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Original Article

Impact of Servant Leadership on Employee Retention in Corporate Sector Organizations of Indore, India

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Abstract

Background: Organizational retention has been among the measures that organizations working in competitive and high-attrition industries have been keen about. Although conventional motivators to retention like pay and job stability are still significant, current studies put more focus on the leadership style in influencing employee attitudes and withdrawal intentions. Servant leadership is a style in which a leader concentrates on employee growth, encouragement, and welfare, with scholarly interest in this type of leadership drawing the attention of potential retention outcomes. **Objectives:** This research paper seeks to investigate how servant leadership affects employee retention among employees in organizations in the corporate sector in Indore, India. **Methods:** The research design was a quantitative, descriptive one. The study design involved the use of a structured questionnaire in convenience sampling of 100 employees by use of a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was tested through Cronbach's Alpha (0.940) to determine the reliability of the instrument. Linear regression analysis was used in examining data with the assistance of SPSS and MS Excel. **Results:** The findings indicated that servant leadership and employee retention have a statistically significant and strong positive relationship ($R = 0.837$, $p < 0.05$). The model predicts 71% variation in employee retention ($R^2 = 0.710$), which means that servant leadership is a significant predictor of retention among the sampled population. **Conclusion:** The research gives empirical results that servant leadership is a key factor for employee retention. Institutions that aim to lower staff turnover and improve workforce retention can be interested in advancing leadership, employee-centered support, development, and relationship-building practices.

Keywords: Attrition Intention; Employee Retention; Leadership Style; Withdrawal Intention

Introduction

Employee retention is something that has to be managed by an organization to survive in the long run. An organization, irrespective of the sector it is operating in, cannot survive without manpower. In today's scenario, it has become very difficult for organizations to maximize employee retention. Several organizations fail to handle employees' withdrawal intentions. Salary, job security, healthy working conditions, etc. are no longer capable of motivating employees to withdraw their thoughts of leaving an organization. According to Rahman (2012), factors like meager growth opportunities, lack of future study plans, and opportunities in the external environment persuade an employee to leave an organization. Several other studies were also conducted that outlined the reasons behind poor employee retention in organizations. Job dissatisfaction and poor leadership at the workplace are also drivers of employee turnover intention in organizations (Chen, 2020).

The leadership approach of a leader in managing his followers plays a key and vital role in influencing an employee's withdrawal intention. Leaders today try every possible way to have cordial relations with their followers. In recent years, studies have shown that the majority of organizations have adopted an autocratic style of leadership, while on the other hand, today the maximum number of leaders resort to a democratic style of leadership. So, this demonstrates that it is urgent to learn about another style of leadership, i.e., the term servant leadership, and its effects on workers and organizations. There are already numerous articles discussing the significance of the so-called servant leadership in the modern context. Servant leadership does not define the level of output of an organization per se, although it can assist in studying how the output of a follower changes. Research by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) explored the subject of servant leadership in the study of the performance of followers. Nevertheless, few studies are found to investigate the connection linking servant leadership and its influence on employee retention.

This paper then enables us to do the same, hence bridging the research gap that was left by the previous research. At the modern workplace, employee retention is not just a human resource issue but a necessity, particularly with institutions grappling with the ever-increasing gaps between employer practices and employee expectations. Recent retention statistics point out that more than 50 percent of workers (51) are proactively pursuing new ways, and close to 42% of turnover can be avoided with the intervention of the management, leaving a lot of space for the influence of leadership on retention performance (Paycor, 2026). In addition, it is demonstrated that ineffective management and the working conditions are some of the leading causes forcing employees out of their jobs, which in most cases overshadow salary-related reasons (Xiang, 2024).

This leadership issue is further intensified by the fact that Gallup has reported that 70 percent of the difference in employee engagement, which is a major precursor to retention, is influenced by managers, which highlights leadership as the biggest determinant in employee retention or dissatisfaction. Leadership practices done poorly can increase turnover intentions due to the lack of trust, job embeddedness, and the inability to satisfy employees' needs to grow and be recognized (Gupta, 2026). This notwithstanding, most organizations still have been using the traditional forms of leadership that emphasize control over support and empowerment (George *et al.*, 2026).

A comparison of leadership styles by Tarar (2021) showed that the leadership behaviors that contribute to the establishment of trust and employee development, including those characteristics of servant leadership, are strongly linked with increased retention and commitment rates in a competitive and fast-paced organization such as SMEs and service industries. This highlights the need to move away from hierarchical or transactional models toward people-centered leadership to address modern retention challenges more effectively.

Literature Review

Since the time the term servant leadership was coined, researchers have tried to explain it in their own way. Some researchers attempted to define servant leadership, while others identified characteristics or traits that a servant leader possesses to provide a brief overview of this style of leadership. Mahembe and Engelbrecht (2014) and Whitaker (2009) explain servant leadership in their work by outlining the traits and characteristics a servant leader has.

As cited by Spears and Lawrence (2016), servant and leader are two terms that have opposite meanings, i.e., these two terms cannot be used together. But servant leadership is that style of leadership that proves the statement wrong. In fact, if this style of leadership is adopted, it will mean that the leader is supportive, and hence, a supportive leader brings out the best in his subordinates.

According to Darmawan *et al.* (2022), in an organization, it is the manager who leads, manages the team, and is in charge of working for the betterment and welfare of the employees. Besides these roles, the manager also acts as a leader, as he is in charge of getting work done by his subordinates. The study also suggested that while deploying these roles and responsibilities, the manager becomes an employee champion. So, a manager can also be referred to as a leader, as he is under the liability of

leading the group of employees. Hence, it is enough to say that all the responsibilities fulfilled by a manager are equivalent to those of a leader, which in turn proves that a leader that works for its follower's well-being is a servant leader.

Recent research has had a key role in enhancing the conceptual and empirical basis of servant leadership and also demonstrating gaps in methodology and context that pertain to retention studies. One significant synthesis, by Eva *et al.* (2019), synthesized almost twenty years of servant leadership research and maintained that the concept of servant leadership is strongest when considered as a distinct, follower-oriented construct instead of a repackaged form of ethical or transformational leadership. The review recommended that positive employee attitudes and behaviors always be associated with servant leadership but also more mechanism-focused research and greater causal designs (e.g., time-lagged or experimental research).

Following this, Lee *et al.* (2019) showed through a meta-analysis that servant leadership is a strong predictor of key employee outcomes compared to similar leadership styles. The research implied that servant leadership could provide incremental validity, meaning that the organizations could benefit more through retention-related gains, which is not possible with other so-called positive leadership strategies alone. Nonetheless, the study also showed that most of the primary research works heavily depend on self-report, cross-sectional data, which inflates relations because of the common method bias.

More current research has shifted to the explanation of how servant leadership minimizes withdrawal intentions. Exploring servant leadership and turnover intention in an educational setting, Mustamil and Najam (2020) proposed that servant leadership decreases the intention to leave among employees by enhancing positive psychological and relational resources in the workplace. Nevertheless, the sector-specific context of the study suggests that mechanisms might not be equally effective across industries, which implies that sector-specific replication is necessary to implement servant leadership in the elevation of relationship quality and psychological safety between supervisors and subordinates to increase their organizational identification conditions, which plausibly lowers turnover intention conditions. Nonetheless, cultural and relationship constructs (e.g., guanxi) might act differently in Indian corporate contexts, which implies that context-based testing is the only way out.

Recent empirical studies further explain how servant leadership affects the employee consequences, namely, turnover intention, job engagement, and organizational commitment. As an example, a 2024 quantitative study based in Poland by Gigol (2024) revealed that servant leadership was negatively correlated with turnover intention, and work engagement mediated this relationship partially. It can be seen that servant leadership has a direct, negative impact on employees trying to leave as well as encourages engagement, which equally suppresses turnover intentions.

The effects of servant leadership have been investigated by other psychological pathways through complementary research. According to Nantamu *et al.* (2025), servant leadership was found to be linked to reduced turnover intention through improved perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and job embeddedness, which are all crucial constructs in retention models. The relationships are applicable in diverse cultural settings and sectors, which implies that supportive leadership is one of the factors that contribute towards the beliefs and attitudes that anchor employees to their companies. The investigations are also emerging and point to significant boundary conditions and moderators of the servant leadership-turnover relationship. In their study of Generation Z employees in Indonesia, Putri *et al.* (2025) found that the relationship between servant leadership, ethical climate, and interpersonal justice consists of a complex interaction. Servant leadership in general reduced turnover intentions and also contributed to an ethical climate of principled character, which was occasionally restraining among younger employees, and this aspect illustrates the importance of organizational justice and culture in contributing to the impacts of leadership on retention.

In addition to the direct turnover results, servant leadership has remained to show desirable consequences on work engagement and psychological well-being variables that are directly related to retention. A 2024 study by Cai *et al.* (2024) showed that servant leadership enhances work engagement by providing personal and job resources such as resilience and perceived organizational support,

forming a resource-based pathway through which leadership increases employees' sustained involvement and attachment to work.

Finally, broader research reinforces that enhancing job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment through servant leadership not only fosters retention but also builds a supportive work environment that mitigates burnout and turnover. For instance, servant leadership has been shown to increase job satisfaction by fostering trust, empowerment, stewardship, and gentle persuasion, all of which reinforce employees' sense of value and well-being at work (Henry & Uzoechi, 2025).

Further evidence, which is more current, connects servant leadership to engagement pathways. Gigol (2024) reported that servant leadership is adversely related to turnover intention and proposed work engagement could mediate this association partially. However, the research also suggests that age cohort and early-career status can mediate these relationships, which are particularly the case in high-attrition service industries.

Recent research is finding a growing association between servant leadership and reduced turnover intentions and increased work engagement. Empirical evidence, including that by Cai *et al.* (2024), revealed that leaders who focus on employee development, listening, and psychological safety create a stronger organizational identification and decrease the intention to leave rates in employees. Meta-analytic reviews by Gigol (2024) also indicated that servant leadership mediates significant incremental differences in employee performance as compared to traditional leadership approaches, although the majority of primary research is cross-sectional.

Cross-context validation of measurement scales of servant-leadership studies (in both low- and middle-income nations) claim strong psychometric qualities and can be used to make cross-national comparisons on the effects of servant-leadership more confidently (Nantamu *et al.*, 2025). A recent sectoral and regional paper by Ojha *et al.* (2024) has demonstrated the practical relevance of servant leadership to IT/BPO/service firms with high attrition, with the effects moderated by contextual factors (e.g., culture, job design, and managerial constraints).

Lastly, emerging longitudinal and mechanism-oriented research indicates that engagement, organizational identification, and perceived organizational support mediators are an avenue future research (and applied HR intervention) should take to go beyond a correlational assertion.

On the whole, recent research indicated servant leadership is a significant predictor of lower turnover intention, and future research must use multi-source data, longitudinal studies, and other predictors (e.g., engagement, commitment, and psychological safety) to further elaborate on retention in the corporate context.

Rationale of the Study

The problem of employee retention is still acute in the world, and in the Indian industries, the turnover rates are increasing, negatively impacting productivity, costs, and competitiveness. Within recent surveys of more than 1,000 organizations in all sectors, India has an overall attrition rate of 17.1% in 2025, with increased turnover in all areas that are in continuous change; e-commerce and IT (projected as 13.6% in 2026) are in ongoing human capital difficulties to gain sustainable performance (Nagpal, 2026). Although things are now much better than they were years ago, there is still a possibility of attrition of more than 20% to attribute to matters of management practices, workplace culture, and support mechanisms for employees.

Available literature such as Xuecheng *et al.* (2022) identifies several antecedents of retention such as work environment, job satisfaction, and training interventions but also highlights the role of leadership in influencing workplace experiences and long-term commitment. Literature on leadership research by Kumar (2023) emphasized a study that supportive and employee-focused leadership may be a key factor in retention performance since leaders determine motivation, perceived organizational support, and employee perceptions of value within the workplace. It is worth noting that the research specifically focusing on servant leadership shows that it has a positive correlation with employee retention, thus

implying that a leader who emphasizes employee development and welfare can decrease turnover intentions and increase organizational loyalty (Romi *et al.*, 2022).

Nonetheless, regardless of the theoretical importance of leadership, the empirical evidence is not extensive in both the Indian corporate and service settings, especially in the context of the relationship between servant leadership and retention measures. This gap highlights the existence of a need to conduct specialized research to enlighten both the scholarly knowledge and visual approaches to human resource management to retain talents and ensure their continued organizational success.

Objectives of the Study

Choosing a leadership style for maintaining employees has been a key issue for leaders and managers today. This is because employees tend to leave an organization if they are unable to maintain cordial relations with the leader. Such employee withdrawal intentions reduce employee retention, resulting in high employee turnover. So, it is proposed to carry out a regression analysis to study the impact that servant leadership has on employee retention. The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To study the effect of servant leadership on employee retention

2. To broaden the scope of research and develop a base for putting the results into practice in terms of the study's ramifications.

Methodology

The study is descriptive and discusses the effects of servant leadership on employee retention. For the purpose of this empirical study, respondents who worked in Indore's corporate companies were surveyed using the survey method. Questionnaires were distributed to them, and the results were recorded accordingly.

Sample

For gathering data, a sample of 100 employees was taken. All these employees were working in different corporate companies operating in Indore. To select these 100 employees, convenience sampling was used.

Tools

For data collection, the responses were gathered through the use of an opinionnaire that was properly designed, closed-ended, and structured. The survey of opinions identified us with the data concerning the perception and opinions of respondents and helped to gather the data. The questions were based on the five-point scale known as the Likert scale, where the scale ran between 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree'. To measure the reliability of the opinion questionnaires, the Cronbach's Alpha Test was conducted before the final survey was conducted by distributing the questionnaires. An opinion questionnaire should have an alpha coefficient of 0.70 so that it can be said to be reliable. In this study, the Alpha Coefficient was determined to be 0.940, implying that the questionnaire is very reliable and can be used in further research.

Table 1: Case Processing Summary

Cases	N	Percentage (%)
Valid	101	99.0
Excluded	1	1.0
Total	102	100.0

In Table 1, the case processing summary shows that of all 102 responses obtained to conduct the study, 101 responses (99%) were valid and processed in the analysis with only 1% omitted because of incomplete or missing data.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Statistic	Value
"Cronbach's Alpha"	0.940
Number of Items	23

Table 2 displays the reliability statistics of the measurement instrument applied in the study. The 23 items have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.940, which indicates a high internal consistency of the questionnaire. Given that the alpha coefficient is greater than the recommended level of 0.70, the scale employed to measure the constructs in this paper is reliable.

Tools for Data Analysis

MS Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyze the data.

Results

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 3 below displays the demographics. 52 of the 100 people who responded were female, while the remaining 48 were male, as shown in the table below. Additionally, the educational credentials are listed in the table. 64 of the 100 people who responded were postgraduates, while the remaining 36 were undergraduates (Table 4).

Table 3: Distribution of Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Missing/Other	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Female	52	51.0	51.0	52.9
Male	48	47.1	47.1	100.0
Total	**102**	**100.0**	**100.0**	—

Table 4: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Missing/Other	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
PG (Postgraduate)	64	62.7	62.7	64.7
UG (Undergraduate)	36	35.3	35.3	100.0
Total	**102**	**100.0**	**100.0**	—

Regression Analysis

A Linear Regression Analysis Model was applied to analyze the impact that servant leadership has on employee retention. The sample size was not too large, and hence, simple linear regression was opted for. As presented in Table 5, the analysis is statistically significant as the p value, i.e., 0.000 < 0.05. The lower p value suggests that the results thus rendered can be relied on and that servant leadership does have an impact on employee retention. The R^2 in the table outlines the variation that an independent variable has on the dependent variable. In the study, the value was 0.710, i.e., 71%. This indicates that about 71% of the contribution to employee retention is because of servant leadership. The remaining 29% variation in employee retention is due to other factors such as the work environment, the mental health of superiors and subordinates, employee relationships, and so on (Table 6).

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	*R*	*R* Square	R Square (Adjusted)	Std. Error
1	0.837	0.701	0.698	0.4078

Table 6: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	*F*	Significance
Regression	38.213	1	38.213	229.748	0.000
Residual	16.300	98	0.166	—	—
Total	**54.514**	**99**	—	—	—

Dependent Variable: Employee Retention
Predictor: Servant Leadership

Table 7: Coefficients

Model	Variables	*B* (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	*t*	Sig.
1	Constant	0.498	0.234	—	2.127	—
	Servant Leadership	0.863	0.057	0.837	15.157	0.000

According to Table 7, the *R* value in the table above is 0.837. The *R* value is nothing but the correlation between the dependent and the independent variables. Here, an *R*-value of 0.837 suggests that there is a strong positive correlation between the two variables. If a servant leadership style is adopted more often, employee retention will go up.

The significant f value in the table above is 0.000. This value is less than 0.005, which makes it significant. This lower significance *F* value demonstrates that the regression did not happen by chance, and hence the results are reliable and accurate.

Thus, according to these theories, it is possible to make the following equation:

Y=b0=b1x1=b2x2

Employee retention = 0.498 + 0.837 (Servant leadership)

Managerial Implications of the Study

The study suggests some fascinating findings. If these findings are taken into consideration by the companies operating in the service sector, the attrition rate will fall and a high retention rate will be attained by them. The empirical findings concluded that servant leadership predicts employee retention by 71%. This is enough to state that it is a valid predictor of employee retention. Hence, if a company wants high retention in its organization, the leader and the managers should practice a servant leadership style the most.

Discussion

The current study indicates that the relationship between the variables of the study is very high and significant. That is, the more a leader is concerned about the needs, growth, and welfare of his or her followers, the more likely it is to reduce employee withdrawal intentions and enhance their intentions to stay with the organization. This finding is practically significant, as the problems of retention in service-intensive organizations are often not only pay- or job-security-related but also related to day-to-day supervisor-subordinate relationships and organizational support. In addition, the broader workforce

evidence indicates that engagement and connection in the workplace are currently tenuous. Harter (2025) described that employee engagement in the United States is at an all-time low in 2024 (31 percent), which is characterized by greater detachment and poorer relationships between workers and organizations. Under these circumstances, a servant-leader model of listening, support, and development can be a viable force that ensures that employees remain psychologically engaged and are less likely to leave.

In addition, retention has direct cost implications. Yi (2024) projected the replacement costs of frontline positions at an average of 40 percent of salary, technical positions at 80 percent, and leaders/managers at 200 percent. This is why efforts by leadership to avoid preventable turnover are strategically important. Thus, the high predictive relationship in the study can be viewed not only as a statistical association but also as a potentially high-impact managerial tool to avoid costly attrition.

The findings are consistent with the existing literature on servant leadership, which discovers that servant leadership is associated with numerous favorable personal and organizational outcomes and that increased integration of servant leadership should be channelled toward more consistent, mechanism-based empirical testing, especially in understanding why servant leadership is effective. This paper is a significant integrative review of the existing bodies of research on servant leadership, and Eva *et al.* (2019) proposed several ideas: servant leadership is linked to numerous desirable individual and organizational outcomes, and more consistent and mechanism-based studies are to be conducted in the future, namely, why servant leadership works. The data presented in the current research enables a more generalized conclusion via the empirical approach that makes servant leadership a critical predictor of the outcomes regarding retention.

Later, Canavesi and Minelli (2021) also highlighted that servant leadership is associated with better attitudes like satisfaction and commitment factors that generally lessen turnover intention. However, they reported that most studies are cross-sectional designs. This is significant since the current results are robust, but the larger body of literature warns that time-lagged designs and multi-source data should be used in future research to enhance causal inference.

More recent applied research still indicates that servant leadership decreases employees' propensity to consider leaving the organization based on relational and psychological processes (e.g., commitment, decreased strain). To illustrate this point, Pircher Verdorfer *et al.* (2025) emphasized the following pathways where servant leadership can alleviate the uncertainty-related withdrawal effects, which implied that the value of servant leadership would rise in cases when employees are exposed to stress and instability. The current research aligns with this new strand of argument, which means that servant leadership may be particularly applicable in high-pressure settings.

High performance monitoring, target pressure, and emotional labor are commonly reported by employees in corporate service environments (including BPO-type environments), and these may hasten burnout and job withdrawal. The secondary sources concerning the BPO sector have also long referred to attrition rates that usually ranged between 20 and 40 percent in most contexts, reflecting the endemic nature of the retention problem. It is in this context that servant leadership can be especially effective, as it directly addresses major turnover causes with human-focused management: employees who feel listened to, supported, and developed are less likely to view their organizations as places to remain even when work requirements are high (Batterywala, 2020). Furthermore, since engagement issues were reported on a large scale and disengagement causes a decrease in productivity, the focus of servant leadership on meaning, care, and development seems to be a viable path toward reinforcing attachment and curbing withdrawal tendencies.

Theoretically, the results support servant leadership as an employee-focused leadership model that can make a notable impact on retention outcomes. The findings validate the idea promoted in significant reviews that servant leadership is not merely an ethical add-on, but rather a leadership model with quantifiable behavioral implications for the intention of employees to remain. Through this, the paper contributes to the body of leadership and HRM by providing more information that the leader-follower

relationship (support, development orientation, and genuine concern) may be a key mechanism through which retention in service-sector settings might be achieved.

Limitation

The article has some potential limitations. Firstly, the study was restricted to companies operating in Indore. Secondly, a total of 100 respondents were considered, which indicates a small sample size. Thirdly, the study focused on employees working in the corporate sector of Indore. Lastly, only one independent variable, i.e., servant leadership, was included in the study, ignoring other variables that could potentially be indicators of employee retention.

Conclusion

Assessing the effect that servant leadership has on employee retention is still a long road that has to be traveled in both research and practice. According to the results found during this study, it was interesting to see that both variables had a positive correlation. Besides both variables being highly correlated, it was also found that servant leadership explains employee retention to a very high degree. Remarkably, all the results from the study can serve as a pragmatic tool for policymakers, managers, and other stakeholders of companies operating in the service sector. These stakeholders need to see that a servant leadership style, if followed, can lead to favorable outcomes for both employees and the organization collectively.

This study has provided enough data to continue studying the impact that a leadership style has on employee retention. The above study discussed servant leadership, while future studies could focus on other leadership styles. Future research could also explore the manufacturing, educational, and healthcare sectors, among others. Hence, the study has provided enough basis for researchers to conduct further studies in the future.

Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicting objectives.

Acknowledgement

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