



## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE: TESTING SOCIAL LEARNING AND SOCIAL EXCHANGE-INFORMED MOTIVATIONAL PATHWAYS**

**Aryee, S., Hsiung, H. H., Jo, H., Chuang, C. H. & Chiao, Y. C**

The growing interest in customer-centric attitudes in frontline employees' service interactions with customers coupled with its service-oriented attributes has engendered much interest in servant leadership. Considering its emphasis on a concern for the needs of an organization's multiple stakeholders (e.g employees and customers) research on servant leadership has explained its documented outcomes in terms of social exchange and social learning theories. However, there is a dearth of research that has competitively tested the relative efficacy of these theories in explaining customer service performance. Additionally, there is a dearth of research on the boundary conditions of the motivational drivers through which servant leadership relates to customer service performance. Across two studies, we address these issues by examining why and when servant leadership relates to service performance. In Study 1, we examine customer stewardship (social learning) and gratitude towards the organization (social exchange) as pathways through which servant leadership relates to service performance and customer directed extra-role performance. Results of structural equation modelling analysis of multi-source and multi-wave data reveal servant leadership to indirectly relate to service performance through both customer stewardship and gratitude but relates to customer-directed extra-role performance only through gratitude. These findings provide initial support for the relative efficacy of social exchange relative to social learning in explaining the performance effects of servant leadership.

In Study 2, we constructively replicated Study 1 by examining customer orientation (social learning) and gratitude (social exchange) as pathways through which servant leadership relates





to service performance. Additionally, we examine initiative climate as a second stage moderator of the influence of the motivational

drivers on service performance. Contrary to our predictions, initiative climate did not moderate the influence of the motivational drivers on service performance. However, consistent with the findings of Study 1, gratitude (social exchange) transmitted the effects of servant leadership on service performance. Across both studies, our findings suggest that although servant leadership motivates service performance through inculcating customer centric attitudes as well as meeting the needs of followers (employees), they underscore the primacy of social exchange in accounting for the documented performance effects of servant leadership. This reinforces the importance of calls in the literature to examine the role of gratitude in servant leadership and in customer service interactions.

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