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The Effect of Servant Leadership Style on Employee Trust: A Lebanese Context

Muhamad Msheik

Department of Management, Faculty of Business Administration, Beirut, Lebanon

Hussin J. Hejase (Corresponding Author)

Basic and Applied Sciences Research Center, Al Maaref University, Beirut, Lebanon

E-mail: Hussin.hejase@mu.edu.lb

Ali El Dirani

Department of Human Resources, Faculty of Business Administration, Al Maaref University, Beirut, Lebanon

Ali Hammoud

Department of Economics, Faculty of Business Administration, Al Maaref University, Beirut, Lebanon

Fatima A. Omais

Business Graduate, Department of Management, Faculty of Business Administration, Al Maaref University, Beirut, Lebanon

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Abstract

The research aims to answer how servant leadership behaviors contribute to building trust among employees and identify which leadership practices have the strongest impact. The paper focuses on the leadership dimensions of listening, empathy, and supportiveness and their influence on the trust dimensions of transparency, reliability, and fairness. A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured survey distributed to 153 employees across five small and medium Lebanese organizations. Data were analyzed using SPSS, including correlation analysis to determine the relationships between leadership behaviors and employee trust. The findings indicate that servant leadership has a statistically significant and positive effect on employee trust. Among the leadership dimensions, supportiveness emerged as the most influential factor, particularly in enhancing transparency and reliability, while listening had the strongest impact on fairness. Empathy also contributed positively, though its effect was lower than that of other dimensions. These results suggest that servant leaders who actively support, listen to, and empathize with employees can foster a work environment characterized by trust, fairness, and reliability.

The study has important implications for human resource (HR) managers and organizations, highlighting the need to develop servant leadership behaviors through recruitment, training, performance management, and health and well-being initiatives. Future research should explore broader organizational contexts, long-term effects, and the impact on employee well-being, health, and workplace outcomes.

Keywords: leadership, servant leadership, employee trust, listening, empathy, supportiveness, transparency, reliability, fairness

1. Introduction

Many wonder how organizations could prosper without effective leadership. In many other fields, leadership plays a significant role in achieving goals. Whether the issue is simple, complex, or in between, it may interfere with every process to give the best version of what one is planning. Despite the importance of leadership, people are still unaware of its types, styles, concepts, and effects. Understanding all these terms will help the leader apply the right type of leadership in the right place and at the right time. However, some confusion may arise in understanding the difference between leadership and management, as many people debate its importance. Both leadership and management are complementary roles in the organization, but differ somewhat in the tasks (Robbins & Coulter, 2018).

Leadership encompasses multiple definitions. However, most scholars who have researched leadership would probably concur, at least theoretically, that leadership can be characterized as an influencing process and its resulting outcomes that occur between a leader and followers. Day and Antonakis (2012) posit that this influencing process is elucidated by the leader's personal traits and behaviors, follower perceptions and interpretations of the leader, and the context in which it transpires. To clarify, leadership emphasizes future objectives, vision, and mission, whereas management centers on planning, controlling, and organizing; nonetheless, both are crucial in every organization.

There are many definitions and types of leadership, each with distinct characteristics. Servant leadership is positioned as a new field of research for leadership scholars (Van Dierendonck, 2010). Usually, employees are expected to perform well and serve the organization, but what about a leader being a servant? A servant leader can give all that he has, including motivation, empathy, and caring, to build a culture of engaged employees and, ultimately, a successful organization. Employee trust is one of the essential elements that all members of the organization must cultivate. In this paper, we will discuss the impact of servant leadership on employee trust. Perceptions of servant leadership were positively correlated with employee trust, and research found that organizations perceived as servant-led exhibited higher levels of organizational trust than those perceived as non-servant-led (Joseph & Winston, 2005).

1.1 Research Problem

Despite the influence of leadership in our lives, it remains poorly understood by most of us (Vendor, 2015). In 1977, Greenleaf first presented the idea of servant leadership in an essay titled "The Servant as Leader," attributing the inspiration for his servant-leader concept to Herman Hesse's 'The Journey to the East'. Greenleaf suggested that "the exceptional leader is regarded as a servant initially, and that simple truth is essential to his greatness." Conversely, is society truly aware of how to be servant leaders, or do they understand what those traits entail? Research on servant leadership has grown from 1999 to 2004 with the introduction of servant leadership models by many researchers (Farling et al., 1999; Russell and Stone, 2002; Page and Wong, 2000; and Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002), alongside the creation of tools by Page and Wong (2000) and Sendjaya and Sarros (2002). In every servant leadership model discussed by these researchers, trust is a shared element (Joseph & Winston, 2005).

Based on the aforementioned, there is a link between servant leadership and trust. Yet there is insufficient evidence, and the method of application remains unfamiliar to most people. Additionally, researchers find it challenging to conduct a study like that due to the difficulty of testing its results and the need for more time to observe the changes. But it is crucial to know that a servant leader would build a culture of engaged employees and enhance trust within. Therefore, this study examines servant leadership and its effect on employee trust.

1.2 Significance of the Study

There is considerable research interest in leadership models and theories that can serve as practical guides for managers and leaders to overcome obstacles they face in organizations. Servant leaders are usually ready to serve anyone at any time to make things work with minimal loss. Eventually, this will boost trust between the leader and his followers, which is highly sought to increase employee trust. Kurnaz (2018) contends that "Nowadays, the importance of organizational trust has increased due to the increasing environmental and economic changes, increasing the need for flexibility and cooperation, and a high level of confidence towards the organization and employees." Consequently, as more effective managers adopt the servant leadership style, exhibiting greater service, humility, and agape love in their behaviors, actions, and leadership approach, the trust they accumulate increases, leading to a corresponding rise in organizational trust levels (Nastiezaie, Bameri, & Dadkan, 2016). This study highlights how to build employee trust through the servant-leadership approach.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to discuss the impact of servant leadership style on employee trust and intends to meet the following objectives:

1. To identify the essential dimensions of servant leadership.
2. To explore three characteristics of a servant leader in the Lebanese context.
3. To analyze the importance of employees' trust.
4. To assess determinants of Lebanese employees' trust based on dimensions of servant leadership.

1.4 Research Questions

The main question of this study is: "How does servant leadership affect employee trust?"

To achieve the objectives mentioned above, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the essential dimensions of servant leadership?
2. What are the characteristics of a servant leader?
3. Why is employee trust important in an organization?
4. What is the status of determinants of Lebanese employees' trust based on a selection of servant leadership characteristics?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the effect of servant leadership on employee trust within organizations in Lebanon. It explores the dimensions of servant leadership, the characteristics of a servant leader, and the relationship between this type of leadership and trust, specifically employee trust. The research will target employees and managers across different small and medium-sized Lebanese organizations as the main respondents. The study does not address other leadership styles or organizational factors beyond trust, as its scope is limited to understanding how servant leadership behaviors influence employees' trust.

This research has five sections. The first introduces the study, providing a general overview, followed by the research problem, the significance of the study, the research objectives, questions and hypotheses, the scope of the study, definitions of terms, and, finally, ethical considerations. Section two reviews previous studies and theoretical frameworks related to servant leadership and employee trust. It highlights the key concepts, theories, and findings that underpin the current research. Section three covers the research methodology, in which the research design, population, sampling methods, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques used in the study are explained. The results, data analysis, and interpretation are covered in Section Four. It is followed by Section Five, which discusses the major findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and practical implications for organizations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

2.1.1 Agency Theory

Eisenhardt (1989) states that "agency theory analyzes the common relationship between a principal entity (such as institutional top managers and executive leaders) and an agent (like employees, supervisors, and lower-level managers) in authoritative roles.” Conflicts of interest arise between the principal (with more authority) and the agent (with less authority) when the principal assigns tasks or responsibilities to the agent. This happens because of possible differences in communication, risk tolerance, and empathy among the involved parties (like a principal and an agent, or an employee and lower-level managers, in relation to a coordinator or a student). For instance, consider a managerial scenario where the leaders of the institution (the principal) question the decisions and actions of the lower managers, or a supervisor questions a solution presented by an employee (the agent) and might find it challenging to align them with the institution's objectives (i.e., as stated in a mission statement or a standard operating procedure). Posthumus and Solms (2008) assert that “possible explanations encompass moral hazard and adverse selection, as outlined by agency theory. Moral hazard may arise as top managers might not consistently engage in guaranteeing that e-training (IT application) fulfills its expected benefits” (p. 689). Moreover, if the institution’s employees lack a full understanding of the institution's reliance on IT, negative selection may occur. Additionally, as noted by Shim (2015), according to Agency theory (or principal-agent (P-A) theory), "Users' insufficient efforts in adequately maintaining IT systems can be linked to moral hazard, resulting in the ineffectiveness of security measures" (p. 1). Therefore, the Agency theory highlights ineffective scenarios by detecting disputes between cooperating parties with differing objectives. For example, if the expected organizational outcomes are not realized from a P-A perspective, it could be argued that managers' evaluation techniques are failing due to misaligned work objectives, insufficient incentives to perform, and employees' ethical risks. The persistent discord between managers and subordinates can undermine the effectiveness of organizational resources and services, which are vital for enhancing skills and the overall standard of performance in firms, rendering them vulnerable to threats. Additionally, if the dispute remains unresolved at the highest levels of authority, the benefits of employee loyalty, trust initiatives, and innovation could be overshadowed by the adverse effects of conflicts between subordinates and managers.

2.1.2 Leadership Theories

The phenomenon of leadership has its roots in the earliest stages of civilization (Stone & Patterson, 2023). It is literally timeless, present at any time, and in every field. Early studies of leadership were based on trait theory, which focuses on qualities of the leader, and behavior theory, which focuses on leadership actions (Lussier and Achua, 2012; Verawati and Hartono, 2020; Cherry and Gans, 2025). Over the past several decades, organizations have evolved alongside the development of methods and processes. Similarly, the nature of leadership has been evolving due to significant changes across the economic, cultural, social, and technological spheres. Many theories were discussed and changed over time as well. Leadership literature reveals that theories have been refined and modified over time, and none is completely irrelevant (Khan and Khan, 2016). In this paper, a few of these theories are discussed to understand the evolution of leadership.

A. Great Man Theory

Over centuries, what was well realized in old cultures is the need for heroes to differentiate between failures and successes. During the 19th century, studies on leadership focused on the inherent traits of leaders and sought to identify the personality characteristics and other qualities of successful leaders. The fundamental principle of the Great Man theory is that leaders are innate rather than developed or educated. Put differently, merely a handful of exceptionally rare individuals have the distinct qualities needed to become successful leaders and achieve greatness by divine intention (Benmira and Agboola, 2021). In fact, in 1847, Thomas Carlyle asserted in his "great man theory" that leaders are innate and that only those individuals with heroic qualities can truly become leaders. He stated that remarkable individuals are born, not created (Khan and Khan, 2016). This theory posits that leaders possess certain traits like charisma, strength, and creativity, which enable them to be instinctive leaders. Benmira and Agboola (2021) state, "The Great Man theory subsequently changed into the trait theories" (p. 3).

B. Situational (Contingency) Theory

The situational leadership model, introduced in 1969, proposed that there is no single best way to lead and that effective leaders must adjust their leadership style to the circumstances, switching between task-oriented and relationship-oriented approaches (Khan & Khan, 2016). Moreover, AICURA (2026) posits that 'Situational' (or 'Contingency') leadership theories revolve around the concept that a leader's actions need to adapt to the specific circumstances encountered; that is, leadership approaches shift based on the 'situation' in which the leader operates. Several leadership models are included in this theory, namely "Kurt Lewin's Three Styles model; Tannenbaum and Schmidt's Leadership Continuum model; the Fiedler Contingency model; House's Path-Goal theory; Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership® model; and Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame model" (AICURA, 2026, para 1). These leadership models rest on the key belief that there is no one ideal method for leading since situations differ. Consequently, competent leaders adapt their conduct based on the context. Adding to the above, Shonk (2026) asserts that situational elements, or contingencies, consist of: "Economic circumstances; access to qualified workforce; organizational environment; legislation and directives; technology transformation; worldwide competition and virtual work settings; and pressures related to the environment and climate" (para 5).

C. Behavioral Theory

During the 1950s, researchers in leadership shifted their attention to leaders' behavioral styles. Leader behaviors are closer to the act of leadership than traits, making them more predictive of leadership effectiveness (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). The effectiveness of the behavioral style should depend on the context. In a way akin to the Lewin and Lippitt (1938) discussion of democratic versus autocratic leadership, this area of study focused on the actions leaders demonstrated and their treatment of followers (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

Behavioral leadership theory seeks to clarify how individuals attain leadership roles and what qualities contribute to effective leadership. It indicates that effective leaders develop and embrace certain behaviors rather than possess innate qualities of successful leadership. This theory classifies leadership actions into two categories: task-focused and people-focused (Hui, 2024). Task-focused leadership actions help achieve objectives. Their goal is to enhance team members' dedication and involvement, define roles, and distribute resources. Leadership behaviors that focus on people promote engagement among team members by striving to fulfill their emotional needs and fostering a respectful, positive workplace atmosphere. Both leadership styles are effective in appropriate situations and enhance a comprehensive leadership approach (Spalding University, 2025).

2.1.3 Leadership VS. Management

It turned out that defining leadership is not easy, which explains the existence of several definitions in this field. Antonakis and Day (2018) contend that in 1971, Fred Fiedler noted that nearly as many definitions of leadership exist as there are theories of leadership, and nearly as many leadership theories are present as there are psychologists in the discipline. The aforementioned is illustrated in the following description by Antonakis and Day (2018), which asserts Fiedler's view. At times, leadership researchers experienced considerable frustration due to numerous false starts, gradual theoretical progress, and conflicting results. Warren Bennis noted nearly sixty years ago (1959) that "Among the unclear and perplexing domains in social psychology, leadership theory certainly vies for the top spot. . . ." (pp. 259-260). More has probably been recorded and less comprehended concerning leadership than with any other topic in the behavioral sciences. Similarly, Hackman and Wageman (2007) have stated more recently that the leadership area is "strangely unformed" (p. 43). Building on the aforementioned sections, leadership involves setting a course, coordinating individuals and resources, and possessing the power to shape the actions or conduct of others. Its significance lies in its ability to foster unity, influence social awareness and behavior, and determine the destiny of entire countries. To be an effective leader, one must be able to draw people in and inspire them to give their best effort in every circumstance. Nonetheless, it is also observed that leadership is perceived differently across various cultures and historical periods.

Conversely, management represents an official authority and assigned responsibility that encompasses planning, organizing, leading, and monitoring. When an organization possesses robust management but lacks leadership, it may achieve consistent success in misguided endeavors. According to Bennis (1959) and Hejase (2010), managers execute tasks correctly, while leaders make the right choices. Despite encompassing distinct roles, the phrases management and leadership are frequently used as synonyms. Differentiating between these two terms is crucial, as many individuals neglect their responsibilities due to this confusion.

2.2 Styles of Leadership

For the past forty years, organizations and researchers have been fixated on leadership, striving to reduce it to a universal set of criteria (Goffee and Jones, 2000; Higgs, 2003; Conger and Toegel, 2002). A prevailing approach to examining leadership has surfaced recently. The leadership literature indicates growing consensus that there is no universal formula for achieving effective performance (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005; Chodkowski, 2025). Because of the numerous theories, styles, and forms of leadership, it is not feasible to list them all. This study will focus on two styles: Transformational and transactional.

2.2.1 Transformational Leadership

Recently, the contextualization suggested by the Transformational school (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996) has shifted from a primarily internal leader-follower perspective to a wider, frequently external one (Higgs and Rowland, 2000). Transformational leadership focuses on followers' growth and addresses their needs (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Bass and Avolio (1994) suggest that the purpose of the transformational style is to 'transform' individuals and organizations in a literal way, fostering changes in mindset and emotions, expanding vision, insight, and comprehension, clarifying motivations, aligning behavior with values and concepts, and leading to changes that are lasting, self-sustaining, and momentum-generating (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). This approach occurs when the leader supports the employees' interests after they embrace the team's purpose. Leaders who employ this style inspire and motivate their followers to view challenges from different viewpoints (IMD, 2024). Transformational leadership refers to leaders who leverage optimism, charisma, intellect, and other personal traits to elevate ambitions and convert individuals and organizations into achieving new standards of high performance.

2.2.2 Transactional Leadership

Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy (2014) contend that transactional leadership emphasizes "exchanges" between the leader and followers, in which followers receive compensation for achieving designated goals or performance standards. Martins (2025) contends that “Transactional leadership is an approach centered on a framework of incentives and penalties. Leaders establish explicit expectations, and team members are rewarded for achieving objectives or encounter corrective measures if they fail. This method emphasizes organization, structure, and purpose-driven planning. A transactional leader instructs their team on tasks, emphasizing maintaining the existing situation instead of questioning it” (para 4-5).

Moreover, Aniebonam, Chukwuba, Emeka, & Taylor (2023) argue in their review article that the transactional leader first establishes a link between performance and reward before providing it in return for adequate subordinates' responses, thereby motivating subordinates to enhance their performance. They utilize corrective actions, enforce rules, and provide contingent rewards to motivate followers. In addition, they add, “transactional Leadership, referred to as managerial leadership, emphasizes prevention, centers on supervision, organization, and group performance; the leader encourages follower compliance through rewards and punishments” (p. 9). Moreover, Sadeghi and Pihie (2012) posit that transactional leaders excel at accomplishing specific tasks by overseeing each segment separately. As a result, transactional leadership enables followers to pursue their own self-interests, reduce workplace stress, and focus on specific organizational objectives such as improved quality, customer service, lower costs, and increased productivity.

2.2.3 Servant Leadership

Numerous companies and non-profit entities are quickly shifting from traditional hierarchical and authoritarian leadership styles to servant leadership to engage with individuals (Canavesi and Minelli, 2022). Servant leadership aims to engage others in the decision-making process, relies heavily on ethical and compassionate actions, and fosters employees' development while enriching the quality of organizational life and care (Spears, 2010). The servant leader prioritizes serving others above all. It all begins with the instinctive urge to assist. One then aims to guide as a consequence of deliberate decision-making.

Both terms, servant and leader, are usually thought of as opposites, but they were eventually deliberately combined, bringing them together in a meaningful way. Robert Greenleaf coined the paradoxical term servant leadership. In the years since then, many of today’s most creative thinkers are writing and speaking about servant leadership as an emerging leadership paradigm for the 21st century (Spears, 2010; Canavesi and Minelli, 2022). In addition, Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson (2008) contend that Servant leadership is characterized as a multifaceted concept comprising seven dimensions: emotional healing, community value creation, conceptual abilities, empowerment, assisting subordinates in their growth and success, prioritizing subordinates, and ethical behavior (Liden et al., 2008). Theoretical and empirical evidence support that servant leadership is advantageous for employees, teams, and organizations (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya et al., 2019).

Servant leadership is increasingly recognized as an appropriate leadership style that countless individuals and organizations strive for. Today, an unparalleled explosion of interest in, and practice of, servant leadership is being witnessed. In addition to openly emphasizing followers' needs more than any other leadership philosophy, servant leadership may be especially relevant in this era since it incorporates social responsibility into transformative leadership (Liden, Wang, & Wang, 2025).

2.3 Characteristics of a Servant Leader

Each leadership style possesses fundamental characteristics. A servant leader is an individual who engages transparently with everyone, considers all perspectives, honors commitments, delegates authority, listens to understand, and prioritizes the well-being of others (Liden, Wang, & Wang, 2025). Expanding on the concept of ‘Servant Leadership’ as defined by AT&T executive Robert K. Greenleaf (1977/2002), Spears (2010) proposed a set of 10 traits of the servant leader that are crucial for nurturing servant leaders. These traits consist of: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, dedication to fostering individuals, and community building. However, this paper will examine only three of these within the Lebanese context. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs will offer concise definitions.

2.3.1 Listening

The initial characteristic to highlight is listening. A servant leader seeks to understand the group's desires and helps articulate them clearly. He or she pays close attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication. Listening also involves recognizing one's internal voice. The growth and well-being of the servant leader depend on active listening and moments of self-reflection (Spears, 2010).

2.3.2 Empathy

The next trait is empathy. The servant leader seeks to understand and relate to others' experiences. Individuals ought to be acknowledged and celebrated for their distinct personalities. While some may feel obligated to disapprove of certain actions or performances, they do not dismiss coworkers and colleagues as people; instead, they believe that these individuals have positive intentions. Individuals who have honed their capacity to listen with empathy are the most successful servant leaders (Spears, 2010; Murphy, 2020a; Hejase, 2020).

2.3.3 Supportiveness (Commitment to the Growth of People)

The final trait to be discussed is supportiveness. Patterson (2003) stated, "Empowering people, with the best interest of those served in mind, is at the heart of servant leadership" (p. 23). A servant leader shows support by putting their team's growth and well-being first and providing direction, inspiration, and tools that help people advance. This trait demonstrates a leader's sincere dedication to understanding workers' needs, offering constructive feedback, and establishing a secure workplace where individuals feel appreciated and inspired (Khan, Mubarik, Islam et al., 2021). The servant leader creates an environment where workers can realize their full potential by fostering a culture of trust and confidence via helpful behaviors (Spears, 2010). Also, according to "Servant leaders empower their followers by serving them" (Focht, 2015). Moreover, servant leaders empower others through teaching and nurturing individuals (Russell & Stone, 2002). The fulfillment of servant leaders arises from the development and growth of those around them, and they are prepared to take responsibility for the outcomes (Blanchard, 2000).

2.4 Employee Trust

Joseph and Winston (2005) posit that trust is the level of confidence one individual has in another's competence and in the other's willingness to act in a fair, ethical, and predictable manner. Among the well-established effects of servant leadership in the leadership and organizational behavior literature are employee trust and commitment (Chinomona, Mashiloane, & Pooe, 2013). Leaders use their behavior to establish and maintain trust. Relationships built on trust and service are the basis for the influence of servant leadership (Joseph & Winston, 2005). Greenleaf (1977) argued that trust was central to servant leadership, as leadership legitimacy begins with trust. He noted that "the only sound basis for trust is for people to have the solid experience of being served by their institutions". Servant leaders are trusted because of their capacity to relate to and welcome followers fully, their dependability, which stems from their extraordinary intuitive insight, and their setting an example. Murphy (2020b) argues that "Workers' attitudes (such as optimism, resilience, proactivity, assertiveness, ambition, etc.) are more important than having an excellent manager. Those individual perspectives (rather than their managers' behaviors) influence their employee engagement. Having trust in one's supervisor accounts for about 22% of an employee's motivation at work. That's positive. Employees with high resilience (i.e., managing tough situations with ease) account for 25% of an employee's motivation at work. That's significantly improved" (Para 9). What makes a difference is living in a caring work environment. Thus, an employee's confidence in a leader represents a psychological condition characterized by optimistic anticipations regarding the leader's intentions or actions toward oneself in risk-related situations (Chinomona et al., 2013). The experiences, interactions, and context within a relationship can either strengthen or weaken trust, which is likely to develop differently concerning team members, team leaders, and the organization as a whole. Multiple studies have demonstrated that servant leadership can boost interpersonal trust between employees and their supervisors (Plessis, Wakelin, & Nel, 2015). When a leader is transparent and truthful, followers understand the leader's principles and convictions. Trust will rise if such insights reveal that the values and objectives of both parties align.

2.5 Transparency

Building employee trust is largely dependent on transparency (Jiang and Men, 2017; Mattina, 2025). A servant leader practices transparency through honest and consistent communication of intentions, open exchange of information, and clarification of decisions. This transparency shows that the leader has nothing to hide, lessens uncertainty, and makes workers feel included in organizational processes (ibid). Employees are more inclined to accept a leader's intentions and view them as trustworthy and moral when they can clearly understand the logic behind their actions. Servant leaders cultivate a culture based on transparency and respect for one another and build trust via open communication (Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010; Jiang & Men, 2017). Moreover, Hadziahmetovic and Salihovic (2022) assert that “When employees can observe and evaluate everything a leader does, it's crucial that the person guides the organization with integrity in ways that align with their values. As a result, workers will demonstrate their reliability and trustworthiness/trust” (p. 359).

2.6 Reliability

Employee trust is mostly based on reliability, which is more potent when exhibited by a servant leader. A trustworthy servant leader regularly keeps their word, fulfills commitments, and exhibits consistent behavior that is consistent with their declared ideals. This consistency lowers uncertainty and increases trust in the leader's goals by communicating to staff members that the leader is dependable and trustworthy. Servant leaders foster a trustworthy work environment where employees feel safe and appreciated by demonstrating dependability via steady actions and regular support (Spears, 2010).

2.7 Fairness

Effective servant leadership is characterized by fairness, which is essential to building employee trust. By making fair decisions, treating staff members equally, and making sure that opportunities, awards, and recognition are allocated fairly, a servant leader exemplifies fairness (Spears, 2010). Employees are more likely to feel appreciated, respected, and assured that their interests are taken into consideration when they believe their leader is fair. Servant leaders build trust, encourage corporate commitment, and foster an environment of honesty and respect by continuously acting fairly (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

2.8 Research Hypothesis

In line with the study’s purpose, the hypotheses below were developed to examine the expected relationship between servant leadership and employee trust.

H0: Servant leadership has no significant positive effect on employee trust.

H1: Servant leadership has a significant positive effect on employee trust.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology is a crucial component of a thesis that helps maintain coherence among the selected tools, techniques, and foundational philosophy (Melnikovas, 2018; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). A method for constructing research methodology is the "research onion," a visual representation that highlights the issues involved in choosing data collection techniques and analytical procedures. It provides a rather exhaustive description of the main layers that must be addressed to formulate an effective methodology (Melnikovas, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Alturki, 2021). This research follows the main layers of the research onion: research philosophy, research approaches, methods, strategies, choices, time horizon, and techniques and procedures.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

This study adheres to a positivist philosophy (Hejase and Hejase, 2013). It concerns the understanding gained through observation and the identification of patterns of events, which rely on causal, law-like, and functional relationships (Melnikovas, 2018). This study aims to test the effect of servant leadership on employee trust, while also measuring other factors. According to positivism, reality is objective and can be investigated using empirical data regardless of the researcher's personal beliefs or interpretations. The positivist approach is best suited for this study, as it focuses on testing hypotheses and examining statistical relationships between employee trust levels and leadership behavior.

The research, which is quantitative and follows a positivist philosophy, aligns with a deductive approach. A deductive approach is applied to existing theory testing because it begins with an existing theory of servant leadership and employee trust, then employs statistical analysis to test the proposed relationship using survey data.

3.2 Research Strategy

Saunders et al. (2019) list the following as the primary research strategies: experiment, survey, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry. This paper’s quantitative methodology is based on a survey strategy that uses a structured questionnaire to collect relevant data to assess variables, test hypotheses, and identify correlations between factors. Numerical data and statistical analysis are used. In order to generate results. Thus, quantitative research delivers quantifiable proof and statistical significance. In fact, this study uses quantifiable markers to record the views of a selected sample of respondents. In addition, statistical analysis enables the researcher to examine correlations among variables and test hypotheses; the use of validated scales improves accuracy.

3.3 Time Horizon

A short-term, cross-sectional study is used here. It entails gathering data at a particular moment in time.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants' willingness to participate was a key factor. All individuals involved were informed about the research and recognized that their participation was voluntary, with their identities kept confidential and their responses used exclusively for research purposes. Participants were selected from different regions in Lebanon, and the sample size “n” was determined using Cochran’s formula as detailed in Hejase & Hejase (2013, p. 231).

$n = (z^2 p(1 - p)) / e^2$

Where

z = The confidence level for this study is 92%, resulting in z = ±1.75.

p = The percentage of the population experiencing trust, concerning gender, is considered to be skewed towards females (70%) and males (30%).

e = The target precision level (accuracy) was set at 6.5%.

Applying these values in Cochran’s formula results in a sample size of 152 participants. From 170 distributed questionnaires, 123 valid responses were collected, while 29 were excluded for being either partially completed (21) or containing only demographic details (8). The response rate achieved was 72.35%. This sample size is acceptable for the current exploratory research. To assess the reliability of this sample size, an alternative method is used, with a sample of 123 and an overall population of 500 (grouping five small and medium enterprises). The researchers utilized the methods of Chehimi & Hejase (2025), Rammal et al. (2024; 2025), Hejase, **A.**, Hejase, H., Kassem et al. (2025), Zneit & Hejase (2025), Hejase, **A.**, Haidous, HejaseBazzi et al. (2025), and Hejase, **A.** Beiz, Chehimi et al. (2026), to evaluate reliability error values for estimates derived from Hardwick's (2022) results, e.g., Table 1. Results show that for a population of 500, a standard error of 5%, and a reliability of 7.9% ± 0.1%, the necessary sample size is 123. Consequently, with a 95% confidence level, the study's sample size of 123 participants yields a margin of error of 7.9%. This indicates that in 92.1 out of every 100 instances of conducting the survey, the results will vary by no more than 7.9%. This reliability error percentage would be suitable for this type of preliminary research.

Table 1. Statistical reliability versus sample size

[50/50% proportion characteristics]						
	Population					
Sample Size	**500**	**1000**	**5000**	**10000**	**100,000**	**1 Million+**
75	±10.4%	±10.9%	±11.3%	±11.4%	±11.5%	±11.6%
100	±8.8%	±9.3%	±9.7%	±9.8%	±9.9%	±10.0%
200	±5.4%	±6.2%	±6.8%	±6.9%	±7.0%	±7.1%

300	±3.6%	±4.7%	±5.5%	±5.6%	±5.7%	**±5.8%**

Source: Extracted with modification from Hardwick Research, 2022.

3.5 Survey Design

The survey was organized into four parts, along with a demographic section. Section One (Leadership Dimension of Listening), comprising 6 items, evaluates employee trust dimensions: transparency, reliability, and fairness. Section Two (Leadership Dimension of Empathy) consists of 6 items, assessing employee trust dimensions: transparency, reliability, and fairness. Section Three (Leadership Dimension of Supportiveness), containing 6 items, investigates employee trust dimensions: transparency, reliability, and fairness. Section Four (Demographics), consisting of nine (9) items, gathers background information such as gender, age group, education level, employment status, salary range, industry type, years of experience, management level, and employee status.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent before data collection. They were made aware of the study's purpose and goals and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were assured that their data would remain confidential, including its use for research purposes. No incentives were provided for participating in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration.

3.7 Data Analysis

This analysis aims to find out how servant leadership affects employee trust by assessing managers' and employees' perspectives, who are from different ages, educational levels, industries, years of experience, levels of management, and employment status.

According to Hejase & Hejase (2011), giving data a purpose generates insightful knowledge. Descriptive statistics, in addition, "aims to provide a better understanding of a collection of data by reducing the amount of data to simple, representative numerical numbers or graphics" (p. 272), as stated by Hejase & Hejase (2013). For clarity, therefore, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used and shown in tables. The IBM Statistical Product and Service Solutions, SPSS version 26.0, was used to evaluate the gathered data by applying frequency distributions, reliability analysis, correlation tests, and multiple regressions.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Demographics

Employees' perceptions of servant leadership and employee trust may be influenced by several demographic factors, including age, gender, educational level, salary range, industry, management level, employment status, and years of experience. Statistical information on these demographic variables is presented as percentages, providing a clear overview of the study sample's composition. The employed questionnaire includes nine questions related to respondents' demographics, as stated earlier. As for sex, 83% of respondents were female, and 17% were male.

This is a clear indication of the skewed inclination towards a female majority.

As for age, 43% of the respondents correspond to the ages between 20 and 24 years, 22% age between 25 and 29 years, 15% age between 30 and 34 years, 7% age between 35 and 39 years, and a similar percentage between 40 and 44 years, 4% age between 45 and 49, and 2% age between 50 and above. This implies that the grand majority of respondents belong to young employee age categories. Results about education levels show the following distribution: Bachelor's degrees, 43%; Master's degrees, 15%; Doctorate (PhDs), 22%; High and Middle schooling, 22%; 6% Vocational and Technical schooling. The sample illustrates a high level of education among participants. In addition, the distribution of respondents by wage category shows that the majority (82%) earn between 499 and 999 USD, 17% earn between 1,000 and 2,500 USD, and a small minority (5%) earn more than 2,000 USD. Such a distribution is a result of the current Lebanese economic and financial crises (Rkein, A. et al., 2022; Rkein, H.I. et al., 2022), which have strongly impacted salaries. In addition, participants' industry affiliations show that the largest portion of respondents was employed in the educational sector (25%), followed by the healthcare sector (22%). The next-largest portion, 20%, is in sales and retail; 13% in various kinds of businesses; and 10% in technology and information technology. Moreover, 4% work in the government and public sector, and 3% each in manufacturing and the banking/finance sector. These results are acceptable and reflect the economic sector.

The next demographic variable shows the distribution of participants by years of work experience. The results show that the majority of participants reported having between 1 and 3 years of experience (34%), equal proportions of respondents have 4 to 6 years and less than 9 months of experience, each accounting for 20% of the sample. Also, 18% have more than 10 years of experience, and 8% have 7-9 years. In general, such a distribution of work experience is suitable to actually sense the leadership style of the organizations. As for the distribution of participants by management level, the largest group occupied non-managerial positions (68%). The next portions include 16% of supervisors and team leaders, 9% middle managers, and 7% distributed among executive, top managers, and senior managers. Therefore, the grand majority of the sample are subject to the leadership style practiced in the different organizations. Finally, the distribution of respondents by employment status shows that 76% were employed full-time, while 24% were employed part-time.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Survey's Statements

This survey adopted a 4-level Likert scale for consistency across all survey sections, with SA: Strongly Agree (5), A: Agree (4), D: Disagree (2), and SD: Strongly Disagree (1).

Table 2. Overall descriptive statistics

	No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Servant Leadership: Listening							
	1	Effective listening by my leader increases clarity and openness in communication	60.2	38.2	1.6	0.0	3.59	0.527
T	2	My leader actively listens to employees,	39.0	51.2	7.3	2.4	3.29	0.702

		which helps in making transparent decisions.						
R	3	My leader's active listening makes me feel I can rely on them to act consistently	33.3	54.5	9.8	2.4	3.19	0.705
	4	I trust my leader to act reliably because they genuinely understand employee feedback	30.1	53.7	11.4	4.9	3.09	0.779
F	5	My leader's listening skills contribute to fairness in distributing work and resources	34.1	51.2	9.8	4.9	3.15	0.786
	6	By listening to all perspectives, my leader ensures fair treatment of employees	39.0	44.7	12.2	4.1	3.19	0.803
Servant Leadership: Empathy								
T	7	When my leader shows empathy, I feel more informed and aware of the reasons behind decisions	30.1	54.5	13.8	1.6	3.13	0.701
	8	Understanding employees' feelings helps my leader share information more transparently	40.7	45.5	13.0	0.8	3.26	0.710
R	9	My leader's empathetic behavior makes me feel they are dependable and trustworthy	29.3	52.8	16.3	1.6	3.10	0.718
	10	My leader's empathy makes me confident that he will fulfill his promises	30.1	51.2	15.4	3.3	3.08	0.764
F	11	Empathy allows my leader to understand diverse viewpoints, supporting fair treatment	26.0	61.8	11.4	0.8	3.13	0.827
	12	I believe my leader is fair because he/she genuinely cares about employees' needs	34.1	41.5	20.3	4.1	3.06	0.848
Servant Leadership: Supportiveness								
T	13	Supportive behavior by my leader encourages sharing information openly	32.5	56.1	10.6	0.8	3.20	0.652
	14	Supportive behavior by my leader fosters a culture of transparency	34.1	55.3	9.8	0.8	3.23	0.651
R	15	A supportive leader consistently follows through on promises	35.0	45.5	18.7	0.8	3.15	0.743
	16	My leader's supportiveness makes him dependable in fulfilling commitments	36.6	47.2	15.4	0.8	3.20	0.720
F	17	My leader's support promotes fairness in assigning responsibilities	33.4	56.9	8.9	0.8	3.23	0.638
	18	My leader's support encourages equitable opportunities for everyone	31.7	55.3	11.4	1.6	3.17	0.686

Note: To reach Employee Trust Needs = T: Transparency; R: Reliability; F: Fairness

Table 2 shows high agreement on most statements classified under the servant leadership traits of "listening, having empathy, and supportiveness," and, at the same time, leads to defining the degree of achieving "transparency, reliability, and fairness." The first section of Table 3, with statements 1 to 6, shows an average agreement rate of 88.2%, indicating that respondents have high expectations when a servant leader demonstrates a 'hearing ears' or listening trait across the three dimensions, which may help build trust with employees. However, in this section, we also need to consider the highest disagreement observed in item 4, "I trust my leader to act reliably because they genuinely understand employee feedback," with 15.2% disagreement in the reliability dimension, and item 6, "By listening to all perspectives, my leader ensures fair treatment of employees," with 15.3% disagreement in the fairness dimension. These two statements lead to agreement on the first, but the word 'genuinely' is not very accurate, which also suggests that certain organizations have leadership that does not show full reliability; and the second statement does not assure full 'fairness.' Even though these results reflect respondents' subjective opinions, attention may be necessary when interpreting them.

The second section of Table 2, with statements 7 to 12, shows an average agreement rate of 82.93%, indicating that respondents have higher expectations when a servant leader shows the 'empathy' trait than when it is shown in the three dimensions, which may help build trust with employees. However, in this section, we also need to consider the highest level of disagreement observed across most items, namely items 7 to 10 and 12. Item 7, "When my leader shows empathy, I feel more informed and aware of the reasons behind decisions," with 15.4% disagreement, and item 8, "Understanding employees' feelings helps my leader share information more transparently," with 13.8% disagreement, both in the transparency dimension. Also, item 9, "My leader's empathetic behavior makes me feel they are dependable and trustworthy," with 17.9% disagreement, and item 10, "My leader's empathy makes me confident that he will fulfill his promises," with 18.7% disagreement, both in the reliability dimension. Finally, item 12, "I believe my leader is fair because he/she genuinely cares about employees' needs," with 24.4% disagreement, was the highest in this section, in the dimension of 'Fairness.' Respondents, in this section of 'Empathy,' reflect a few concerns in the dimensions of reliability (where an average of disagreement is 18.3%) and fairness (with the highest disagreement of 24.4%), which may impact their trust level over time.

The third section of Table 2, with statements 15 and 16, shows an average agreement rate of 86.60%, which indicates that the respondents have high expectations when a servant leader shows a 'supportive' trait (caring for the growth of the subordinates) versus the three dimensions that may help build trust with employees. In this section, we consider the highest disagreement among the items, namely items 15 and 16. Item 15, "A supportive leader consistently follows through on promises," with 19.5% disagreement, and item 16, "My leader's supportiveness makes him dependable in fulfilling commitments," with 16.2% disagreement. Both these items are linked to the 'reliability' dimension, which, when assured, leads to employees' trust. Hence, some respondents may have concerns about their top managers' reliability in keeping promises or fulfilling commitments. This is serious in the Lebanese context, because the current crisis may compel employees to continue working until a better opportunity at another institution becomes available. This situation has been confirmed by the Lebanese economist Prof. Bassam Hamdar (personal communication, May 22, 2026), who believes that when employees lose trust due to top managers' failure to keep their promises and commitments, they simply leave whenever an opportunity presents itself.

4.2.1 Data Integration

Further analysis of the three sections follows to have a clearer stance backed up by statistical analysis. Table 3 illustrates the integration of statements based on the three dimensions (relative to Servant Leadership traits: Listening, Empathy, and Supportiveness) leading to employee trust, namely (1) 'Transparency/Listening: T/L; Transparency/Empathy: T/E; and Transparency/Supportiveness: T/S,' (2) 'Reliability/Listening: R/L; Reliability/Empathy: R/E; and Reliability/Supportiveness: T/S,' and (3) Fairness/Listening: F/L; Fairness/Empathy: F/E; and Fairness/Supportiveness: T/S.' Results show a very positive stance among respondents toward all three employee trust dimensions, measured relative to Servant Leadership traits selected for this research. The overall averages with agreement and disagreement are as follows: "For Transparency (88.57%, 10.43%, mean of 3.28, Std., Dev. of 0.657); for Reliability (83.20%,16.80%, mean of 3.135, Std. Dev. of 0.738); and Fairness (84.95%, 15.05%, mean of3.155, Std. Dev. of 0.765). Qualitatively, we may concur that the practices of the Servant Leadership traits by the corresponding Lebanese managers, according to the surveyed employees and other leaders, on average, are perceived as trustworthy by employees who trust their leadership, even though very specific concerns were raised in Table 2 related to reliability and fairness (high disagreement percentages as compared to all other results), as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Integration of Statements According to Each Dimension Leading to Employee Trust

	No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Servant Leadership: Listening, Empathy, & Supportive							
T/L	1	Effective listening by my leader increases clarity and openness in communication	60.2	38.2	1.6	0.0	3.59	0.527
	2	My leader actively listens to employees, which helps in making transparent decisions.	39.0	51.2	7.4	2.4	3.29	0.702
T/E	7	When my leader shows empathy, I feel more informed and aware of the reasons behind decisions	30.1	54.5	13.8	1.6	3.13	0.701
	8	Understanding employees' feelings helps my leader share information more transparently	40.7	45.5	13.0	0.8	3.26	0.710
T/S	13	Supportive behavior by my leader encourages sharing information openly	32.5	56.1	10.6	0.8	3.20	0.652
	14	Supportive behavior by my leader fosters a culture of transparency	34.1	55.3	9.8	0.8	3.23	0.651
		Overall Average	**38.43**	**50.14**	**9.37**	**1.06**	**3.28**	**0.657**
		Overall Average showing Agreement &	**88.57**		**10.43**		**3.28**	**0.657**

		Disagreement						
	Servant Leadership: Listening, Empathy, & Supportive							
R/L	3	My leader's active listening makes me feel I can rely on them to act consistently	33.3	54.5	9.8	2.4	3.19	0.705
	4	I trust my leader to act reliably because they genuinely understand employee feedback	30.1	53.7	11.4	4.9	3.09	0.779
R/E	9	My leader's empathetic behavior makes me feel they are dependable and trustworthy	29.3	52.8	16.3	1.6	3.10	0.718
	10	My leader's empathy makes me confident that he will fulfill his promises	30.1	51.2	15.4	3.3	3.08	0.764
R/F	15	A supportive leader consistently follows through on promises	35.0	45.5	18.7	0.8	3.15	0.743
	16	My leader's supportiveness makes him dependable in fulfilling commitments	36.6	47.2	15.4	0.8	3.20	0.720
		Overall Average	**32.40**	**50.80**	**14.5**	**2.3**	**3.135**	**0.738**
		Overall Average showing Agreement & Disagreement	**83.20**		**16.80**		**3.135**	**0.738**
Servant Leadership: Listening, Empathy, and Supportive								
F/L	5	My leader's listening skills contribute to fairness in distributing work and resources	34.1	51.2	9.8	4.9	3.15	0.786
	6	By listening to all perspectives, my leader ensures fair treatment of employees	39.0	44.7	12.2	4.1	3.19	0.803
F/E	11	Empathy allows my leader to understand diverse viewpoints, supporting fair treatment	26.0	61.8	11.4	0.8	3.13	0.827
	12	I believe my leader is fair because they genuinely care about employees' needs	34.1	41.5	20.3	4.1	3.06	0.848
F/S	17	My leader's support promotes fairness in assigning responsibilities	33.4	56.9	8.9	0.8	3.23	0.638
	18	My leader's support encourages equitable opportunities for everyone	31.7	55.3	11.4	1.6	3.17	0.686
		Overall Average	**33.05**	**51.9**	**12.33**	**2.72**	**3.155**	**0.765**
		Overall Average showing Agreement & Disagreement	**84.95**		**15.05**		**3.155**	**0.765**

Table 4. Final Results of Integration of Statements Extracted from Table 4.

	No.	Statement	SA, %	Am %	D, %	SD, %	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Servant Leadership: Listening, Empathy, & Supportive							
T/L T/E T/S	1, 2, 7, 8, 14, and 14	Overall Average	38.43	50.14	9.37	1.06	3.28	0.657
		Overall Average showing Agreement & Disagreement	88.57%		10.43%		3.28	0.657

R/L	3, 4, 9,	Overall Average	32.40	50.80	14.5	2.3	3.135	0.738
R/E **R/S**	10, 15, and 16	Overall Average showing Agreement & Disagreement	83.20%		16.80%		3.135	0.738
F/L	5, 6,	Overall Average	33.05	51.9	12.33	2.72	3.155	0.765
F/E **F/S**	11, 12, 17, and 18	Overall Average showing Agreement & Disagreement	84.95%		15.05%		3.155	0.765

4.3 Internal Reliability

The Cronbach's Alpha recorded 0.947 (number of items = 18, e.g., Table 5), which, according to the thumb rule, is considered excellent, statistically significant, and reliable (Burns and Burns, 2008, p. 481; Hejase and Hejase, 2013, p. 570). Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha varies between 0.942 and 0.947 when an item is deleted during an item-total statistics assessment. These values are well above the recommended minimum criterion of 0.7, indicating an excellent level of consistency among questionnaire items (Chehimi, Hejase, & Hejase, 2024, p. 46). Moreover, Chehimi et al. (2019) contend that the aforementioned indicates "an excellent strength of association and supports the suitability and selection of the questions for the questionnaire purpose" (p. 1915). Results do not change much across the three sections of the questionnaire (items 1 to 6; 7 to 12; and 13 to 18), with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.878 to 0.927, considered very good to excellent.

Table 5. Reliability Statistics

Total Items Included	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted**	
			Minimum	**Maximum**
18	0.947	0.947	0.942	0.947
6 (1-6)	0.887	0.880	0.910	0.847
6 (7-12)	0.878	0.881	0.875	0.841
6 (13-18)	0.927	0.928	0.924	0.908

4.4 Factor Analysis

4.4.1 Common Method Bias

A commonly used tool in quantitative research is the survey questionnaire. “Such surveys often provide the information needed to evaluate both the independent and dependent variables in an analysis.” Still, this leads to the potential for common method bias” (Jakobsen & Jensen, 2015). Common Method Bias (CMB) occurs, among other reasons, from the uniformity in the wording and structure of survey items, which results in similar responses. A different reason arises from the consistent application of measures, leading to specific response patterns that evaluators might display (Farhat, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the data for the identified risk, and the Harman Single Factor Test was utilized for this analysis.

The Harman Single Factor Test essentially conducts Principal Component Analysis by selecting a single factor and examining whether the resultant percentage of variance falls below 50% (Younis, Hejase, Abdallah et al., 2021). In fact, the result indicates a value of 48.028% < 50% (e.g., Table 6), leading us to conclude that there is no Common Method Bias and that the data are prepared for further analysis. Therefore, the subsequent step is to derive the valid constructs for this study through Factor Analysis.

Table 6. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**
1	**9.606**	**48.028**	**48.028**	9.606	48.028	48.028	7.748
2	1.959	9.795	57.824	1.959	9.795	57.824	7.958
3	1.513	7.567	65.391	1.513	7.567	65.391	6.662
4	1.286	6.430	71.821	1.286	6.430	71.821	1.950

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Initially, testing utilized Principal Component Analysis (PCA), followed by Varimax rotation with 18 items. The initial run yielded three (3) factors, all of which had unsatisfactory outcomes, with the first accounting for more than 53% of the total. A second run was then performed, and four demographic variables were added. However, after eliminating items that were not aligned with the components, 20 of the 27 questionnaire items (including demographics) remained, with only two demographic items retained. The second run yielded four (4) factors, which showed satisfactory outcomes and passed the Harman Single Factor test. The first factor accounted for 48% of the total variance, and the analysis used the Promax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization. Table 6 shows that the cumulative ‘Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings’ of the total variance explained was 71.821%, considered satisfactory.

4.4.2 Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Promax Rotation

The assessed correlation matrix indicates that it is suitable for factor analysis. Table 7 shows the Chi-square value estimated for the Bartlett test of Sphericity as statistically significant ($\chi 2 = 1817.165$, df = 190, Sig. = 0.000), with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy at 0.899 (considerably above 0.60). Thus, "the variables exhibit correlations with one another, facilitating the grouping of variables" (Burns & Burns, 2008; Coakes, 2013). Moreover, the anti-image correlation matrix reveals that "each measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) surpasses the acceptable limit of 0.5" (Coakes, 2013, p. 133).

Table 7. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Adequacy.	Measure of Sampling	0.899

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Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1817.165
	Df	190
	Sig.	0.000

The communalities in factor analysis ranged from 0.309 to 0.754. Burns & Burns (2008) claim that "Communalities indicate the extent to which the variances in each variable have been explained by the extracted factors" (p. 455). For instance, “My leader's effective listening enhances clarity and openness in communication” accounted for 46.8% of the variance, while “I have confidence in my leader to act dependably because they truly comprehend employee feedback” accounted for 84.8%, among other instances. Table 6 shows the overall variance accounted for and the cumulative percentages. Eigenvalue analysis indicates that four (4) factors were extracted with eigenvalues exceeding 1 (e.g., Figure 1). Extracting the four factors indicates that 71.821% of the variance will be accounted for. Additionally, Figure 1 depicts a Scree plot showing one main factor and three additional factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, in alignment with Kaiser's Rule (Burns & Burns, 2008, p. 456). Thus, based on the statistics provided, one cannot definitively connect the variables. Additional data is required, making the interpretation challenging. Thus, a selected rotation is required.

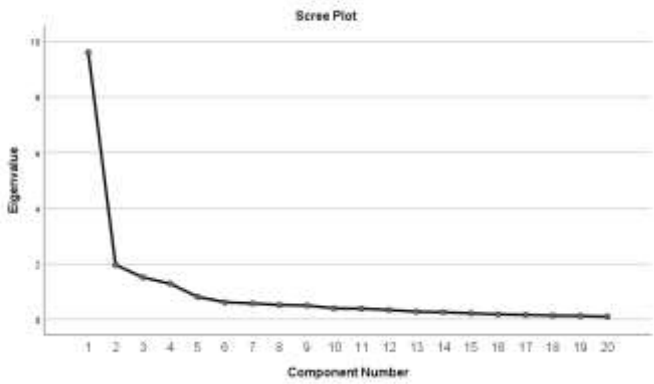

Figure 1. Scree Plot

The Varimax followed by the Promax rotation results are not shown per se (due to limited space), but are illustrated in the resultant four factors in Table 8. The table (e.g., Table 8) reports the Structure Matrix resulting from Promax rotation results, where "the factor axes are kept at right angles to each other. This rotation is of choice to solve negative signs in most factors. Ordinarily, according to Hejase et al. (2014), "rotation reduces the number of complex variables and improves interpretation" (p. 1573).

Table 8. Interpretation of Factors’ Components

Factor	Elements	No. of Elements	Weight
	➢ My leader actively listens to employees, which helps in making transparent decisions.		0.845
1	➢ My leader’s active listening makes me feel I can rely on		0.686

Accounting for 48.028% of Variance	them to act consistently. ➢ I trust my leader to act reliably because they genuinely understand employee feedback. ➢ My leader's listening skills contribute to fairness in distributing work and resources. ➢ By listening to all perspectives, my leader ensures fair treatment of employees. ➢ I believe my leader is fair because he/she genuinely care about employees' needs.	6	0.912 0.899 0.864 0.739
2 Accounting for 9.795% of Variance	➢ Effective listening by my leader increases clarity and openness in communication ➢ Supportive behavior by my leader encourages sharing information openly. ➢ Supportive behavior by my leader fosters a culture of transparency. ➢ A supportive leader consistently follows through on promises. ➢ My leader's supportiveness makes him dependable in fulfilling commitments. ➢ My leader's support promotes fairness in assigning responsibilities. ➢ My leader's support encourages equitable opportunities for everyone.	7	0.660 0.804 0.837 0.819 0.852 0.862 0.844
3 Accounting for 7.567%	➢ When my leader shows empathy, I feel more informed and aware of the reasons behind decisions. ➢ Understanding employees' feelings helps my leader share information more transparently. ➢ My leader's empathetic behavior makes me feel they are dependable and trustworthy. ➢ My leader's empathy makes me confident that he will fulfill his promises. ➢ Empathy allows my leader to understand diverse viewpoints, supporting fair treatment.	5	0.810 0.755 0.873 0.850 0.776
4 Accounting for 6.430% of Variance	➢ Age ➢ Years of experience	2	0.924 0.921

Table 8 illustrates the final step of the Factor analysis process, discussing the resultant factors and showing their respective elements. Factor 1 (loaded with six (6) items) is labeled "Listening Trait," accounting for 48.028% of the total variance. Factor 2 (loaded on seven (7) items) is labeled "Supportiveness Trait," and accounts for 9.795% of the total variance. The third factor (loaded with five (5) items), labeled "Empathy Trait," accounted for 7.567% of the total variance. The fourth factor (loaded with two (2) items), labeled "Demographics," accounts for 6.430% of the total variance.

Table 8 allows the generation of weights (or loads) of the four factors. Therefore, by carrying out a weighted-sum assessment using the factor analysis results, the following outcomes are generated, as shown in Exhibits 1 and 2. The resultant transformed variables depict the integrated weighted sum of the components of employee trust (Transparency, Reliability, and Fairness), as shown in Exhibit 1, and those of the selected servant leadership characteristics (Listening, empathy, and supportiveness), as shown in Table 8. Many other studies used the same transformation-of-variables approach in SPSS (Younis et al., 2021; Chehimi, Hejase, H., & Hejase, A., 2024; Hejase, H., Hamdar, Hejase et al., 2024).

Exhibit 1: Transformation of variables for determinant components of employee trust

```
COMPUTE
ETransp=SUM(Listening1*0.660,Empathy1*0.810,Empathy2*0.755,Supportiveness1*0.804,Supportiveness2*0.837).
EXECUTE.
COMPUTE
EReliability=SUM(Listening3*0.686,Listening4*0.912,Supportiveness3*0.819,Listening5*0.852).
EXECUTE.
COMPUTE
EFairness=SUM(Listening5*0.899,Listening6*0.864,Empathy6*0.739).
EXECUTE.
```

Exhibit 2: Transformation of variables for the selected Servant Leadership characteristics

```
COMPUTE
Slistening=SUM(Listening2*0.845,Listening3*0.686,Listening4*0.912,
Listening5*0.899,Listening6*0.864,Empathy6*0.739).
EXECUTE.
COMPUTE Sempathy=SUM(Empathy1*0.810,Empathy2*0.755,
Empathy3*0.873,Empathy4*0.850,Empathy5*0.776).
EXECUTE.
COMPUTE Ssupport=SUM(Listening1*0.660,Supportiveness1*0.804,Supportiveness2*0.837,
Supportiveness3*0.819,Supportiveness4*0.852,Supportiveness5*0.862,Supportiveness6*0.844).
EXECUTE.
```

Having the two pairs of integrated variables defined, it is possible to test for a conceptual framework to answer the different research questions proposed. Therefore, a framework is constructed by testing three dependent variables: 'Transparency, Reliability, and Fairness,' addressing the employee's three independent variables, being the servant leader selected characteristics. Figure 2 illustrates the relationships.

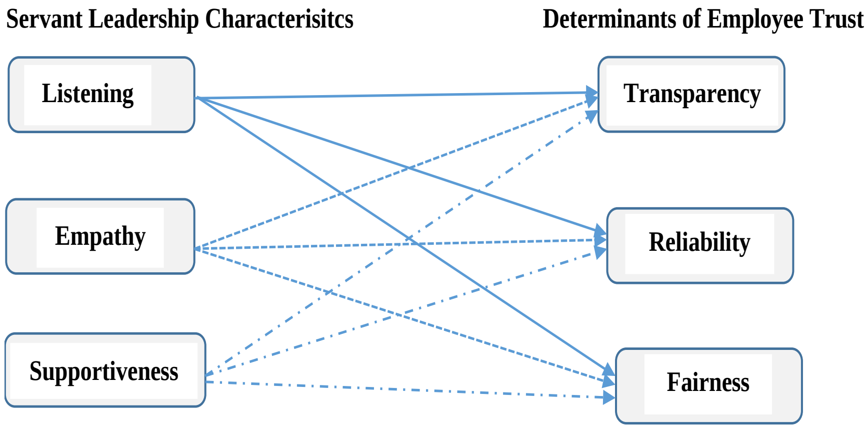

Figure 2. Proposed Research Framework

4.5 Regression Analysis

4.5.1 Variables Descriptive Statistics

Three variables that lead to employee trust are shown in Table 9 and in the histograms in Figures 3 to 5 herein. The Rule of Thumb notes that data distribution is regarded as excellent when the skewness and kurtosis values are within the range of "-1 to +1", and is still acceptable between -2 and +2 (George and Mallery, 2010; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2022; Hair, Hult, & Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022, p. 66; Chehimi and Hejase, 2025, p. 10). Table 9 shows that the skewness for the three variables, transparency, reliability, and fairness, are -0.368, -0.487, and -0.884, respectively, and kurtosis values are 0.596, 0.204, and 0.889, respectively, ranging from -1 to +1; therefore, they are deemed acceptable to demonstrate a normal univariate distribution for parametric analysis as shown in Figures 3 to 5.

Table 9. Determinants of Employee Trust Statistics

		ETransp	EReliability	EFairness
N	Valid	123	123	123
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		12.6401	10.2614	7.8412
Median		12.2580	9.8070	7.5060
Mode		11.60	9.81	7.51
Std. Deviation		1.92444	2.01458	1.77931
Skewness		-0.368	-0.487	-0.884
Std. Error of Skewness		0.218	0.218	0.218
Kurtosis		0.596	0.204	0.889
Std. Error of Kurtosis		0.433	0.433	0.433

Similarly, Table 10 and the histograms illustrated in Figures 6 to 8 show that skewness for the three variables 'Listening, Empathy, and Supportiveness' are -0.723, -0.506, and -0.325, respectively, and kurtosis values are 0.485, 0.506, and 0.206, respectively, ranging from -1 to +1; therefore, they are deemed acceptable to demonstrate a normal univariate distribution for parametric analysis.

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Table 10. Characteristics of Servant Leadership

		Slistening	Sempathy	Ssupport
N	Valid	123	123	123
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		15.6067	12.7490	18.4007
Median		15.5740	12.1920	17.6940
Mode		14.84	12.19	22.71
Std. Deviation		3.19892	2.35170	3.12240
Skewness		-0.723	-0.506	-0.325
Std. Error of Skewness		0.218	0.218	0.218
Kurtosis		0.485	0.869	0.206
Std. Error of Kurtosis		0.433	0.433	0.433

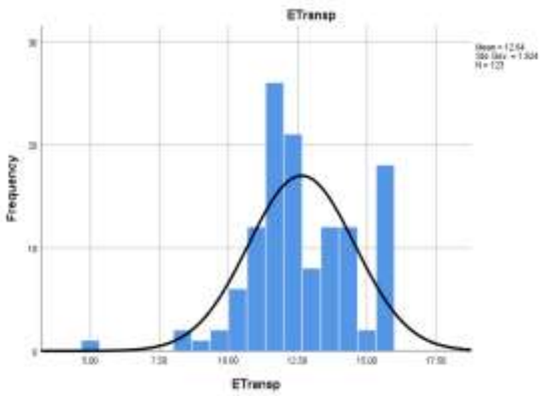

Figure 3. Histogram for the data ‘Transparency.’

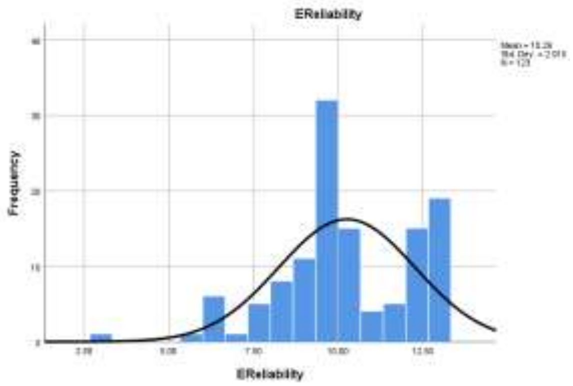

Figure 4. Histogram for the data ‘Reliability.’

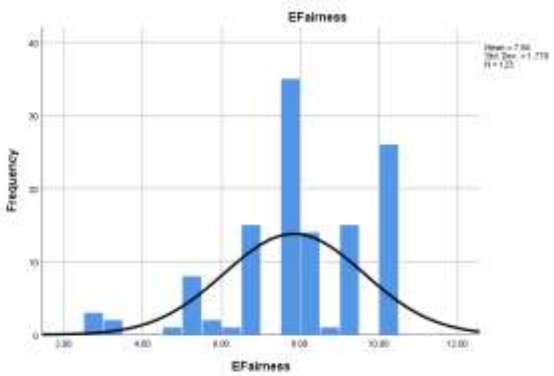

Figure 5. Histogram for the data ‘Fairness.’

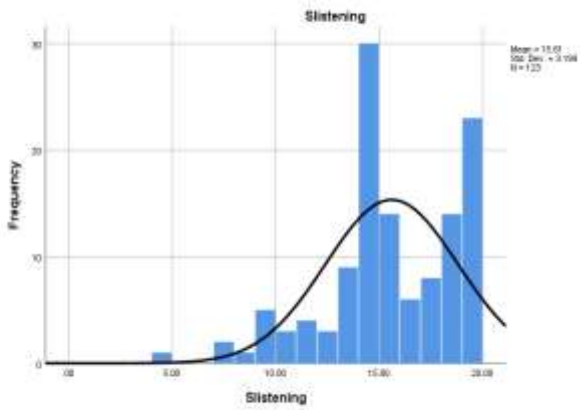

Figure 6. Histogram for the data ‘Listening.’

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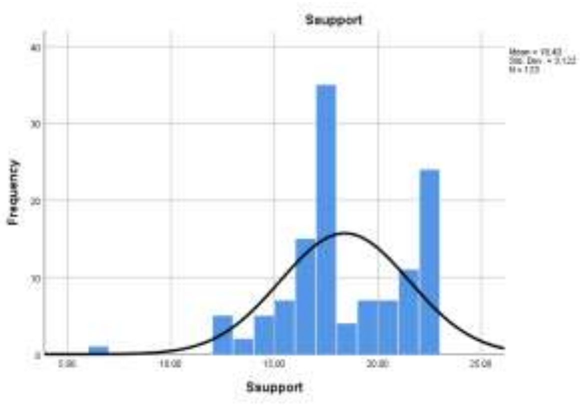

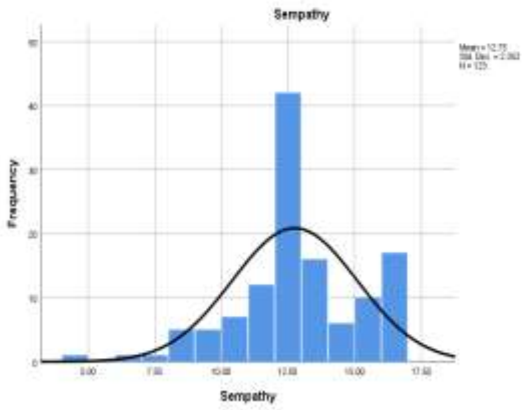

Figure 7. Histogram for the data ‘Supportiveness.’ Figure 8. Histogram for the data ‘Empathy.’

4.5.2 Regression Analysis

The survey statements in this research focus on dependent variables (employee trust determinants) and independent variables (servant leadership characteristics), based on respondents’ subjective experiences and perceptions. Therefore, to run regression analysis, a thorough and meticulous analysis is performed to define each group of variables with no collinearity. For this purpose, the servant leadership variables produced by factor analysis are kept as is, but the employee trust variables must be reconstructed for each determinant by selecting the corresponding items without repetition. Exhibit 3 shows the required distribution of items.

Exhibit 3: Redistribution of items for the employee trust determinants

Transparency	**Reliability**	**Fairness**
1. Effective listening by my leader increases clarity and openness in communication. 7. When my leader shows empathy, I feel more informed and aware of the reasons behind decisions. 8. Understanding employees’ feelings helps my leader share information more transparently. 13. Supportive behavior by my leader encourages sharing information openly. 14. Supportive behavior by my leader fosters a culture of transparency.	3. My leader’s active listening makes me feel I can rely on them to act consistently. 4. I trust my leader to act reliably because they genuinely understand employee feedback. 15. A supportive leader consistently follows through on promises. 16. My leader’s supportiveness makes him dependable in fulfilling commitments.	5. My leader’s listening skills contribute to fairness in distributing work and resources. 6. By listening to all perspectives, my leader ensures fair treatment of employees. 12. I believe my leader is fair because they genuinely care about employees’ needs.

Exhibit 3 shows the new distribution that allows the regression analysis with no multicollinearity among the variables; i.e., no common statements are found when selecting the relationships.

Therefore, the following relationships will be tested:

1. Transparency versus Listening,
2. Reliability versus Empathy, and
3. Fairness versus Empathy and Supportiveness.

Regression analysis was performed in three stages. Stage one examines the interrelationships among the first three employee trust variables. Stage two examines the interrelationships among the three servant leadership characteristics, and stage three examines the relationships among the three servant leadership characteristics and the employee trust determinants. These analyses help justify the proposed framework shown in Figure 2.

A. Stage One

The results from the regression models (e.g., Table 11 and Table 13) indicate that the Pearson's correlation coefficients for the models (R = 0.619, 0.701, 0.863, and 0.889, respectively) and the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adj. R2 = 0.378, 0.487, 0.743, and 0.786, respectively) suggest that the regression lines can effectively represent the available data. Nonetheless, the models are also qualitatively suitable, demonstrating a notable probability of 0.000 ($p < \alpha = 0.01$). The Durbin-Watson statistic ranges between 1.882 and 2.228, which lie between 0 and 4. A value close to 2.0 indicates the absence of autocorrelation in the sample (Al Sayed et al., 2022). The ANOVA tests produced acceptable F-values (Sig P = 0.000 < α = 1%), suggesting that the derived regression equations are superior to random predictions. Additionally, each standardized beta (e.g., Tables 12 and 13) is statistically significant at the 1% level. Additionally, the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) in Tables 12 and 14 suggest that multicollinearity is absent (VIFs < 2) (Akinwande, Dikko, & Samson, 2015; Kim, 2019). Each explanatory variable can be accounted for in a regression analysis to determine a causal relationship (Hashem et al., 2022). These models show that the explanatory variables account for 37.8%, 48.7%, 74.3%, and 78.6% of the variance in the dependent variables, respectively. The findings above are introduced into a schematic diagram for clarity (e.g., Figure 9).

Table 11. Regression analysis, One-to-One, for the three employee trust determinants

Model	**Dep. Var.**	**Indep. Var.**	**Pearson's R**	**R^2**	**Adj. R^2**	**Sig. F Change**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Durbin-Watson**
1	Transparency	Fairness	0.619	0.383	0.378	0.000	75.183	0.000	1.882
2	Transparency	Reliability	0.701	0.491	0.487	0.000	116.752	0.000	1.908
3	Fairness	Reliability	0.863	0.745	0.743	0.000	353.359	0.000	2.244

Table 12. Regression Coefficients (One-to-One: Employee Trust Determinants)

Model	**Dep. Var.**	**Indep. Var.**	**Std. Beta**	**Sig.**	**α**	**VIF**
1	Transparency	Fairness	0.619	0.000	1%	1.000
2	Transparency	Reliability	0.701	0.000	1%	1.000
3	Fairness	Reliability	0.863	0.000	1%	1.000

Table 13. Regression analysis for multi-relationships between the three employee trust determinants

Model	Dep. Var.	Indep. Var.	Pearson's R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Sig. F Change	F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
1	**Reliability**	**Transparency** **Fairness**	**0.889**	**0.790**	**0.786**	**0.000**	**225.505**	**0.000**	**2.228**
2	Transparency	Reliability Fairness	0.701	0.492	0.483	0.000	58.078	0.000	1.904
3	Fairness	Reliability Transparency	0.863	0.745	0.741	0.000	175.587	0.000	2.240

Note: Models 2 and 3 are feasible, however not considered due to failure of one of the variables.

Table 14. Regression Coefficients (Multi-relationships: Employee Trust Determinants)

Model	Dep. Var.	Indep. Var.	Std. Beta	Sig.	α	VIF
1	**Reliability**	**Transparency** **Fairness**	**0.270** **0.696**	**0.000** **0.000**	**1%** **1%**	**1.621** **1.621**
2	Transparency	Reliability Fairness	0.653 0.056	0.000 0.666	1% **> 5%**	3.920 3.920
3	Fairness	Reliability Transparency	0.843 0.028	0.000 0.666	1% **> 5%**	1.965 1.965

Note: Models 2 and 3 are feasible, however not considered due to failure of one of the variables.

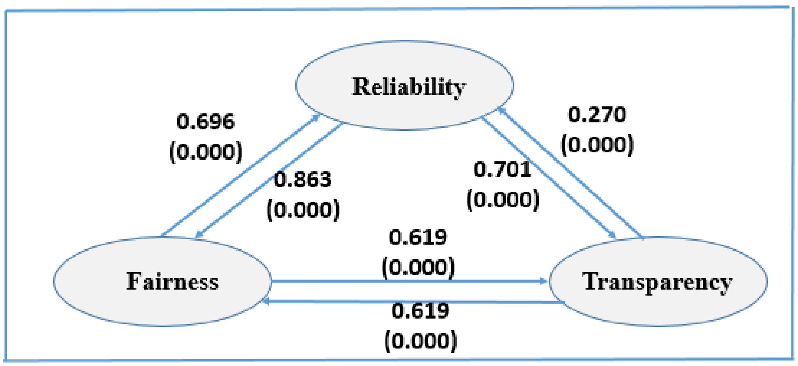

Figure 9. Scheme representing the inter-relationship between employee trust determinants

B. Stage Two

The results from the regression models (e.g., Table 15) indicate that the Pearson's correlation coefficients (R = 0.731, 0.685, and 0.775) and the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adj. R2 = 0.527, 0.461, and 0.593) suggest that the regression lines can effectively represent the available data. Nonetheless, the models are also qualitatively suitable, demonstrating a notable probability of 0.000 and 0.013 ($p < \alpha = 0.01$ & 0.05). The Durbin-Watson statistic ranges between 1.756 and 2.036, which lie between 0 and 4. A value close to 2.0 indicates the absence of autocorrelation in the sample (Al Sayed et al., 2022). The ANOVA tests produced acceptable F-values (Sig P = 0.000 < α = 1%), suggesting that the derived regression equations are superior to random predictions. Additionally, each standardized beta (e.g., Table 16) is statistically significant, with all variables in the three models being significant at the 1% level, and in models 1 and 3, one pair of variables is significant at the 1% and 5% levels, respectively. Additionally, the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) in Table 16 suggest that multicollinearity is absent (VIFs < 3) (Chehimi et al., 2019). Each explanatory variable can be accounted for in a regression analysis to determine a causal relationship (Hashem et al., 2022). These models show that the explanatory variables account for 52.7%, 46.1%, and 59.3% of the variance in the dependent variables, respectively. The findings above are introduced into a schematic diagram for clarity (e.g., Figure 10).

Table 15. Regression analysis for the three servant leadership characteristics

Model	Dep, Var.	Indep. Var.	Pearson's R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Sig. F Change	F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
1	Listening	Empathy Supportiveness	0.731	0.535	0.527	0.013	69.056	0.000	2.036
2	Empathy	Listening Supportiveness	0.685	0.469	0.461	0.013	53.079	0.000	1.756
3	Supportiveness	Listening Empathy	0.775	0.600	0.593	0.000	89.995	0.000	1.889

Table 16. Regression Coefficients (Servant Leadership Characteristics)

Model	Dep, Var.	Indep. Var.	Std. Beta	Sig.	α	VIF
1	Listening	Empathy Supportiveness	0.210 0.575	0.013 0.000	5% 1%	1.790 1.790
2	Empathy	Listening Supportiveness	0.240 0.493	0.013 0.000	5% 1%	2.042 2.042
3	Supportiveness	Listening Empathy	0.494 0.371	0.000 0.000	1% 1%	1.540 1.540

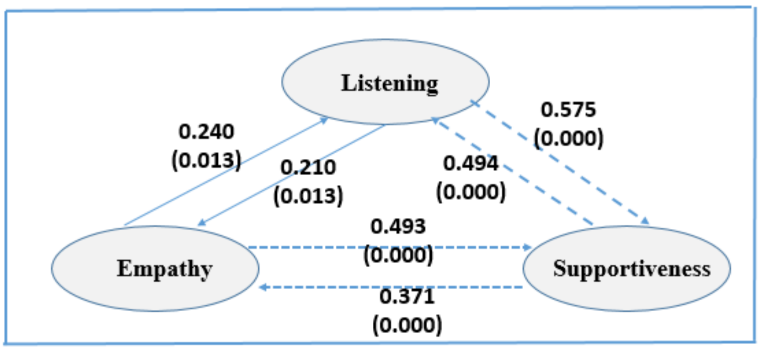

Figure 10. Scheme representing the inter-relationship between servant leadership characteristics

C. Stage Three

The results from the regression models (e.g., Table 17) indicate that the Pearson's correlation coefficients for the models (R = 0.662, 0.580, and 0.686) and the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adj. R2 = 0.433, 0.331, and 0.461) suggest that the regression lines can effectively represent the available data. Nonetheless, the models are also qualitatively suitable, demonstrating a notable probability of 0.000 and 0.013 ($p < \alpha = 0.01$ & 0.05). The Durbin-Watson statistic ranges between 1.756 and 2.036, which lie between 0 and 4. A value close to 2.0 indicates the absence of autocorrelation in the sample (Al Sayed et al., 2022). The ANOVA tests produced acceptable F-values (Sig P = 0.000 < α = 1%), suggesting that the derived regression equations are superior to random predictions. Additionally, each standardized beta (e.g., Table 18) is statistically significant, and all variables in the three models are significant at the 1% level (e.g., A). Additionally, the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) in Table 18 suggest that multicollinearity is absent (VIFs < 3) (Chehimi et al., 2019). Each explanatory variable can be accounted for in the regression to determine a causal relationship (Hashem et al., 2022). These models show that the explanatory variables account for 43.3%, 33.1%, and 46.1% of the variance in the dependent variables, respectively. The findings above are introduced into a schematic diagram for clarity (e.g., Figure 11).

Table 17. Regression analysis for the relationship between the three servant leadership characteristics and the three employee trust determinants

Model	Dep. Var.	Indep. Var.	Pearson's R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Sig. F Change	F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
1	Transparency	Listening	0.662	0.438	0.433	0.000	94.219	0.000	1.877
2	Reliability	Empathy	0.580	0.337	0.331	0.000	61.455	0.000	2.141
3	Fairness	Empathy Supportiveness	0.686	0.470	0.461	0.000	53.229	0.000	2.102

Table 18. Coefficients of the Regression analysis for the relationship between the three servant leadership characteristics and the three employee trust determinants

Model	Dep. Var.	Indep. Var.	Std. Beta	Sig.	A	VIF
1	Transparency	Listening	0.662	0.000	1%	1.000
2	Reliability	Empathy	0.580	0.000	1%	1.000
3	Fairness	Empathy	0.272	0.003	1%	1.790
		Supportiveness	0.474	0.000	1%	1.790

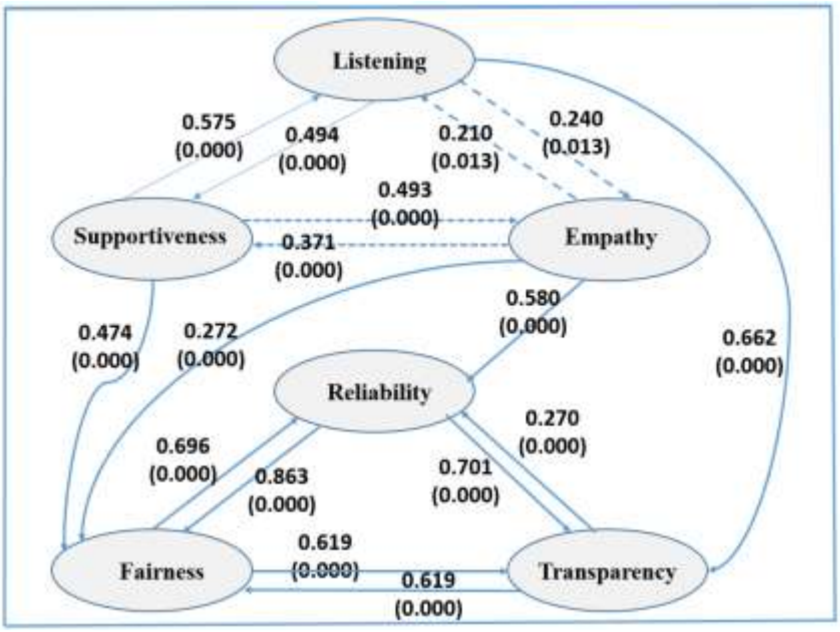

Figure 11. An Integrated Scheme of the Relationship between the Three Servant Leadership Characteristics and the Three Employee Trust Determinants

4.6 Discussion of Findings

This study examined the impact of servant leadership on employee trust by analyzing the connections between the servant leadership dimensions (listening, empathy, and supportiveness) and the trust dimensions (transparency, reliability, and fairness). The results show that the selected three servant leadership characteristics have a positive, statistically significant impact on employee trust.

According to the findings, the servant leadership characteristics that have the biggest overall impact on employee trust, as a determinant of fairness, are empathy and supportiveness. Also, the determinants of employee "trust, transparency, and reliability" are triggered by the servant leadership characteristics of listening and empathy, respectively, with positive, statistically significant impacts. A servant leader's supportiveness triggers employees' trust through fairness. That is, fairness is built when leaders show and promote dependability, openness, and honesty within the company. This also leads subordinates to view their leaders and the company as fair and, therefore, more reliable when they consistently offer direction, support, and care. Empathy and supportiveness, as independent variables explaining employees' perceptions of fairness, are significant leadership behaviors in this study. Usually, many employees leave their jobs when they feel they are not being treated fairly. Norman, Avolio, & Luthans (2010) and Jiang and Men (2017) assert that servant leaders foster an environment grounded in transparency and mutual respect, establishing trust through honest communication. Additionally, Hadziahmetovic and Salihovic (2022) emphasize that "It is vital for a leader to direct the organization with integrity in ways that reflect their values when employees can see and assess all actions taken." Consequently, employees will showcase their dependability and credibility/trust" (p. 359).

On the other hand, compared to empathy and supportiveness, the servant-leadership characteristic of listening elicited a positive, statistically significant transparency relationship. According to this result, employees' perceptions of transparency are strongly influenced by active listening, especially in decision-making, dispute resolution, and equitable treatment. Subordinates are more inclined to think that transparent company policies are standardized, clear, and therefore fair and impartial. This relationship also leads to a further sense of trust among employees toward leadership and the organization (Jiang and Men, 2017; Mattina, 2025).

Empathy revealed a moderate and statistically weak correlation with two aspects of employee trust, namely reliability and fairness. This demonstrates that, even though its impact is not as strong as that of supportiveness or listening, empathetic leadership significantly contributes to trust development by improving emotional understanding (through fairness) and strengthening interpersonal relationships (through reliability). According to Ma, Wu, Liu et al. (2024), “Empathetic leadership fosters trust through improved emotional awareness and the deepening of personal connections. When leaders exhibit fairness, team members experience emotional validation; when they show reliability, relationships strengthen. This combined emphasis fosters a secure, cooperative, and deeply involved work environment.” Therefore, a fair, reliable, and transparent leader ensures the development of a caring organizational culture (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Spears, 2010). This helps retain organizational talent and, at the same time, builds a positive, open culture of communication and a trustworthy network of subordinates and leaders. In this case, the agency theory marks a healthy relationship that helps sustain organizational corporate social responsibility on the dimension of human relations.

Figure 11 clearly shows that the selected three servant leadership characteristics are mutually interrelated and statistically significant. This means leadership’s characteristics cannot be isolated from one another; rather, they build on one another over time, strengthening the positive culture that such leadership hopes to foster. Consequently, subordinates do live the organizational culture and, when they feel its positivity, shall show positive feedback on wellness and productivity (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Spears, 2010). Furthermore, Figure 11 shows that employee trust determinants are also mutually interrelated with statistical significance. When employees sense transparency, reliability, and fairness, their trust in their leaders (superiors) will build up, favoring organizational wellness and productivity (Ma, Wu, Liu et al., 2024). Employees’ retention will not be susceptible to shake-ups. In summary, the results show that while all aspects of servant leadership have a beneficial effect on employee trust, listening (which triggers transparency) has the greatest overall influence, followed by supportiveness (which triggers fairness) and empathy (which triggers reliability and fairness). These findings highlight that transparent, dependable, and equitable work cultures are more effectively created by servant leaders who actively help their subordinates focus on their issues and demonstrate emotional understanding (Spears, 2010). Finally, the integrated overall picture, illustrated in Figure 11, answers the research questions proposed in this study.

4.6.1 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

RQ1: What impact does servant leadership have on employee trust?

Regression analysis's results clearly show that employee trust is strongly, favorably, and statistically significantly impacted by servant leadership. The three aspects of employee trust, which are transparency, reliability, and fairness, were substantially connected with all three servant leadership traits: Listening, empathy, and supportiveness (see Figure 11). This suggests that employees are more inclined to trust their leaders and the company when leaders exhibit servant-leadership qualities (Spears, 2010). These results are consistent with the servant leadership idea, which emphasizes meeting employees' needs as a basis for developing credibility, trust, and moral leadership (Hai and Van, 2021).

RQ2: What are the essential dimensions of servant leadership?

Listening, empathy, and supportiveness are the selected key components of servant leadership in this study. These represent three out of ten characteristics proposed by Spears (2010). These dimensions are appropriately selected for the Lebanese context to evaluate servant leadership characteristics and are internally consistent. Figure 10 shows that these characteristics are positively related, with statistical significance of 1%, and collectively support the servant leadership style. The results complement previous research that highlights listening, emotional intelligence, and helpful conduct as essential components of successful servant leadership. According to Liden, Wang, & Wang (2025), "A servant leader is an individual who interacts transparently with everyone, values diverse perspectives, honors commitments, delegates responsibilities, listens to comprehend, and shows genuine concern for others."

RQ3: What are the characteristics of a servant leader?

The capacity to actively listen to staff members, show empathy, and offer constant assistance are traits of a servant leader (Spears, 2010). Employees see leaders who display these traits more favorably, according to the descriptive statistics and correlation findings. Empathy is a sign of emotional intelligence and comprehension (Shiels, 2025); listening is a sign of respect for workers' opinions (Andrew & Carolyn, 1996), and support is a sign of dedication to workers' development and well-being (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe et al., 2002). Taken as a whole, these traits characterize a leader who places greater emphasis on helping others than on using power, consistent with the core ideas of servant leadership theory.

RQ4: Why is trust important among employees?

Aspects of servant leadership have a significant impact on trust, as evaluated by transparency, reliability, and fairness (e.g., Figure 11). High levels of trust boost employee dedication to company objectives, promote open communication, and minimize confusion. Greenleaf (1977) proposed that trust is fundamental to servant leadership, as the legitimacy of leadership starts with trust. He remarked that "the sole reliable foundation for trust is for individuals to have the concrete experience of being supported by their institutions." Strong links between servant leadership behaviors and trust dimensions indicate that trust serves as an essential means by which leadership enhances relationships at work and the efficacy of organizations (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). Inclusio (2025) posits that "Trust isn't just a virtue;

it's a strategic asset" (para 1). This supports other studies showing that cooperation, productivity, and long-term organizational success depend on trust (Montilla, 2024). Zak (2017) asserts that "companies with high trust experience 50% increased productivity and 76% enhanced employee engagement. When individuals have confidence in their leaders and colleagues, they become more cooperative, creative, and faithful. The outcome - A team that not only works but flourishes" (pp. 6-7).

RQ5: What are the different ways to achieve employee trust as a servant leader?

The most significant factors were found to be supportiveness and empathy, especially in improving fairness (Yijuan, Xinmu, & Xiaoqin, 2022). Fairness, in turn, is highly interrelated positively and statistically with transparency and reliability. This suggests that leaders who provide direction, support, and encouragement enhance transparency and dependability (Mohrenweiser and Pfeifer, 2023). It was discovered that listening had the biggest impact on transparency, suggesting that when leaders actively listen to their concerns, workers view decision-making procedures as more equitable. By fostering stronger emotional ties and understanding employees' needs, empathy also significantly contributed to the development of trust (Strengthify, 2025). Servant leaders can successfully foster employee trust by integrating real support, careful communication, and emotional awareness as illustrated in Figure 11.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of servant leadership on employee trust by concentrating on the aspects of listening, empathy, and supportiveness and their impact on transparency, reliability, and fairness. The study provided empirical evidence for the crucial role of servant leadership in building trust within businesses, using quantitative data gathered via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS.

All servant leadership dimensions were strongly and significantly correlated with employee trust, indicating that leaders who listen, demonstrate empathy, and provide support are more likely to build trustworthy relationships with employees. These results are aligned with previous research suggesting that servant leadership behaviors enhance trust and positive employee outcomes (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008).

Among the servant leadership dimensions examined, supportiveness emerged as the influential variable, particularly in relation to transparency and reliability. Leaders who actively support employees by offering guidance, encouragement, and assistance contribute significantly to open communication and dependable leadership. Prior studies have similarly emphasized that supportive servant leaders strengthen trust by creating a safe and empowering work environment (Rashid and Ilkhanizadeh, 2022). Listening was found to have the strongest relationship with fairness, indicating that employees perceive organizational practices as more just when leaders actively consider their opinions and concerns (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser et al., 2014).

Finally, to assess the research hypothesis related to the main research question:

H0: Servant leadership has no significant positive effect on employee trust.

H1: Servant leadership has a significant positive effect on employee trust.

Descriptively, based on Table 4, the integrated statistics for the determinants of employee trust, given the impact of servant leadership characteristics, indicate that respondents agreed on the positive impact. Namely, Transparency, reliability, and fairness were 88.5%, 83.2%, and 84.95% in agreement, with means and standard deviations of 3.28 & 0.657; 3.14 & 0.738; and 3.16 & 0.765, respectively. Therefore, the respondents agree that servant leadership has a positive impact on the determinants of employee trust. The aforementioned supports the alternative hypothesis **H1.** However, upon reviewing the proposed framework shown in Figure 2 after inserting the resulting regression coefficients, a new framework emerges, as shown in Figure 12 herein.

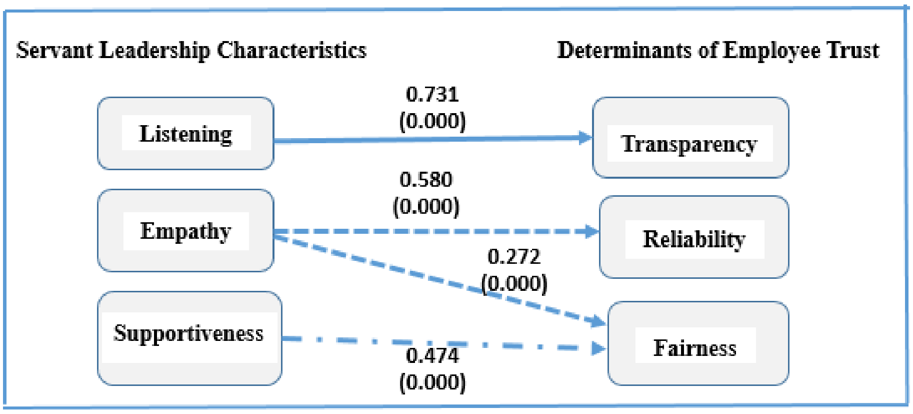

Figure 12. Statistically Assessed Research Framework

Figure 12 shows that the beta coefficients are positive and statistically significant at the 1% level. The overall impact of the selected servant leadership is apparent, as discussed earlier, given that each group is statistically interrelated, leading to direct and indirect impacts supported by the interrelations. These are illustrated in Figures 9, 10, and 11. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is selectively (partially) accepted, as shown, since not all three servant leadership characteristics statistically relate to each of the determinants of employee trust.

5.1 Limitations

- **Sample Size and Scope:** The study collected data from 123 employees and managers within a limited number of organizations. Although the sample size was sufficient for statistical analysis, it may not fully represent the diversity of workplaces or industries. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all organizations, particularly those in different cultural, geographical, or industry contexts.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** This research used a cross-sectional survey design, which captures data at a single point in time. While this allows for identifying correlations between servant leadership behaviors and employee trust, it cannot establish causality. Longitudinal studies would be needed to determine whether servant leadership behaviors lead to changes in employee trust over time.

- **Focus on Specific Leadership Dimensions:** The study focused on three dimensions of servant leadership and their effects on employee trust aspects. While these dimensions were selected based on the literature and relevance to the Lebanese context, other aspects of servant leadership, such as stewardship, vision, and community building, as well as other factors influencing trust, may have been overlooked.

5.2 Implications for HR Managers and Functions

There are significant implications for Human Resource managers and the effective management of HR functions within organizations. The strong positive relationships between servant leadership dimensions and employee trust dimensions highlight actionable strategies HR managers can adopt to enhance organizational performance and employee satisfaction. More specifically, fostering employee engagement is important because it directly relates to employee trust, efficacy, and productivity.

5.2.1 Recruitment and Selection

HR managers should prioritize identifying and recruiting leaders who demonstrate servant leadership behaviors. Specifically, candidates should be assessed for supportive tendencies, active listening skills, and empathy toward employees. Structured interviews, behavioral assessments, and situational judgment tests can help ensure that selected leaders possess these traits, which are shown to enhance employee trust (Tariq & Ambali, 2013; Liden et al., 2014).

5.2.2 Training and Development

The study emphasizes the need for training programs focused on developing servant leadership behaviors. HR can design workshops and coaching sessions that teach leaders how to actively listen to employee concerns and feedback, provide consistent support and guidance, and demonstrate empathy in decision-making and interpersonal interactions. Such programs will improve leaders' ability to foster trust, particularly transparency and reliability among employees (Rashid and Ilkhanizadeh, 2022).

5.2.3 Employee Relations

The findings suggest that servant leadership significantly enhances trust in leaders (Kurnaz, 2018). HR managers should facilitate open channels of communication and encourage leaders to maintain transparency in decision-making. By promoting a culture of fairness, reliability, and transparency, organizations can reduce conflicts, increase collaboration, and improve employee morale (Greenleaf, 1977)

5.2.4 Performance Management

Employee trust can be reinforced through performance management systems that evaluate not only outcomes but also leadership behaviors (Kurnaz, 2018). HR managers should incorporate servant leadership competencies into performance appraisal criteria, rewarding leaders who consistently demonstrate supportive, empathetic, and listening behaviors. This encourages a culture of accountability and trust, which in turn strengthens organizational commitment and fairness perceptions.

5.2.5 Health, Safety, and Well-being

Leaders who demonstrate supportiveness, empathy, and active listening create an environment where employees feel psychologically safe, valued, and understood (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Spears, 2010). Employees are more likely to report hazards, raise concerns, or provide feedback when leaders are supportive and listen to their input. This enhances both mental and physical safety in the workplace. HR managers can integrate servant leadership principles into well-being initiatives, such as stress management programs, counseling services, and work-life balance policies.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- Studies could examine the effectiveness of training programs, mentorship initiatives, and talent management strategies in enhancing supportiveness, listening, and empathy among leaders, and how these behaviors influence employee trust.
- The role of organizational culture and structure as factors that facilitate or hinder servant leadership.
- The relationship between servant leadership and employee health, safety, well-being, and engagement.
- The effect of servant leadership on broader workplace outcomes, such as team performance, productivity, innovation, and retention.
- Future studies could focus on different industries, organizational sizes, or cultural contexts to determine whether servant leadership and employee trust operate differently across workplaces.
- Researchers could examine mediating and moderating factors within the workplace, such as organizational justice, communication quality, psychological safety, or employee empowerment.

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Glossary

- **Empathy** is the ability to understand and share the feelings, thoughts, and perspectives of others, while remaining aware that these feelings originate from another person (Mark, 1983).

- **Employee Trust:** refers to the confidence employees have in their employer, management, and coworkers, based on some perceptions (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

- **Fairness:** refers to the perception that policies, procedures, and treatment of individuals are just, impartial, and consistent, and that outcomes are allocated equitably (Colquitt, 2001).

- **Leadership:** A leader is an individual or a group that identifies, prepares, mentors, and inspires one or more followers possessing various talents, capabilities, and skills, directing the followers toward the organization's mission and goals, motivating them to willingly and energetically invest their spiritual, emotional, and physical resources in a unified effort to fulfill the organizational mission and objectives (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

- **Listening:** the ability to accurately understand and make sense of information communicated by others, while showing openness and respect for different viewpoints (Andrew & Carolyn, 1996).

- **Reliability:** refers to the degree to which an individual, process, or system consistently performs as expected, meeting commitments and delivering results over time (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007).

- **Servant Leadership** is a leadership and service philosophy in which the leader prioritizes serving first. Servant leadership is grounded in the concept of service, and servant leaders focus on meeting the needs of their followers while nurturing and developing their team members (Nastiezaie, Bameri, & Dadkan, 2016).

- **Supportiveness** is defined as behaviors that demonstrate concern for others' well-being, including offering assistance, understanding problems, and providing emotional and instrumental help (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe et al., 2002).

- **Transparency:** refers to the degree to which information is openly shared, clear, accurate, and accessible, allowing individuals to understand decisions, processes, and actions within an organization (Rawlins, 2008).