



The Role of Servant Leadership in Enhancing Individual Innovativeness

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ABSTRACT

It is undeniable that organizations today need to be more innovative in order to be sustained due to the increasingly competitive environment. Further, creative and innovative employees are crucial in supporting the organization to be more competitive. Unfortunately, the level of individual innovativeness in Malaysia remains at a moderate level. Thus, it is believed that the role of servant leadership is imperative to enhance the innovativeness among the staff in the organisations. This study aims to examine the influence of servant leadership's characteristics, i.e. altruistic calling, emotional healing, and organizational stewardship in fostering individual innovativeness. A total of 177 administrative staff from private educational institutions in Selangor participated in the survey. The Partial Least Square (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (PLS-SEM) was applied in assessing the path modeling. The results indicated that altruistic calling, emotional healing, and organizational stewardship positively and significantly influenced the individual innovativeness. A well-practiced servant leadership in the organisation will lead the employees to be more creative and innovative. In addition, individual innovativeness can increase the innovative performance level of the organization. This study will serve as a guideline for the management to design new strategies in engaging leaders and employees to strive for innovation as well as to stimulate individual innovativeness.

Keywords: Innovativeness, Altruistic Calling, Emotional Healing, Organizational Stewardship.

INTRODUCTION

The innovativeness and creativity of a company's business practices are critical to the company's growth as well as its ability to compete successfully. The participation of employees

who are creative and innovative in the innovation activities such as designing new innovative marketing strategies, and applying new technological processes are essential components of innovation success.

Referring to the Global Innovation Index for the year 2022, Malaysia was ranked 36th among 132 countries [1]. Additionally, based on creative outputs and knowledge and technology outputs, Malaysia was ranked 41st and 39th, respectively. It shows that Malaysia has improved in the world ranking as compared to the previous years. This proves that the individual innovativeness is the key factor in completing the process of innovation. However, the individual innovativeness in Malaysia is still at a moderate level [2].

The engagement of leaders is essential for innovative efforts, as this is the component that most correctly predicts whether the efforts will be successful. It is necessary for the leaders to successfully manage the creative process to achieve success, paying attention to how they allocate their time, the resources they use, and the brilliant individuals who are working on new projects [3]. A good leader should support their employees' innovative ideas and activities rather than trying to stop them or stifle them [4]. Moreover, leaders should lead the concepts of idea support as innovative thinking will help employees to be more innovative [2]. It has been proven that the support by leaders indirectly drives individual innovation.

Empirical studies have been carried out on the relationship between leadership and individual innovativeness in both the Malaysia context [5-7] as well as the global context [8-10]. Nevertheless, those studies were done based on different perspectives and in different sectors. Unfortunately, there is a paucity study that investigates the impact of servant leadership on individual innovativeness [11], hence this study attempts to fill the gap.

Employees are an organization's most precious resource, both in terms of those who generate and implement new ideas and those who have a positive attitude toward them. The employees' opinions on the leadership role in stimulating innovation in the organization should be further examined [3]. According to [10] and [12], the studies on individual innovativeness are still insufficient in Malaysia. Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies on individual innovativeness among administrative employees, particularly in Malaysia. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of servant leadership in fostering individual innovativeness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individual Innovativeness

Innovativeness is defined as "the degree to which an individual or other unit of adoption is significantly sooner in adopting new ideas than other members of a system," [13]. General innovativeness is one term that has been used to refer to innovativeness as a personality feature [14]. [15] in his study in defined individual innovativeness as umbrella concept incorporating the essence of such concepts as risk-taking, openness to new experiences, creativity, and thought leadership. Further, he added the concept of "individual innovativeness" is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of characteristics, including a willingness to take risks, an openness to new experiences, creativity, and thought leadership. According to [16], the development of a company's competitive advantages relies heavily on the ability to innovate, both in product quality and in business processes. Furthermore, understanding employee

innovativeness is crucial as a factor of the organization's innovativeness. Despite that, [17] and [18] highlighted that innovation is obtained from an employee's ideas in the workplace for upgrading organization's level. Innovation and great performance in organisations can be attributed to the efforts of individuals or groups of employees.

Servant Leadership

In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis placed on the usefulness of servant leadership as a management strategy to develop and preserve a competitive edge [19]. [20] added to his original definition by saying that servant leadership is a multidimensional leadership theory that starts with a leader's desire to serve, then moves on to the leader's intention to lead and develop others, and ends with the leader's determination to reach a higher purpose goal that helps people, organisations, and the communities where he or she works and serves.

[21] indicated that servant leadership comprises five distinct dimensions, namely: altruistic calling, emotional healing, organizational stewardship, wisdom, and persuasive mapping. Altruistic calling is described as a "leader's deep desire to have a positive influence and make a positive difference in others' lives". Indeed, the altruistic leader tends to put a high priority on others than his interest. In addition, these leaders capable to inspire people, set more difficult tasks, overcoming crises, and driving innovation [22-23]. Meanwhile, Emotional Healing describes a leader's ability to "creates environments that are safe for employees to voice personal and professional issues".

This leader has high empathy and is a good listener for the followers; thus, it helps facilitate the healing process. Organizational stewardship refers to the "extent that leaders prepare an organization to make a positive contribution to society through community development, programs, and outreach" [21]. Referring to [24], persuasive Mapping is defined as the ability of leaders who can influence others, meanwhile, wisdom is the dynamic of the workplace that necessitates a sense of self-awareness and the expectation of repercussions.

Leaders that focus on serving their followers by putting the needs of their followers first realize the importance of providing them with the resources they need to develop. It emphasizes integrity and the making of ethical decisions, which enables the followers to place more trust in the leader [25]. In addition, they put the needs of their followers ahead of their own, whether at home or in business, making service their top priority [26]. When servant leaders listen to their employees and show appreciation for their feedback, the degree of employee engagement in an organization can rise [27]. It can be concluded that strong leadership may foster the creativity and innovativeness of individuals.

Hypotheses Development

This paper examines the relationship between servant leadership and individual innovativeness. A study that was done by [28] on the effect exerted by servant leaders on the level of innovativeness has found that when leaders serve the employees by giving them the necessary knowledge, the employees then feel empowered and that is normally translated in their level of innovations which increase as well as their work performance. In this study, servant leadership comprises altruistic calling, emotional healing, and organisational stewardship. Basically, an altruistic leader is believed to guide others to improve their

emotional state or well-being. Therefore, altruistic leaders are vital to encouraging innovative conduct among individuals, while affiliative humor has a significant role in explaining how unselfish leaders improve the innovative behavior of the personnel. Emotional healing usually appears in the academic literature as a behaviour related to servant leaders, as these leaders enhance the emotional health of their followers by promoting a positive climate in the workplace [29]. Leaders using emotional healing are highly empathetic and great listeners, making them adept at facilitating the healing process. The link between innovation and stewardship is treble. To start with the intrinsic motivation that comes with stewardship is very important for both. Intrinsic motivation is very important when it comes to innovation. Moreover, intrinsic motivation is also essential for stewardship conduct. Consequently, lacking intrinsic motivation means there will also be a lack of stewardship since the person cannot know that subordinating personal objectives to those of the company can generate personal reimbursements [14]. In so doing the person will have to follow the personal objectives of the company to fulfill what they want to achieve.

Considering the above-mentioned research, it is likely that servant leadership plays an important role in fostering individual innovativeness. Therefore, the following hypotheses are developed:

- *H1*: There is positive relationship between altruistic calling and individual innovativeness.
- *H2*: There is positive relationship between emotional healing and individual innovativeness.
- *H3*: There is positive relationship between organizational stewardship and individual innovativeness.

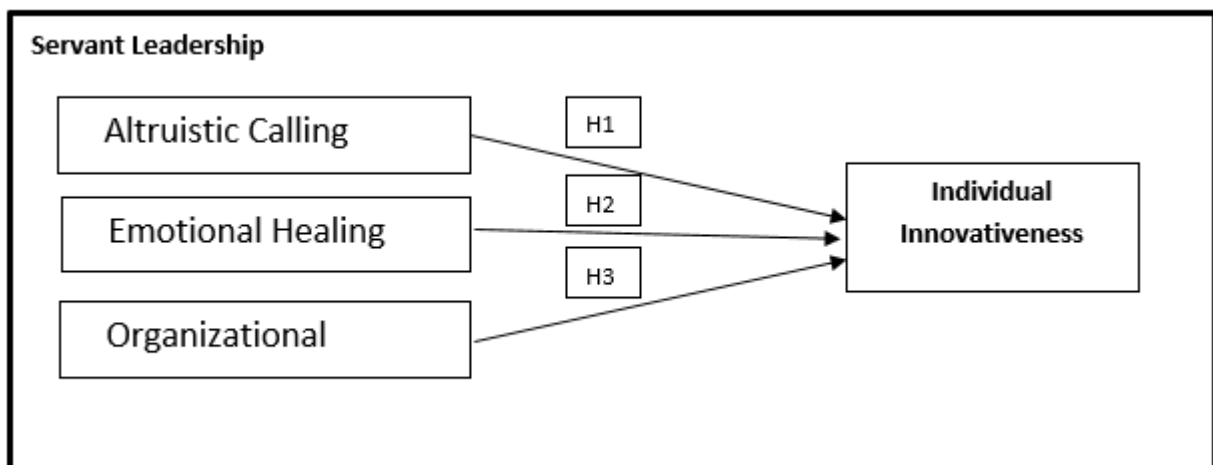


Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of the relationship between servant leadership and individual innovativeness among administration staff

METHODOLOGY

This study used a structured study instrument for data collection purposes. The population of this study comprised private higher educational institutions located in Selangor. In total, 200 survey questionnaires were distributed to administrative staff via simple random sampling. A self-administered questionnaire was used as the main method of collecting data for this study to gain a wider scale of data. To ensure a high response rate, a telephone call and appointment

have been made with the respective institutions. Also, the online questionnaire was used as an alternative method to gain more responses. A total of 177 administrative staff (response rate = 88.5%) returned the questionnaire.

This questionnaire was comprised of three sections, Section A is focused on Demographic Information such as gender, age, working experience, and educational background. Section B is measured servant leadership, which is represented by altruistic calling, emotional healing, and organisational stewardship. The 13 items were used and adopted from [21]. In measuring individual innovativeness (Section C), this study adopted 11 items from [30]. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was used to measure the level of respondents' agreeableness on the statement.

This study employs Partial Least Square (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (PLS-SEM) to measure the model. The assessment of the measurement model was conducted to determine the internal consistency reliability (composite reliability), convergent validity (factor loading and average variance extracted), and discriminant validity (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation) [31]. Further, the structural model is to investigate the relationship between altruistic calling, emotional healing, and organizational stewardship toward individual innovativeness. The explanatory power of the estimated model can be assessed by observing the coefficient of determination (R^2 values) and the path coefficient (beta value) [32].

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

The demographic information of respondents was evaluated using questionnaires that were designed to include gender, age, length of working experience and level of education. A total of 106 (60%) respondents are female and 71 (40%) are male respondents. In relation to age, 60 (34%) of the respondents were aged 40-49 years old, followed by 48 (27%) from 20 -29 years old, 45 (25%) were aged 30-39 years old, and 24 (14%) were aged from 50-59 years old. Majority of the respondents have more than 12 years of working experience (51%). 45% of the respondents possess Bachelor Degree, Degree (23%), Diploma (18%), and High School (14%).

Assessment of the Measurement Model

In assessing the measurement model, the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) should be administered to measure the reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity. The values of loadings should be ≥ 0.5 , the AVE should be ≥ 0.5 and the CR should be ≥ 0.7 . As shown in Table 2, the AVEs are all higher than 0.5 and the CRs are all higher than 0.7. The three constructs which are 1. Altruistic Calling, 2. Emotional Healing, and 3. Organizational Stewardship were assessed the validity and reliability as shown in Table 1. This indicates the measurement model was valid and reliable.

Table 1: Results of the Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Altruistic Calling	AC1	0.938	0.921	0.748
	AC2	0.940		
	AC3	0.881		
	AC4	0.673		
Emotional Healing	EH5	0.844	0.960	0.856
	EH6	0.951		
	EH7	0.965		
	EH8	0.935		
Organizational Stewardship	OS9	0.931	0.958	0.821
	OS10	0.933		
	OS11	0.911		
	OS12	0.949		
	OS13	0.798		
Individual Innovativeness	INN1	0.854	0.895	0.520
	INN2	0.818		
	INN3	0.841		
	INN4	0.607		
	INN5	0.664		
	INN6	0.650		
	INN8	0.636		
	INN10	0.646		

Note: II7, II9, and II11 were deleted due low loadings.

The discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion suggested by Henseler et al. [33] and Franke and Sarstedt [34]. The HTMT values should be ≤ 0.85 the stricter criterion and the mode lenient criterion is it should be ≤ 0.90 . As shown in Table 2, the values of HTMT were all lower than the stricter criterion of ≤ 0.85 . Thus, the results show that the AVE square root surpassed the correlation against other variables.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (Heterotrait-monotrait Criterion)

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Altruistic Calling				
2. Emotional Healing	0.818			
3. Individual Innovativeness	0.384	0.203		
4. Organizational Stewardship	0.732	0.672	0.340	

According to Kock and Lynn [35] and Kock [36], full collinearity should be tested to overcome the issue of Common Method Bias due to the data was collected using a single source. In this method all the variables will be regressed against a common variable and if the VIF ≤ 3.3 then there is no bias from the single source data. According to Hair et al. [31], the analysis yielded VIF less than 3.3 thus single source bias is not a serious issue with the data as can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Full Collinearity Testing

Altruistic Calling	Emotional Healing	Organizational Stewardship
2.711	2.406	2.068

Assessment of the Structural Model

The Partial Least Square (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (PLS-SEM) was employed in assessing the structural model and testing the proposed hypotheses. The coefficient of determination (R²) was analyzed to measure the endogenous constructs and the path coefficients [37]. The effect of the three predictors on Individual Innovativeness indicated that the R² was 0.187 meanwhile the predictive relevant (Q² = 0.083) which shows that all the three predictors explained 19% of the variance in Individual Innovativeness.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

HT	Relation - ship	Std Beta	Std Error	T Values	P Values	LL	UP	Decision	F2	R2	Q2
H1	AC --> INN	0.433	0.095	4.542	0.000	0.254	0.569	Supported	0.085	0.187	0.083
H2	EH --> INN	-0.285	0.120	2.371	0.009	- 0.477	- 0.111	Supported	0.042		
H3	OS --> INN	0.224	0.118	1.893	0.029	0.011	0.399	Supported	0.030		

As suggested by [38], the path coefficients, the standard errors, t-values and p-values for the structural model using a 5,000-sample re-sample bootstrapping procedure should be reported. Further, [39] critics that p-values are not good criterion for testing the significance of hypothesis and suggested to use a combination of criterions such as p-values, confidence intervals and effect sizes. Findings of this study shows that Altruistic Calling (t = 4.542, p< 0.01), Emotional Healing (t = 2.371, p< 0.01), and Organizational Stewardship (t = 1.893, p< 0.01) were positively related to Individual Innovativeness as shown in Table 4. Thus H1, H2 and H3 were supported.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The results underline important findings on the linkages within the present study as depicted in Table 4. The findings reveal that altruistic calling has a significant and positive relationship with individual innovativeness, thus supporting H1. The result of this study is consistent with the finding of [40] that altruistic calling has a positive impact on innovativeness. According to Dominguez et al. [41] in their study on the effect of organizational learning capability, altruistic behaviors of the leaders also can promote innovation in the organisations. This is in line with studies in [42-43] that show that altruistic leaders are important in promoting individual innovativeness. It proves that the servant leadership technique can encourage the innovativeness of the employees and inspire them to find different new methods of solving problems [44].

The result of H2 reveals that the relationship between emotional healing and individual innovativeness is significant; thus, H2 is supported. The findings suggest that emotional healing has an impact on individual innovativeness. It is aligned with [45] which confirmed the relationship between emotional healing and radical innovation. The study also shows that

emotional healing promotes organisational learning capability and suggested the guidelines to improve workplace conditions. A recent study by [46] indicates that the level of employees is improved through employing managers who are servants to the employees. This corresponds with the study by [47] which is crucial in enhancing the innovative behavior that may contribute to the organisation's success.

The findings of this study confirmed that organizational stewardship enhances individual innovativeness, thus supporting H3. The result of this study is aligned with [47] which confirmed that organizational stewardship significantly influences employees' innovativeness. For example, a leader's attention in an organization highly influences the employees. In addition, this result was also supported by [48] in their study by using radical innovation as an explanatory variable. It shows that leaders that care about society i.e., the social issues and their threats can create a positive organizational environment that encourages the development of innovations in the organizations

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Referring to the statistical significance of the model, it indicates that thorough altruistic calling emotional healing, and organizational stewardship can enhance individual innovativeness. Notably, promoting individual innovativeness is key to raising greater success for organisational performance. Driven by the low R square value of the three servant leadership characteristics on individual innovativeness, this will be a warning sign that it is crucial to determine the role of leaders in practicing proactive behavior such as spirituality, discipline, morality, sensitivity, and stewardship in managing the employees.

Therefore, it is imperative for management to encourage the leaders to exhibit those characteristics, especially in leading and staffing functions. This function is one of the essential competencies for the manager or leader professionals which in turn may stimulate the individual innovativeness as well as organization success. Further, this study discovers a new experience for organizational management theories specifically the role of servant leadership and individual innovativeness in private educational institutions. It will be a benchmark for management to boost leaders' role in stimulating individual innovativeness.

This study was conducted to determine the role of a leader in enhancing employee innovativeness, particularly in private educational institutions in Malaysia. However, some limitations were observed, in which the number of responses is rather moderate and it might not be able to capture and generalize in this context.

Perhaps, future studies could incorporate larger samples size to obtain more comprehensive findings. In addition, the future potential study could be integrated a mediating variable into the research framework for substantial impact.

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