How Does Servant Leadership Influence Employee Creativity? A Scoping Review

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Abstract

This scoping review synthesizes contemporary evidence on how servant leadership shapes employee creativity through interconnected psychological and organizational mechanisms. Covering publications from 2010 to 2025, the study systematically mapped 2,467 records retrieved from Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, screened using Publish or Perish, and managed through Mendeley. A total of 27 studies met the PRISMA-ScR eligibility criteria. The synthesis indicates that servant leadership enhances employee creativity through five recurring pathways: psychological safety, psychological empowerment, knowledge sharing, creative process engagement, and innovation-supportive climates. These mechanisms operate within contextual conditions shaped by creative self-efficacy, corporate social responsibility, organizational culture, and industry characteristics.

Beyond summarizing prior findings, this review advances the literature by integrating Conservation of Resources Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Learning Theory into a unified conceptual framework. This integration conceptualizes servant leadership as a layered psychological and social process that mobilizes psychological resources, intrinsic motivation, and prosocial modeling to sustain creative behavior across organizational contexts. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that managers and human resource practitioners can foster employee creativity by cultivating psychologically safe environments, strengthening empowerment practices, and encouraging knowledge sharing. Overall, the review reframes servant leadership as a strategic managerial mechanism for fostering employee creativity.

Keywords: servant leadership; employee creativity; psychological empowerment; psychological safety; innovation climate

Introduction

Employee creativity has increasingly become a strategic capability that determines organizational survival and competitive advantage in an era marked by digital transformation and knowledge-driven economies. Under conditions of rapid and unpredictable global change, the capacity of individuals and teams to generate novel and valuable ideas has emerged as a central driver of organizational innovation (World Economic Forum, 2023). The report highlights creativity, critical thinking, and empathic leadership as three essential competencies for the future workforce. Consequently, the development of creativity cannot be understood solely as a function of individual traits; it is also shaped by the social

and cultural environment of the organization, particularly leadership styles that foster psychological safety, collaboration, and a willingness to experiment (Iqbal & Islam, 2023). Empirical findings reinforce this view, showing that psychological empowerment, psychological safety, and creative self-efficacy consistently account for a substantial proportion of variance in creative performance across organizational settings (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Liu & Zaman, 2025). Evidence from Indonesian literature further reveals that strengthening psychological empowerment—encompassing meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact—enhances trust between supervisors and subordinates, which in turn facilitates knowledge sharing and innovative initiatives at the unit level (Saidah & Muhid, 2021). Employee engagement has likewise been shown to intensify intrinsic motivation for idea generation and participation in creative activities (Wan et al., 2022).

Servant leadership has gained notable scholarly attention for its potential to promote creative behavior within organizations. Originating from Greenleaf's (1977) proposition that leadership is fundamentally an act of serving, nurturing growth, and cultivating trust, the concept was later operationalized into eight core dimensions by van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), distinguishing it from performance-oriented leadership models. Recent bibliometric analyses document a significant rise in research on servant leadership, particularly regarding its association with empowerment, psychological well-being, and creativity (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). This surge suggests that servant leadership is increasingly recognized as a relevant framework for developing human potential and enabling sustainable organizational performance (Haider et al., 2025).

Accumulating empirical evidence indicates that servant leadership enhances employee creativity through mechanisms such as psychological safety and knowledge-sharing culture (Purwaningrum et al., 2024). Cross-cultural studies support this trend; Kang (2024) demonstrated that servant leadership strengthens team creativity through trust and collaboration, while Waseem Haider et al. (2025) showed its importance within agile environments that demand continuous innovation. Interpersonal processes also play a central role. Trust among team members facilitates knowledge exchange (Khassawneh et al., 2022), and servant leaders' supportive behaviors have been shown to elevate creative self-efficacy in educational settings (Ren & Shen, 2023). However, findings are not entirely uniform. Cultural norms, structural arrangements, and organizational climate can either amplify or weaken the influence of servant leadership. Some studies report strong effects (Gelaidan et al., 2024; Iqbal & Islam, 2023), whereas others observe contextual dependencies (Purwaningrum et al., 2024).

These inconsistencies highlight that the servant leadership–creativity relationship is complex and results from interacting psychological and social processes. The influence of servant leadership rarely occurs directly; rather, it is transmitted through mediating mechanisms such as psychological empowerment, psychological safety, and creative process engagement (Iqbal & Islam, 2023; Sorour et al., 2021). However, prior studies tend to examine these mediating mechanisms in isolation, offering limited insight into how multiple psychological pathways jointly operate and interact across different organizational and cultural contexts. Evidence from democratic leadership research also underscores the importance of participative decision-making and delegated authority in enhancing employees' sense of empowerment—an insight that is especially relevant for understanding how servant leadership manifests within Indonesian organizational contexts (Khumairaa & Muhid, 2022).

Moderating factors, including creative self-efficacy, corporate social responsibility, and innovation-oriented cultures, further determine the strength of the relationship (Haider et al., 2025). Yet, the existing literature remains fragmented, with limited attempts to systematically integrate mediating and moderating mechanisms into a coherent conceptual explanation of how servant

leadership fosters creativity. Collectively, prior studies demonstrate that this relationship is multi-layered, often unfolding through serial pathways such as psychological safety → creative self-efficacy → innovative behavior (Wan et al., 2022). Psychological empowerment, in particular, emerges as a robust mediator across multiple studies (Bani-Melhem et al., 2021), emphasizing the need for psychologically secure environments to facilitate creative exploration (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023).

This review offers a significant scholarly contribution by clarifying the psychological and contextual mechanisms through which servant leadership influences creativity. Specifically, this review addresses the lack of integrative evidence explaining how multiple mediating and moderating mechanisms collectively shape the servant leadership–creativity nexus across diverse sectors and cultural settings. Unlike earlier studies that primarily examined direct relationships without unpacking the underlying processes (Purwaningrum et al., 2024), the present scoping review shows that creativity is shaped by interdependent cognitive, affective, and moral pathways associated with servant leadership. The findings also have practical implications for organizations seeking to cultivate innovative cultures founded on empathy, collaboration, and empowerment (Haider et al., 2025; Kang, 2024). Previous research highlights that servant leadership fosters psychological well-being, perceptions of fairness, and meaningfulness at work—factors that collectively enhance readiness to innovate (Agustin-Silvestre et al., 2024). In the context of post-pandemic adaptation and accelerating digital transformation, the humanistic orientation of servant leadership represents both a moral foundation and a long-term strategic approach for organizational sustainability (Iqbal & Islam, 2023).

Accordingly, this review maps current literature on the servant leadership–creativity nexus, identifies mediators and moderators, and articulates research gaps across diverse sectors and cultural environments (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Zeng & Xu, 2020). Despite the growing body of empirical research, existing reviews in this domain remain fragmented and predominantly focused on estimating effect sizes or testing isolated causal relationships. Such approaches offer limited insight into the diversity of psychological mechanisms, contextual moderators, and sectoral variations characterizing the servant leadership–creativity nexus. A scoping review is therefore methodologically appropriate, as it allows for systematic mapping of conceptual patterns, identification of dominant mediating and moderating mechanisms, and clarification of theoretical and empirical gaps across heterogeneous study designs, contexts, and disciplines.

Accordingly, this scoping review aims to synthesize contemporary literature on servant leadership and employee creativity by (1) mapping recurrent psychological and organizational mechanisms, (2) identifying contextual conditions that shape the strength of these relationships, and (3) highlighting unresolved theoretical and methodological gaps across sectors and cultural environments. In doing so, the review provides an integrative foundation for future theory development and evidence-based leadership practice (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Zeng & Xu, 2020)

Methods

This study employed a scoping review approach to systematically map the conceptual and empirical developments concerning the relationship between servant leadership and employee creativity. The approach was selected to capture the diverse psychological mechanisms and organizational conditions that mediate or moderate this relationship without restricting the review to specific research designs. All stages of the review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines

proposed by Tricco et al. (2018), ensuring methodological transparency, consistency, and reproducibility.

The literature search was conducted online using two major databases—Google Scholar and ScienceDirect—due to their broad coverage of relevant national and international publications. Publish or Perish (PoP) software was used to extract metadata from Google Scholar, while Mendeley Desktop facilitated reference management, duplicate removal, and article classification by theme and publication year. The search was carried out from January to March 2025 and covered studies published between 2010 and 2025 to capture contemporary trends in the past decade and a half. Search strings were constructed using Boolean operators to maximize coverage while maintaining thematic relevance. The final search query included the following terms: ("servant leadership" AND ("employee creativity" OR "innovation behavior" OR "creative process engagement")) AND ("psychological empowerment" OR "knowledge sharing" OR "psychological safety" OR "innovation climate").

All retrieved records were screened manually to ensure alignment with the review focus. The initial search yielded 2,467 articles (1,894 from Google Scholar and 573 from ScienceDirect). After removing cross-database duplicates using Mendeley, 1,982 unique records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 278 articles were deemed potentially relevant and were subjected to full-text assessment. The final screening process resulted in the inclusion of 27 studies that met all eligibility criteria, while 251 were excluded for irrelevance or insufficient methodological rigor. The entire selection process was performed independently by two reviewers, and inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.87$), indicating a strong level of agreement. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were operationalized to maintain analytical focus and methodological validity. A summary of these criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Document Type	Peer-reviewed scientific journal articles	Books, proceedings, theses, reports, and non-academic articles
Publication Period	Published between 2010–2025	Published before 2010
Language	English or Indonesian	Languages other than English or Indonesian
Document Access	Available in full-text (PDF)	Full text not accessible
Research Focus	Examines the relationship between servant leadership and employee creativity or innovation	Does not address either servant leadership or creativity
Research Design	Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods)	Descriptive papers without empirical analysis

Source: Processed data (2025)

The studies that met the eligibility criteria were then charted using the PRISMA-based data extraction framework. The extracted variables included the authors' names, year of publication, research context, study objectives, methodological design, theoretical foundations, and the principal findings or contributions related to servant leadership and employee creativity. All extracted information was organized within a structured charting matrix to ensure consistency and to facilitate

comparative analysis across studies. To enhance reporting transparency, the overall search and screening procedures are summarized in **Table 2**, which presents the number of records retained or excluded at each stage of the selection process.

Table 2. Summary of the Article Selection Process

PRISMA-ScR Stage	Activity / Data Source	Number of Articles (n)	Description
Initial Identification	Search conducted in Google Scholar (via PoP) and ScienceDirect	2,467	Total records identified before duplicate removal
Duplicates Removed	Automatic duplicate screening using Mendeley Desktop	485	Duplicate records across databases
Records After Deduplication	Unique articles after removing duplicates	1,982	Records ready for title and abstract screening
Title–Abstract Screening	Screening for topic relevance and research focus	278	Articles potentially meeting the inclusion criteria
Full-Text Screening	Full-text eligibility assessment by two independent reviewers	278	Articles read in full and systematically evaluated
Articles Excluded	Not relevant or lacking methodological adequacy	251	Excluded during final assessment
Articles Included	Empirical and conceptual studies retained for analysis	27	Final set used for thematic synthesis

Source: Processed data (2025)

A thematic analysis approach, drawing on the framework developed by Braun and Clarke, was used to synthesize the findings across the selected studies. The analytical process involved several iterative steps: familiarizing with the full corpus of articles, generating preliminary codes, organizing these codes into overarching themes, reviewing cross-theme relationships, and constructing a coherent conceptual synthesis. This method enabled the identification of recurring patterns, mechanisms, and contextual conditions in the literature on servant leadership and employee creativity, while also linking these themes to underlying psychological and organizational theories.

To ensure the reliability of the charting and coding procedures, an inter-coder reliability check was conducted. Two independent reviewers coded a sample of the first ten articles to verify consistency in theme interpretation. The coding comparison yielded an agreement level exceeding 85 percent, indicating a high degree of reliability. Any discrepancies between the coders were resolved through collaborative discussion until full consensus was achieved. A validation matrix was also employed to confirm that each major theme was supported by at least three independent sources.

All stages of the review were carried out in alignment with academic integrity and transparency principles. No conflicts of interest were identified in the conduct of this study. Mendeley Desktop was used to manage references and annotate full texts, while Publish or Perish supported the extraction of bibliometric metadata. Researcher validation occurred throughout each phase of screening and analysis to maintain objectivity. The overall selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (Figure 1), which outlines the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion.
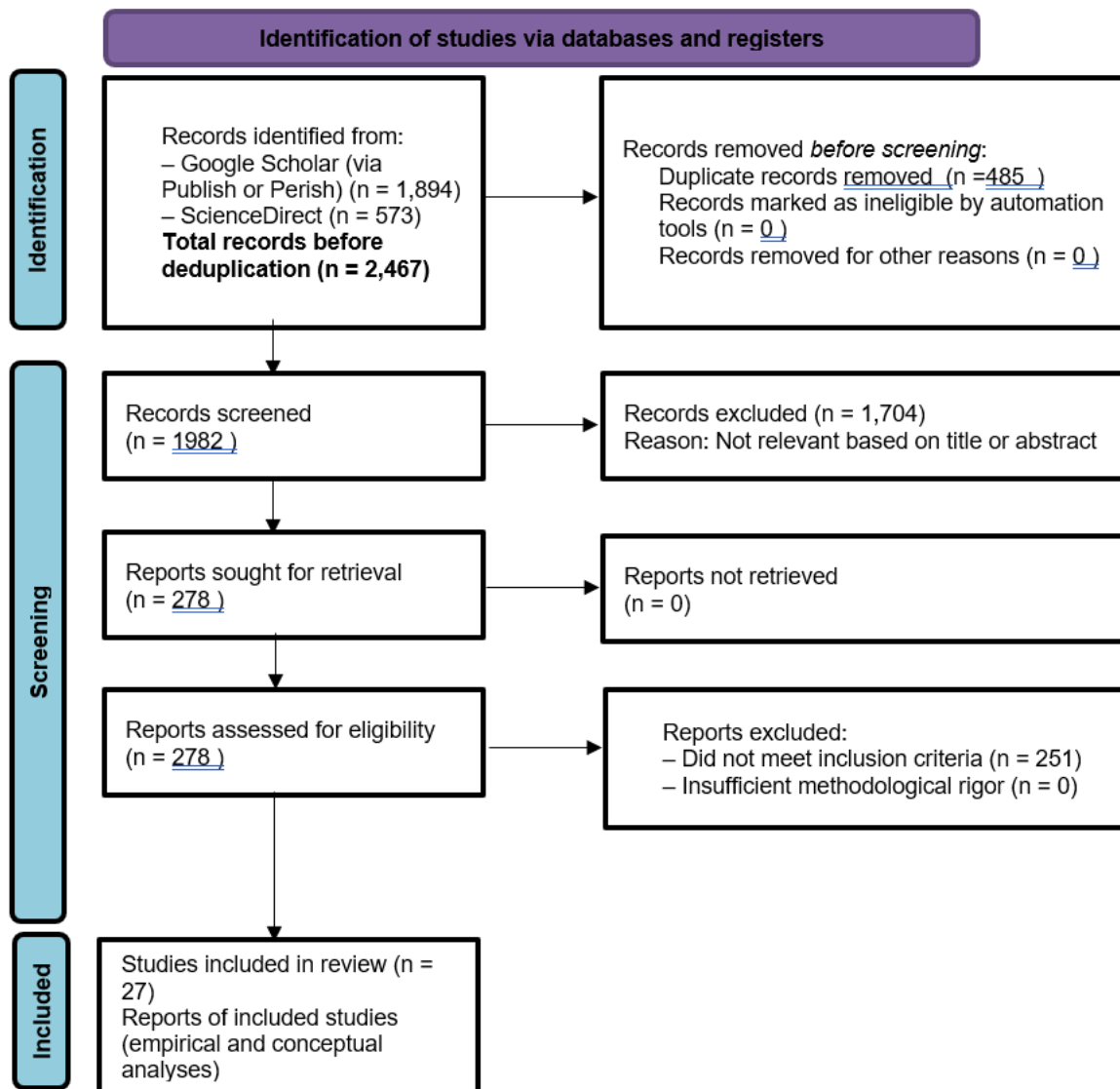
Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram of the Article Selection Process

This figure illustrates the systematic stages involved in the selection of studies for the scoping review. The process began with the initial identification of records from two major databases—Google Scholar and ScienceDirect—followed by the removal of duplicate entries. Subsequent stages included title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and the final inclusion of 27 studies that met all predefined criteria.

From a methodological standpoint, it is important to acknowledge that the scoping review approach does not incorporate a critical appraisal of the methodological quality of each included study. As a result, the interpretations presented in this review take into account the considerable heterogeneity in research contexts, methodological designs, and analytical strategies across the included literature. Despite this limitation, the mapping of evidence provides meaningful conceptual contributions to the understanding of how servant leadership relates to employee creativity and highlights potential directions for future empirical investigations.

Results and Discussion

From the analysis of the 27 eligible studies, a consistent pattern emerges showing that servant leadership (SL) exerts a positive influence on employee creativity across diverse sectors and cultural settings. To provide a clearer overview of the empirical landscape and the specific contributions of each study, Table 3 presents a detailed summary of the included research, outlining their contexts, methodological approaches, and key findings.

Table 3. Table of Included Studies (n = 27)

No	Authors & Year	Study Title	Country / Context	Purpose	Method & Design	Key Findings
1	Yang et al. (2019)	Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity: The Roles of Psychological Empowerment and Work–Family Conflict	China — service & education sectors	To examine how servant leadership relates to employee creativity, and the mediating roles of psychological empowerment and work–family conflict	Quantitative survey; SEM	Servant leadership positively predicted creativity; effect transmitted via increased psychological empowerment and reduced work–family conflict.
2	Jehanzeb & Mushtaq (2025)	Examining the Impact of Well-being-oriented HRM Practices on Innovative Work Behavior: The Moderating Role of Servant Leadership	China — manufacturing & technology	To test whether servant leadership moderates the relationship between well-being HRM and innovative work behavior	Quantitative survey; moderation analysis	Servant leadership strengthened the positive effect of well-being HRM on employees' innovative behaviors by enhancing psychological welfare.
3	Chen et al. (2022)	How Does Servant Leadership Influence Creativity? Enhancing Employee Creativity via Creative Process Engagement and Knowledge Sharing	Pakistan — education sector	To investigate mediation by creative process engagement and knowledge sharing in SL → creativity link	Quantitative; SEM	Servant leadership fosters creativity primarily via greater creative process engagement and increased knowledge sharing among employees.

4	Yoshida et al. (2014)	Does Servant Leadership Foster Creativity and Innovation?	Australia & Indonesia — cross-organizational teams	To assess multilevel effects of servant leadership on team creativity	Multilevel quantitative	Servant leadership enhanced team creativity through improved relational processes and trust at team level.
5	Dirk, (2011)	The Servant Leadership Survey: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Measure	Netherlands & UK	To develop and validate a multidimensional instrument for measuring servant leadership	Quantitative — EFA & CFA	Produced a valid 8-dimension servant leadership scale demonstrating cross-cultural measurement properties.
6	Saleem & Mateou (2025)	Servant Leadership for Sustainability: A Serial Mediation Model of Empowerment, Creativity, and Pro-Environmental Behavior	Saudi Arabia — private firms	To test serial mediation from SL to pro-environmental behavior via empowerment and creativity	Quantitative; serial mediation SEM	Servant leadership increased empowerment and creativity, which sequentially promoted pro-environmental behavior.
7	Roh et al. (2023)	Does Servant Leadership Decrease Bad Behaviors? The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety and CSR	South Korea — cross-industry	To examine whether psychological safety mediates SL's impact on counterproductive behaviors, moderated by CSR	Quantitative — multi-wave survey	SL reduced counterproductive behaviors via enhanced psychological safety; CSR strengthened this pathway.
8	Fröhlich et al. (2025)	Newcomers' Happiness at Work Trajectories and Their Relation to Servant Leadership and	Finland — public sector	To explore longitudinal links between servant leadership, newcomer well-being, and innovative performance	Longitudinal survey	Servant leadership predicted upward trajectories of newcomer well-being that were associated with increased

		Innovative Performance				innovative performance over time.
9	Hamzali et al., (2020)	The Influence of Leadership Style and Organizational Learning on Performance with Innovation as Mediator	Indonesia — university library	To test leadership and organizational learning effects on performance with innovation as mediator	Quantitative — SEM-PLS	Leadership oriented toward service and organizational learning improved performance through innovation as mediator.
10	Dayanti & Yulianti (2023)	How Servant Leadership and Knowledge-Sharing Trigger Employee Creativity	Saudi Arabia — public & finance sectors	To investigate how servant leadership and knowledge sharing jointly affect employee creativity	Quantitative; SEM	Knowledge sharing mediated the positive association between servant leadership and employee creativity.
11	Haider et al. (2025)	Servant Leadership in Agile Frameworks: A Catalyst for Collaboration and Innovation	Hungary — tech startups	To document the role of SL within Agile teams for collaboration and innovation	Qualitative — multiple case studies	Servant leaders acted as facilitators for collaboration and sustained innovation in Agile settings.
12	Irawati & Anindita (2025)	The Effect of Servant Leadership on Employee Creativity with Employee Engagement and Resilience as Mediators	Indonesia — manufacturing	To assess mediating roles of engagement and resilience between SL and creativity	Quantitative — SEM-PLS	Employee engagement and resilience jointly mediated the positive SL → creativity relationship.
13	Nelwan et al. (2024)	The Role of OCB and Servant Leadership on Employee Creativity	Indonesia — higher education (Manado)	To examine OCB and SL influences on academic staff creativity	Quantitative — regression analysis	Both SL and OCB positively predicted creativity, with commitment and participation as

					facilitating mechanisms.
14	Liu & Zaman (2025)	From Leadership to Innovation: Psychological Mechanisms Behind Teacher Creativity	China — physical education teachers	To test psychological pathways (e.g., self-efficacy) linking leadership to teacher creativity	Quantitative — three-wave design	Servant leadership increased creative self-efficacy, which in turn enhanced teachers' innovative practices.
15	Badriyah et al., (2025)	Unlocking Job Performance: How Servant Leadership Fosters Psychological Safety and Creativity in MSMEs	Indonesia — MSMEs (West Java)	To explore SL effects on psychological safety and creativity in MSMEs	Quantitative — SEM-PLS	SL improved psychological safety and creativity, contributing to enhanced job performance in MSMEs.
16	Sayadi (2025)	Servant Leadership on the Path to Organizational Innovation	Iran — primary school teachers	To assess efficacy of SL via self-efficacy and creative outcomes	Quantitative — SEM (AMOS)	SL strengthened creative self-efficacy which mediated its effect on innovative behavior in educational contexts.
17	Ren & Shen (2023)	The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Team Innovation Performance	China — hospitality industry	To evaluate mediation effects (e.g., efficacy) between SL and team innovation	Quantitative	SL positively influenced team innovation; self-efficacy and team processes acted as mediators.
18	Lia et al. (2022)	Cross-Level Research on Self-Serving Leadership vs. Servant Leadership	China — manufacturing firms	To compare effects of self-serving vs servant leadership on innovation outcomes	Multilevel quantitative	Servant leadership increased innovation while self-serving leadership dampened creativity; cross-level dynamics matter.

19	Yulianeu & Yusuf (2024)	Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity: The Mediating Role of Harmonious Passion and Psychological Safety	Indonesia — hospitality industry	To test mediation by harmonious passion and psychological safety in SL → creativity link	Quantitative — SEM-PLS	Harmonious passion and psychological safety mediated SL's positive impact on employee creativity.
20	Pratita & Salendu (2022)	Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity: Innovation Climate as Mediator	Indonesia — manufactu-ring	To investigate whether an innovation climate mediates SL's effect on creativity	Quantitative — survey	Innovation climate partially mediated the positive relationship between SL and creativity.
21	L. Chen et al. (2020)	Participative Leadership and Employee Creativity: Sequential Mediation of Psychological Safety and Creative Process Engagement	Pakistan — service sector	To examine sequential mediation from participative/ser vant-like leadership to creativity	Quantitative — SEM	Findings support sequential mediation: leadership → psychological safety → creative process engagement → creativity.
22	Lindawati et al. (2024)	The Effects of Servant Leadership, Occupational Commitment, and Work Engagement on Teacher Creativity	Indonesia — education sector	To test joint effects of SL, commitment, and engagement on teacher creativity	Quantitative survey	SL increased teacher creativity through higher occupational commitment and work engagement.
23	Atmoko & Tjahjono (2024)	The Influence of Servant Leadership on Followers' Creativity with Climate for Creativity as Mediation	China — private companies	To analyze mediation by creative climate between SL and followers' creativity	Quantitative — SEM	Climate for creativity mediated the SL → creativity relationship, enabling idea generation.

24	Indrianto et al. (2022)	The Application of Servant Leadership in Building Creativity in a Tourism Start-up Team	Indonesia — tourism start-up (Surabaya)	To describe how SL practices foster creativity in a start-up team	Qualitative — case study & interviews	SL facilitated idea generation, problem solving, and target-oriented creative outcomes in start-up team.
25	Aboramad an (2021)	Servant Leadership and Followers' Creativity: Does Climate for Creativity Matter?	Palestine — hotel employees	To examine whether creativity climate moderates/medi ates SL effects on follower creativity	Quantitative — survey (N=232); CFA & SEM	SL positively correlated with creativity; climate for creativity functioned as a partial mediator (indirect β ≈ 0.509, p < .001).
26	Shagufta et al. (2023)	Does Servant Leadership Enhance Employee Creativity and Performance? Mediating Role of Knowledge Sharing and Self-Efficacy	Pakistan — universities & service sector	To study mediation by knowledge sharing and self-efficacy in SL effects on creativity and performance	Quantitative — SEM	Servant leadership increased knowledge sharing and self-efficacy, which in turn enhanced creativity and performance.
27	Wang et al. (2022)	Servant Leadership and Creativity: Sequential Mediating Roles of Psychological Safety and Employee Well-Being	South Korea & UK	To test sequential mediation from SL to creativity via psychological safety and well-being	Quantitative — two-wave SEM	SL affected creativity through a sequence: increased psychological safety → improved well-being → higher creativity.

Source: Processed data (2025)

General Patterns of the Servant Leadership–Creativity Relationship

The overall pattern across the reviewed studies indicates that servant leadership establishes key psychological conditions that encourage risk-taking, interpersonal trust, and collaborative engagement—factors that reliably stimulate the emergence of creative ideas (Aboramadan, 2021; M. Chen et al., 2022; Haider et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2019). However, this influence is rarely direct. Instead, it is channelled through several psychological mechanisms such as psychological safety, empowerment, creative process engagement, and an innovation-supportive climate, each functioning as an

intermediary that translates leader behaviors into creative outcomes (Wang et al., 2022; Yoshida et al., 2014).

A notable geographical pattern also emerges. Approximately 60 percent of the included studies were conducted in Asian contexts—such as China, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Korea, and Iran—where moral and relational forms of leadership tend to align well with collectivistic values emphasizing harmony and group cohesion (Badriyah et al., 2025; Sayadi, 2025). By contrast, studies from Western settings, including Australia, Finland, and the United Kingdom, highlight empowerment and personal autonomy as central pathways through which servant leadership enhances creativity (Fröhlich et al., 2025; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). These differences suggest that while the core principles of servant leadership may be universal, their manifestations and effectiveness are shaped by the cultural norms and organizational structures within which they are enacted.

Psychological Mechanisms Linking Servant Leadership to Creativity

a. Psychological Safety

Servant leaders typically cultivate an environment in which employees feel safe to express ideas without fear of criticism or negative repercussions (Roh et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). This climate of interpersonal safety encourages exploratory thinking and strengthens employees' willingness to engage in innovative behavior, making psychological safety a central pathway through which servant leadership promotes creativity.

b. Psychological Empowerment

Research consistently shows that servant leadership enhances employees' sense of autonomy, competence, and self-confidence (Ganeva & Savitri Pusparini, 2024; Saleem & Mateou, 2025; Yang et al., 2019). When employees perceive that they have meaningful control over their work and are trusted to make decisions, their motivational energy increases, which in turn fosters bolder and more proactive creative actions.

c. Knowledge Sharing

The service-oriented nature of servant leadership also strengthens a collaborative culture characterized by open exchange of information, insights, and experiences among colleagues (M. Chen et al., 2022; Dayanti & Yulianti, 2023; Shagufta et al., 2023). In such environments, shared knowledge acts as a key stimulus for idea generation, enabling employees to develop innovative solutions collectively.

d. Creative Process Engagement

Servant leadership encourages employees to participate actively in all phases of the creative process—from problem identification to idea development and implementation (M. Chen et al., 2022; Lindawati et al., 2024). As a result, servant leadership not only increases the quantity of ideas produced but also contributes to improving the quality and applicability of creative outputs.

e. Innovation Climate

By promoting values that emphasize learning, openness, and tolerance for mistakes, servant leaders help build a workplace culture that welcomes new ideas and supports experimentation (Atmoko & Tjahjono, 2024; Pratita & Salendu, 2022; Purwaningrum et al., 2024). Such conditions nurture a psychologically secure and adaptive innovation climate, enabling employees to pursue creative work more confidently (Aboramadan, 2021).

Contextual and Moderating Factors

The strength of the relationship between servant leadership and employee creativity is not uniform; rather, it is shaped by several contextual and moderating factors that influence how leadership behaviors are interpreted and enacted within organizations:

a. Self-Efficacy

   Employees with higher levels of creative self-efficacy are more capable of translating the support provided by servant leaders into concrete creative actions (Shagufta et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2019). High self-belief amplifies the motivational and behavioral effects of servant leadership.

b. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

   CSR-oriented values reinforce the impact of servant leadership by strengthening employees' perceptions of psychological safety and aligning leadership behavior with broader organizational ethics (Roh et al., 2023). As a result, CSR-driven environments tend to show higher levels of innovative behavior.

c. Organizational Culture and Structure

   Servant leadership is more effective in collectivistic and participatory organizational cultures, where collaboration, harmony, and shared decision-making are emphasized. Conversely, its impact is often weaker in rigid, hierarchical, or highly bureaucratic structures, where autonomy and open communication are limited.

d. Industry Sector Characteristics

   The SL–creativity link tends to be stronger in service-oriented sectors, educational institutions, and knowledge-intensive industries. These environments rely heavily on interpersonal interaction and idea generation. In contrast, more procedural and standardized sectors such as manufacturing often exhibit a more modest effect.

Taken together, these contextual variables illustrate that the effectiveness of servant leadership is contingent upon psychological readiness, cultural alignment, and structural characteristics within the organization. Servant leadership thus operates not as a universally powerful mechanism but as one whose influence depends heavily on situational conditions.

Building on the patterns identified in the preceding results, the following section deepens the analysis by integrating these empirical findings within broader theoretical perspectives. This conceptual synthesis clarifies the psychological and social pathways through which servant leadership shapes employee creativity and highlights the foundational theories that help explain these mechanisms across different organizational settings.

Conceptual Synthesis and Theoretical Foundations

The accumulated evidence across the reviewed studies indicates that servant leadership influences creativity through mutually reinforcing psychological and social mechanisms. These processes can be understood through three major theoretical lenses:

a. Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)

   From a COR perspective, servant leadership functions by providing essential psychological resources—such as emotional support, trust, and a sense of meaningful work—that increase employees' capacity and willingness to engage in innovative behavior (Wang et al., 2022).

b. Social Learning Theory (SLT)

SLT suggests that employees internalize and emulate the prosocial and empathetic behaviors demonstrated by servant leaders. These learned behaviors subsequently manifest in higher levels of creativity and collaborative idea generation (Roh et al., 2023).

c. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT highlights the role of servant leadership in fulfilling individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met, employees experience stronger intrinsic motivation, which supports sustained creativity (Yang et al., 2019).

Integrating these three theoretical perspectives positions servant leadership not only as an ethical orientation but also as a strategically effective mechanism for cultivating work environments that support innovative thinking. Recent empirical research reinforces this theoretical alignment. Numerous studies demonstrate that servant leadership promotes psychological safety, psychological empowerment, and creative self-efficacy—conditions consistently identified as strong predictors of creative performance across a wide range of organizational contexts (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Ren & Shen, 2023; Wan et al., 2022). These pathways directly mirror the assumptions of COR regarding emotional resource availability and SDT's emphasis on autonomy and competence as drivers of intrinsic motivation. Moreover, the prosocial behaviors embedded in servant leadership activate social learning processes that foster knowledge sharing, a mechanism repeatedly shown to mediate creativity outcomes (Khassawneh et al., 2022).

Evidence from Indonesian contexts strengthens these conclusions. Research highlights that psychological empowerment enhances trust between leaders and followers, creating a conducive environment for the expression of creative ideas and initiatives (Saidah & Muhid, 2021). Taken together, the three major theories—COR, SLT, and SDT—not only explain the cognitive and affective foundations of creativity but also illuminate how servant leadership simultaneously activates these pathways to stimulate creative behavior.

Conceptual Model of the Servant Leadership–Creativity Relationship

The synthesis of the 27 included studies indicates that the influence of servant leadership on employee creativity is not linear but emerges through an interplay of mediating mechanisms and contextual moderators. Five core mediators—psychological safety, psychological empowerment, knowledge sharing, creative process engagement, and an innovation-supportive climate—serve as the primary channels through which leader behaviors translate into creative outcomes. At the same time, contextual factors such as self-efficacy, corporate social responsibility (CSR), organizational culture, and industry characteristics strengthen or weaken the relationship between servant leadership and creativity.

Within the Indonesian context, this pattern becomes particularly pronounced. Evidence shows that psychological empowerment enhances follower trust and facilitates knowledge-sharing behaviors that contribute directly to creativity (Saidah & Muhid, 2021). Likewise, leadership practices that allow participation and delegated decision-making cultivate a sense of autonomy—a foundational condition that supports employee engagement in creative processes (Khumairaa & Muhid, 2022)These findings suggest that the conceptual pathways identified in global literature are also highly relevant within Indonesia's collectivistic work culture, where social harmony and normative expectations shape leader–follower dynamics.

Taken together, these insights portray servant leadership as a dynamic social enabler. Leaders create psychologically enriching environments that support creative expression, while the effectiveness of such leadership depends on the alignment between leader characteristics, employee readiness, and the cultural norms of the organization. Empirical evidence reinforces this model: psychological safety, empowerment, and knowledge sharing consistently emerge as significant mediators, producing indirect effects of moderate magnitude across various organizational settings (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Khassawneh et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Recent studies further highlight creative self-efficacy as a critical psychological bridge, especially in education and public service sectors, enabling employees to transform leadership support into creative action (Ren & Shen, 2023). These findings indicate that the mediating processes activated by servant leadership are neither singular nor isolated, but operate as interconnected psychological pathways.

Beyond the five primary mediators, several studies document serial mediation patterns—for instance, psychological safety → creative self-efficacy → innovative behavior (Wan et al., 2022). Such sequential pathways demonstrate that servant leadership not only shapes initial psychological conditions but also strengthens employees' belief in their ability to generate and implement creative ideas. This cumulative process underscores the notion that creativity is the product of layered psychological mechanisms set in motion by the values of service, empathy, and relational care embodied by servant leaders.
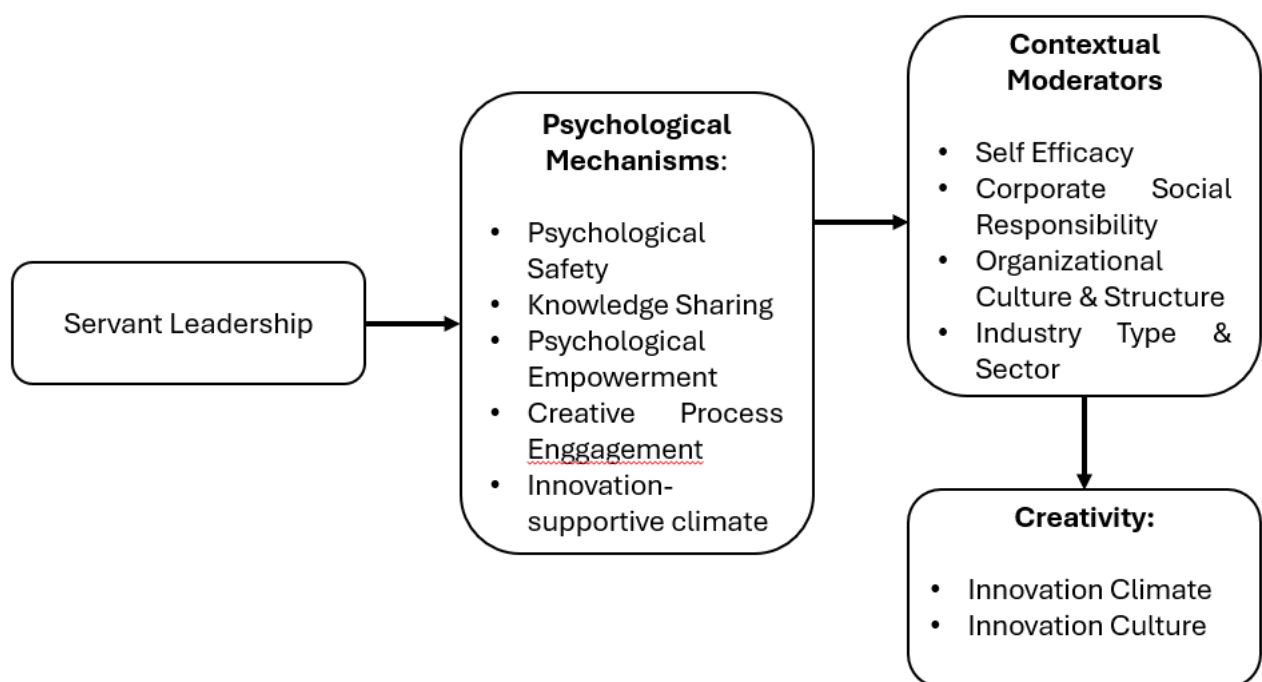

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of the Servant Leadership–Creativity Relationship

The conceptual model presented in **Figure 2** illustrates the synthesis of findings from 27 empirical studies examining the relationship between servant leadership and employee creativity. In this model, servant leadership is positioned as a primary antecedent that influences creativity through five interconnected psychological mechanisms: psychological safety, psychological empowerment, knowledge sharing, creative process engagement, and an innovation-supportive climate. These mechanisms operate within broader contextual boundaries shaped by factors such as self-efficacy, corporate social responsibility (CSR), organizational culture, and industry characteristics. Together,

these moderators determine the extent to which leaders' values of service and empathy translate into creative behaviors in the workplace.

Considering these mediating and moderating patterns, the model offers an integrative explanation of how servant leadership operates through a combination of cognitive, affective, and social processes. Employees who experience psychological safety, emotional support, and freedom to experiment are more likely to interpret leader behaviors as signals of trust and appreciation. This interpretation, in turn, strengthens intrinsic motivation and encourages creative engagement. These dynamics form the basis for understanding how major theoretical frameworks—COR, SDT, and SLT—operate simultaneously to explain the servant leadership–creativity linkage.

This discussion reinforces the theoretical argument that servant leadership functions by providing key psychological resources and fostering intrinsic motivation. Consistent with Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), servant leadership acts as a source of emotional support and meaningful work that sustains employee energy and resilience in navigating innovation challenges. Meanwhile, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains how servant leaders fulfill three fundamental human needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—which serve as the foundation for sustained intrinsic motivation and creative behavior.

Complementing these perspectives, Social Learning Theory (SLT) emphasizes that employees learn by observing leadership behavior. When leaders consistently exhibit empathy, integrity, and a service-oriented mindset, followers tend to internalize and emulate these values, channeling them into innovative ideas and actions. Overall, the model not only clarifies how servant leadership promotes creativity but also highlights opportunities for future research to examine long-term and cross-cultural dynamics. Future studies may benefit from adopting multilevel approaches to explore how leadership processes interact with team dynamics and organizational culture in shaping innovation outcomes.

Research Gaps and Theoretical–Practical Implications

Although most studies over the past two decades report a positive association between servant leadership and creativity, the systematic review of the 27 included articles reveals several conceptual and methodological gaps that warrant further investigation. A key limitation concerns research design: the majority of studies rely on cross-sectional survey data, making it difficult to establish the temporal sequence required to verify causal links between servant leadership and the emergence of creativity. Recent work continues to emphasize single-wave assessments of psychological safety, empowerment, or creative self-efficacy without examining their longitudinal (Badriyah et al., 2025; Haider et al., 2025; Ren & Shen, 2023), thereby weakening causal inferences.

Geographical concentration also presents a notable constraint. More than two-thirds of studies originate from Asian contexts—particularly China, Indonesia, and South Korea—where collectivistic norms amplify psychological pathways associated with trust, safety, and relational warmth (Kang, 2024; Lindawati et al., 2024). This helps explain why moral, empathic, and prosocial leadership behaviors exhibit stronger effects on creativity in these regions. However, this regional dominance limits the generalizability of findings to individualistic cultures in Europe and North America, where intrinsic motivation and autonomy may function as more dominant mechanisms (Agustin-Silvestre et al., 2024). Cross-cultural comparative research is therefore needed to determine whether identified psychological pathways are universal or culturally contingent.

Another gap concerns the lack of multilevel integration. Most studies examine effects at either the individual or team level, while only a few explore cross-level interactions between leadership, team

dynamics, and organizational climate. Advanced multilevel approaches—such as hierarchical linear modeling and cross-level analysis—are required to capture the complex and nested nature of servant leadership processes.

Practical intervention research is similarly limited. All reviewed studies adopt observational or correlational designs, and none evaluate the effectiveness of servant leadership training within real organizational settings. Intervention-based studies—such as randomized controlled trials or action research—are necessary to determine whether training in servant leadership values can strengthen psychological safety, creative engagement, and team innovation. Instrumentation inconsistencies further complicate synthesis: some studies employ the Servant Leadership Survey (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), while others rely on culturally adapted scales with limited cross-cultural validation. Standardization and cross-cultural testing are therefore crucial to improving empirical comparability.

Sectoral coverage is also uneven. Research remains concentrated in service, education, and public-sector settings, while manufacturing, technology, and bureaucratic environments receive substantially less attention. Given structural and cultural differences across industries, future studies should explore sector-specific boundary conditions that determine when servant leadership is most effective—or when its influence weakens.

Theoretical limitations further underscore opportunities for advancement. Most studies examine direct effects or single mediators, with very few integrating major theories such as Conservation of Resources (COR), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Social Learning Theory (SLT) into a unified empirical model. Yet these frameworks offer complementary explanations for motivational, relational, and resource-based processes that underpin creative behavior. Developing integrative models—such as sequential or moderated mediation frameworks—would deepen understanding of how servant leadership activates layered psychological mechanisms.

These theoretical gaps are compounded by the continued reliance on single mediators such as psychological empowerment or creative self-efficacy, rather than exploring their interconnected and sequential effects (Ren & Shen, 2023; Wan et al., 2022). Evidence of serial mediation—for example, psychological safety → creative self-efficacy → innovative behavior—highlights the need for multimechanism models that reflect the complexity of servant leadership's influence. Finally, inconsistencies in operational definitions of creativity—ranging from innovative behavior to creative process engagement and creative self-efficacy—produce heterogeneity in findings (Ren & Shen, 2023; Wan et al., 2022). Research also suggests diminished effects of servant leadership in highly bureaucratic or control-oriented settings (Robinson & Magnusen, 2024; Tariq, 2025), indicating the necessity for context-sensitive and standardized theoretical models.

Table 4. Research Gaps and Recommended Directions for Future Studies on Servant Leadership–Creativity

No	Research Gap	Empirical Evidence	Future Research Directions
1	Dominance of cross-sectional survey designs, limiting causal conclusions	Most studies (e.g., M. Chen et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022) relied on single-wave correlational surveys without tracking temporal dynamics. This limits the ability to confirm the causal sequence between servant leadership and creativity.	Conduct longitudinal, experimental, or field-based studies to observe how servant leadership influences creativity over time and to establish stronger causal inferences.

2	Geographic and cultural bias toward Asian contexts	Nearly two-thirds of the reviewed studies were conducted in collectivistic cultures (China, Korea, Indonesia, Iran), where psychological mechanisms like trust and relational warmth are more pronounced (Lindawati et al., 2024; Sayadi, 2025). Western studies remain limited.	Undertake cross-cultural comparative research that directly contrasts servant leadership effects in collectivistic vs. individualistic contexts to determine whether psychological pathways are universal or culturally contingent.
3	Limited multilevel integration (individual–team–organization)	A few studies (e.g., Ren & Shen, 2023; Yoshida et al., 2014) examine effects at different levels, but very few assess cross-level interactions among leadership, team dynamics, and organizational climate.	Apply multilevel approaches (e.g., Hierarchical Linear Modeling, cross-level analysis) to capture the nested and interactive nature of servant leadership processes.
4	Lack of intervention-based research evaluating leadership training	All reviewed studies used observational or correlational designs and did not evaluate the effectiveness of servant leadership development programs (Badriyah et al., 2025).	Implement experimental or action-research–based leadership interventions (e.g., randomized controlled trials) to test whether servant leadership training improves psychological safety, creative engagement, and team innovation.
5	Measurement heterogeneity and limited cross-cultural validation	Some studies used the Servant Leadership Survey (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), while others relied on locally adapted scales with limited validation, producing inconsistent findings.	Standardize measurement instruments and conduct cross-cultural Confirmatory Factor Analyses to ensure comparability and psychometric consistency across studies.
6	Narrow organizational and industry coverage	Most studies focused on service, education, and public-sector settings; fewer examined manufacturing, technology, or bureaucratic environments (Haider et al., 2025; Robinson & Magnusen, 2024).	Expand research into diverse sectors to identify boundary conditions that determine when servant leadership is more effective—or diminished—in influencing creativity.
7	Limited theoretical integration and underdeveloped serial mediation models	Few studies have combined major theories (COR, SDT, SLT) into a unified sequential model. Most still test single mediators such as empowerment or creative self-efficacy (Ren & Shen, 2023; Wan et al., 2022).	Develop integrative theoretical models (e.g., serial or moderated mediation) to examine how psychological empowerment, psychological safety, intrinsic motivation, and creative self-efficacy work together to shape creativity.

From a theoretical standpoint, this scoping review reinforces that servant leadership functions not merely as a moral or spiritual leadership style but as a motivational system that operates through the creation of positive psychological conditions. Empirical findings consistently highlight psychological safety, empowerment, and creative self-efficacy as the most stable cognitive–affective

resources mediating the servant leadership–creativity relationship (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Ren & Shen, 2023; Wan et al., 2022). These mechanisms align with COR's premise that creativity increases when employees possess sufficient emotional resources and with SDT's assertion that intrinsic motivation flourishes when basic psychological needs are fulfilled. By providing emotional and social support, servant leaders strengthen intrinsic motivation and foster knowledge-sharing behaviors that form the foundation of creative performance. As such, servant leadership can be positioned as a conceptual bridge between motivational theory and organizational behavior, opening possibilities for interdisciplinary integration across work psychology, HR management, and organizational studies.

Practically, the synthesis offers concrete implications for leadership development and HR practices. Organizations should implement servant leadership–based training that cultivates empathy, authenticity, and empowerment. Such programs need to go beyond performance enhancement and focus on building psychologically safe and collaborative climates. Work designs that allow autonomy, two-way communication, and recognition of innovative ideas serve as critical catalysts for employee creativity. Likewise, structured knowledge sharing and cross-generational mentoring can help embed servant leadership values throughout the organization. Recent studies show that training centered on empathy, prosocial communication, and coaching capabilities significantly enhances psychological safety and creative engagement (Patil et al., 2025; Robinson & Magnusen, 2024). Knowledge-sharing practices supported by servant leaders have also been shown to stimulate innovative ideas in education and MSME sectors (Badriyah et al., 2025; Lindawati et al., 2024).

Given these insights and existing gaps, future research should focus on empirically testing integrative models that combine individual-, team-, and organizational-level processes within multilevel designs. Such approaches would deepen theoretical understanding of how servant leadership facilitates creativity and strengthen the empirical foundation for its application as a long-term leadership strategy for building innovative, adaptive, and sustainable organizations.

Overall, the literature affirms that servant leadership is a key driver of creativity at work, enabled through a constellation of interacting psychological and social mechanisms. Core pathways include psychological safety, empowerment, creative engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovation-supportive climates. Leaders who embody service-oriented values create working environments where employees feel safe, supported, and trusted—conditions that promote risk-taking and idea generation (Badriyah et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022). These dynamics form the basis for sustained creative behavior.

In many Asian contexts such as Indonesia, China, and South Korea, the influence of servant leadership is particularly strong because it aligns with cultural norms emphasizing social harmony, empathy, and collectivism (Kang, 2024; Lindawati et al., 2024). In Western contexts, servant leadership strengthens intrinsic motivation and autonomy, which similarly contributes to creativity. These findings enrich the theoretical positioning of servant leadership as a leadership style rooted not only in moral values but also in effective managerial practices that stimulate organizational creativity.

By fostering psychological safety, enabling empowerment, and nurturing knowledge-sharing cultures, servant leadership transforms individual potential into collective creativity that is adaptive and sustainable. The consistency of findings across studies highlights servant leadership as both a psychological and social catalyst for creative risk-taking, especially in environments that value collaboration and team learning (Agustin-Silvestre et al., 2024; Tariq, 2025). Thus, servant leadership contributes to creativity not only at the individual level but also by laying the groundwork for sustained innovation at team and organizational levels.

Conclusions

This scoping review concludes that servant leadership functions not merely as a morally or spiritually grounded leadership paradigm, but as a strategic mechanism that supports employee creativity in contemporary work environments. Based on a synthesis of 27 empirical studies, the findings indicate that the influence of servant leadership on creativity is predominantly indirect, operating through interconnected psychological mechanisms such as psychological safety, empowerment, creative process engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovation-supportive climates, while being shaped by contextual factors including self-efficacy, corporate social responsibility, cultural values, and industry characteristics. Collectively, these findings affirm that servant leadership fosters creativity by strengthening supportive psychological and social conditions rather than through direct control or performance pressure. Methodologically, the review highlights the need for future research employing longitudinal, multilevel, and cross-cultural designs to strengthen causal inference and generalizability. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest differentiated implications across organizational levels: line managers play a key role in cultivating psychological safety and daily empowerment practices, human resource functions are central to embedding servant leadership values into leadership development and reward systems, and top management is critical in aligning servant leadership with innovation-oriented organizational cultures. Overall, this review positions servant leadership as a human-centered leadership approach that provides a robust foundation for sustained creativity and organizational adaptability in increasingly complex and dynamic contexts.

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