is the empirical time of consolidation of servant leadership and its incorporation with employee attitudes, employee engagement, and organizational behavior. The 2021-2024 phase is more contextualized and specialized with themes like work engagement, psychological safety, higher education, green servant leadership, and leadership development being prominent and reflecting the sustainability and well-being agenda.

Servant leadership is now coming out as a major basic theme in the latest period (2025-2026) and this signifies its high levels of acceptance and base within the field of leadership research. At the same time, the most developed niche topics include psychological safety, meta-analysis, and pro-environmental behavior; this indicates the growing level of methodological rigor and thematic specialization.

Figure 4: Thematic Evolution
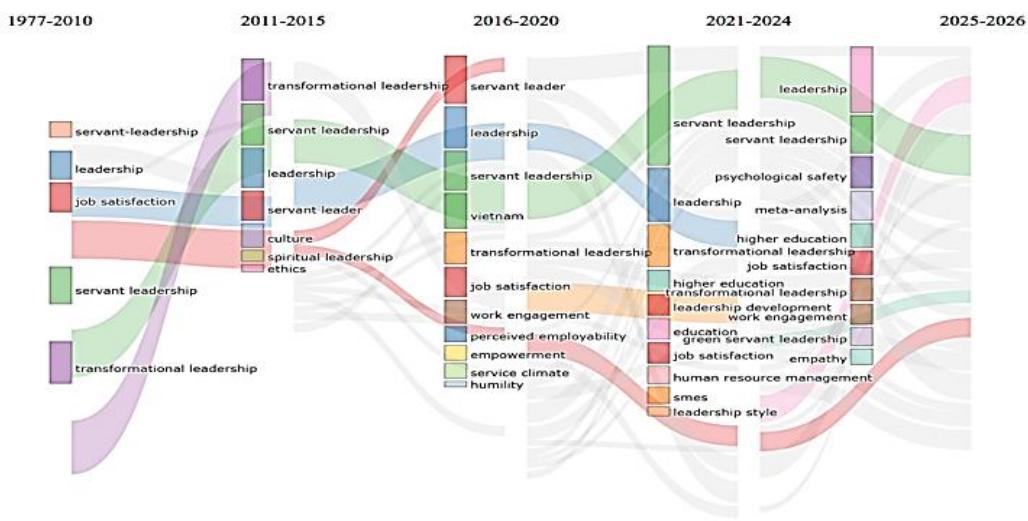
Sources: Authors' Compilation

Generally, the thematic development shows a sophisticated domain that has developed out of the conceptual underpinnings, to subtle, context-complex, and mechanism-based investigation.

- **Future Research Directions**

Although the research on servant leadership has significantly expanded and consolidated its empirical findings, there are still a number of promising areas that have not been explored. The relative direct-effect models of servant leadership on employee outcomes that have been prevalent in the past ought to be replaced with process-oriented perspectives in future studies. More focus needs to be directed towards unwrapping the psychological, relationship, and contextual processes, including moral identity, relational energy, psychological safety, and meaning-making, by which servant leadership can produce both individual and collective results in the long-term.

Second, the current literature is densely focused on service, healthcare and education industries; hence, future research ought to discuss servant leadership in high-stakesand technologically-intensive settings such as digital organizations, platform work and crisis-driven settings. There is also a need to conduct comparative cross-cultural research to determine the influence of institutional logics, power distance, and collectivism on the performance and implementation of servant leadership.

Third, the discipline has remained largely dependent on cross-sectional and self-reported survey designs that create doubts about causal inference as well as common method bias. In future studies, longitudinal, multi-source, experimental and mixed-method designs need to be used in order to include time-based aspects of dynamic leadership processes and temporal impacts. The network analysis and experience-sampling techniques are among the opportunities.

Fourthly, Servant leadership needs to be connected to sustainability, responsible leadership, ESG practices and the Sustainable Development Goals to a greater extent, by scholars, no longer focusing on employee outcomes but looking at the effect on the organization and society in general.

Lastly, theory-building synthesis should be sought in the future to combine servant leadership with other leadership paradigms to develop a clearer conceptual boundary and cumulative knowledge building. All of these directions can move the servant leadership scholarship to a more profound explanatory and transformative influence.

Conclusion

This paper presents a bibliometric-based Review of the servant leadership research, which contains conceptual understanding of the subject, its thematic evolution, and research prospects. Through a big data set of peer-reviewed literature the study can trace the development pattern of the area of servant leadership, discover the main authors, journals and nations, and also find out the conceptual roots that have influenced the sphere of studies throughout its history. The results show that servant leadership is no longer as normative and conceptual as it used to be before, but a fully-fledged empirically based and well-distributed research field.

The thematic analyses demonstrate that a high level of focus is placed on employee-based outcomes, psychological processes, and comparative leadership approaches, as well as show some new extensions to sustainability, healthcare and green servant leadership. Simultaneously, the thematic map and the analysis of evolution reveal the points of conceptual saturation and refer to the necessity of further theoretical polishing and diversification of the context.

The current review makes a contribution to the field of leadership research as it summarizes the scattered information, increases conceptualization, and sets a research agenda. The results can be a good source of information to scholars who would like to develop theory and practitioners who would like to know the changing relevance of servant leadership in modern organizations.

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