

The Asian Journal of Technology Management Vol. 16 No. 2 (2023): 109-120

# Servant Leadership's Impact on Adaptive Performance in Indonesian Tech Companies: How Work Engagement and Trust in Leaders Play a Role

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**Abstract.** Numerous technology-based companies have emerged in Indonesia due to the rapid growth of the technology sector over the last decades. Employees are required to be more adaptive to help the company succeed. Identifying which factors affect employees to adapt in a dynamic and competitive industry is essential. However, study related to adaptive performance affected by servant leadership among technology companies' employees is still limited, particularly in Indonesia. Thus, this research is expected to contribute by providing new knowledge and literature for academics, especially in the field of human resources, as well as other areas related to employee performance, leadership, work engagement, and trust in leaders. Using the structural equation model with Lisrel 8.8 version, we provide the linkages on how work engagement and trust in leaders mediate the effect of servant leadership on adaptive performance of technology companies' employees in Indonesia. The data (N=333) was collected from employees working in Indonesia's technology sector such as financial technology, ecommerce, online transportation and food delivery, online travel, and so forth. Our findings showed that servant leadership has a significant and positive effect on adaptive performance through work engagement. However, trust in leaders does not have a positive mediating effect. Thus, it is important for management in the company to encourage the implementation of servant leadership and assess employees' work engagement on a timely basis to boost employees' adaptive performance.

Keywords: Adaptive performance, servant leadership, technology companies, trust in leader, work engagement

### 1. Introduction

There are five sectors that are leading the growth of the digital economy in Southeast Asia, including e-commerce, online transportation and food delivery, online travel, online media, and financial services as stated in a report published by Google et al. (2022) regarding the digital economy in Southeast Asia. Indonesia is a country with the largest economy in Southeast Asia which also supported by the growing digital technology industry. The swift expansion of the technology sector has led to the emergence of numerous tech-based firms in Indonesia. The talent war among technology companies is inevitable. The human resources department along with the management should have strategies to retain their employees.

Adaptability is crucial in the workplace, especially in the technology industry, which is

prone to changes. Employees are expected to have adaptive performance to achieve company goals. The adaptive ability of employees can be influenced by work engagement (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020), which can be enhanced through the implementation of servant leadership. Besides improving work engagement, servant leadership is considered effective in creating a climate of trust that can positively influence employee performance (Ling, Liu, & Wu, 2017). With demonstrate leaders can confidence in employees' abilities to complete their tasks. Furthermore, trust also has a positive influence on employees' adaptive abilities (Yean, Tan, & Nadarajah, 2022).

Leadership, organizational structure, and the right skills and mindset are several key factors in developing a digital organization (Das et al., 2016). Passakonjaras et al. (2019) also stated that one of the important factors that

influence organizational success is leadership. Zhu et al. (2009) suggests that leaders who demonstrate genuine concern are more likely to have positive leader-follower relationships to increase a sense of belonging to the company. This makes employees want to repay the attention and care of their leaders by giving their best effort at work. Leaders who can provide personal resources that are considered important make employees see the workplace more supportive. This type of leadership is known as servant leadership, where leaders lead others by serving others (Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011). Companies whose leaders or managers implement servant leadership successfully, will also provide their employees various benefits such as training, authority, rewards, career opportunities needed to foster work engagement (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). In general, leadership is an important leadership style that employee performance encourage (Saleem et al., 2020).

Employees in technology companies are required to always innovate and can adapt to dynamic company conditions. The need to always change and innovate within the organization requires employees to have adaptive performance (Chen et al., 2005; Tabiu et al., 2018). Workers must be adaptable, flexible, and have a high tolerance for everchanging and diverse environments to work effectively (Pulakos et al., 2000). Study conducted by Kaya & Karatepe (2020) suggests that the positive impact of servant leadership on work engagement and adaptive performance is stronger than the positive impact of authentic leadership. Assistance, direction, and support provided by servant leaders is important for employees to solve problems and to overcome high pressure in their work (Ling et al., 2017). This aligns with the social exchange theory (SET) put forward by Saks (2006) that employees who are given support will respond with higher levels of work engagement and adaptive performance.

Moreover, servant leadership style is effective in creating a "trust climate" which can improve the quality of mutual relations and encourage positive employee work results (Ling et al., 2017). Senjaya & Pekerti (2010) stated that leader skills, kindness, and integrity which lead to trust in leaders are part of servant leadership behavior. Atkinson & Butcher (2003) also stated that subordinates can develop trust in leaders in the context of servant leadership. Study conducted by Ozturk et al. (2021) also shows that trust mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment, where organizational commitment mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement.

There is only few research of servant leadership. Eva et al. (2019) also emphasizes the need for research on servant leadership as a predictor of work outcomes compared to other leadership styles that have been carried out a lot. Grobler & Flotman (2021) stated that servant leadership has a significant influence on employee expectations and optimism with team-based learning as a mediating variable, where a stronger relationship is shown for employees in the private sector compared to the public sector. Previous studies also suggested that servant leadership has a lower influence on the public sector due to limited authority and a very strong bureaucracy in the public sector (Altwater & Wright, 1996; Bourantas & Papalexandris, 1993; Hansen & Villadsen, 2010; Grobler & Flotman, 2021). Study by Ramdhan et al. (2022) in state-owned companies in Indonesia shows that adaptive performance will be more representative when measured in companies that are experiencing change. The result suggested to the adaptive performance re-measure more complex company construct in situations, especially in micro-enterprises that are vulnerable to pressure and sustainability (Ramdhan et al., 2022), such as technology companies.

Furthermore, the research related to servant leadership nor adaptive performance in the technology industry in Indonesia are still limited. Based on the description above, researchers are interested in conducting research on the role of work engagement and trust in leader in mediating servant leadership on adaptive performance of technology companies' employees in Indonesia. This research is expected to be useful practically and theoretically for organizational practitioners and academics. Research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

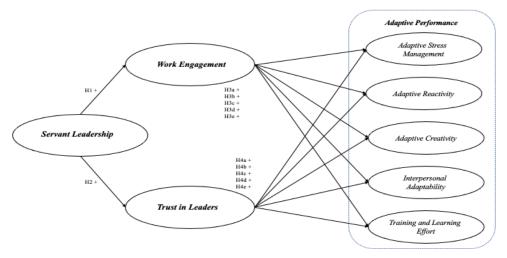


Figure 1 Research Hypothesized Model

# 2. Literature Study

### Servant Leadership

The term servant leadership was first put forward by Greanleaf (1997; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) with the following definition: "It starts with a natural feeling where one wants to serve, to serve first. After that, consciously bring it to desire to lead. The difference lies in caring by the serve-the first to ensure that the highest priorities of others are served. The best way to test this is by: "are those being served growing personally?; do they, when served, become healthier, wiser, freer, and more independent and more willing to be the ones serving?"

Servant leadership or leadership by serving is the desire to lead others by serving them instead of serving oneself by using others (Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011). Servant leaders show readiness to leave the superior status attached to leadership and embrace goodness by how to serve (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011) explains that there are eight aspects which are the best indicators of servant leadership, which are empowerment, accountability, standing back,

humility, authenticity, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship.

#### Adaptive Performance

Employees show adaptive performance by adjusting their behavior to the needs of new work situations and events (Pulakos et al., 2000). Adaptive performance also includes the ability to solve problems, flexibility, and overcome something, but this process is not the same as adaptive performance (Jundt et al., 2015).

& Park (2019) defines adaptive performance based on the study of Pulakos et al. (2000) as flexible work behavior that can employees adapt to change demonstrating perfection in problem solving, control over uncertainty/stress/crisis, new learning, and adaptability related to humans, culture, and the environment. Moreover, Park & Park (2019) defines adaptive performance based on the study of Pulakos et al. (2000) as flexible work behavior that can help employees adapt to change by demonstrating perfection in problem solving, control over uncertainty/stress/crisis, new learning, and adaptability related to humans, culture, and the environment.

Furthermore, based on the construct model from Pulakos et al. (2000), Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel (2012) conducted research to develop a multidimensional scale of adaptive performance. The study re-examined the eight dimensions and summarized them into five factors that can explain adaptive performance, consisting of: 1.) Adaptive creativity; 2.) Adaptive reactivity; 3.) Interpersonal adaptability; 4.) Training and learning effort; 5.) Adaptive managing stress.

### Work engagement

Schaufeli et al. (2002)defines work engagement as a positive and comprehensive state of mind related to work characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Engaged employees have energy and connection to their work activities and see themselves as individuals who are able to deal with the demands of their (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Employees will "pay back" the organization by being very attached to their work (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). Employee engagement can continue to be high due to mutually beneficial relationships (Saks, 2006).

### Trust in leaders

Atkinson & Butcher (2003) developed the concept of trust and defined trust as the condition in which a person places himself to take personal risks in the hope that the person he trusts will not behave in a way that causes harm to himself.

Employees will strive to deliver their best performance when they have a leader to look up to and who supports their personal development. One leadership style that fosters this is servant leadership. Employees become focused and dedicated to their work as a response to what the company and its leader provide (Saks, 2006). They perceive servant leaders as having the most influence on their success, motivating them to enthusiastically dedicate themselves to their work as a form of reciprocity to their leader (De Clercq et al., 2014). Hence, it can be observed that work engagement characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption emerges when leaders implement servant leadership.

The implementation of servant leadership style has been proven to have a positive influence on the level of trust in the leader. Employee trust emerges when superiors or leaders exhibit characteristics of servant leadership, such as empowering individuals, fostering development, demonstrating ethical and behavior, maintaining interpersonal relationships with their followers (Karatepe, Ozturk, & Kim, 2019). This aligns with research conducted by Joseph & Winston (2005), wherein empowering and involving employees, displaying consistent commitment, developing coaching abilities, and being willing to take risks are characteristics of servant leadership that can In a dynamic environment, build trust. servant leaders who empower and support their subordinates will create an environment of mutual trust and encourage the selfconfidence of their subordinates (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017).

Based on research conducted by Kaltiainen & Hakanen (2022), it was also found that work engagement mediates the influence of servant leadership on dimensions of adaptive performance, such as adaptive management, adaptive reactivity, adaptive creativity, and interpersonal adaptability. The study's results further elucidate that work engagement holds a strong influence over the dimensions of adaptive performance due to employees possessing additional resources, positive motivation, and emotions. Additionally, research by Kaya & Karatepe (2020) discovered a strong and positive indirect influence of servant leadership on adaptive performance through reciprocate the engagement. Employees benefits gained from leaders practicing servant leadership by enhancing work engagement and adaptive performance.

The adaptive behavior of employees can be influenced by their relationship with their superiors. Based on research by Ling, Liu, & Wu (2017), it was found that servant leadership can foster a trust climate, which also positively impacts employee performance. Study conducted by Adams &

Webster (2022) indicate that trust influences adaptive performance. Additionally, this research found that a leader's emotional management and interpersonal skills also have an indirect influence on adaptive performance through trust.

- H1: Servant leadership has a positive and significant influence on work engagement.
- H2: Servant leadership has a positive and significant influence on trust in leaders.
- H3: Work engagement mediates the influence of servant leadership on adaptive performance: a.) adaptive stress management; b.) adaptive reactivity; c.) adaptive creativity; d.) interpersonal adaptability, e.) training and learning effort
- H4: Trust in leaders mediates the influence of servant leadership on adaptive performance: a.) adaptive stress management; b.) adaptive reactivity; c.) adaptive creativity; d.) interpersonal adaptability, e.) training and learning effort

# 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Sample and Procedure

Data were collected from technologies companies' employees in Indonesia. After the pre-test with 30 participants to test the validity and reliability of the instruments, we continued to the main-test stage with a larger target. The sample size used in the study is based on the guidelines of Structural Equation Modeling, calculated as 5 times the number of indicators (n = number of indicators). With 42 indicators in this study, the minimum sample size required is 210 individuals.

The number of participants who took part in this study was 341, however, only 221 data could be processed after we did the data cleansing. We use purposive sampling where this technique uses certain criteria so that participants can represent the population (Malhotra, 2020) and snowball technique,

nevertheless, we provided filter questions at the beginning of the questionnaire so that only participants who met the criteria were included in data analysis. Participants were coming from different technology sectors: financial technology (26,7%), e-commerce (19,9%), online transportation and food delivery (8,6%), online travel (10,9%), IT Consulting (8,1%) and so on. The questionnaire was administered online using the Google form and distributed via social media such as Whatsapp, Linkedin, Telegram and Instagram.

#### 3.2 Measures

In this study, servant leadership measured using multidimensional scale with 8 items from van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011) developed by Kaltiainen & Hakanen (2022). Adaptive performance was measured with total 19 teams which captured all five dimensions: adaptive reactivity, adaptive creativity, interpersonal adaptability, and adaptive training effort, adapted from Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel (2012). For work engagement, we use Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) with total 9 items which represent vigor, absorption, dedication. Trust in leaders was measured using scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) which consists of 6 items with a focus on measuring trust between followers and leaders. All items were measured using 6-points Likert scale ranging from 1 for "Strongly disagree" and 6 "Strongly agree".

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with LISREL 8.8 version. SEM is a powerful multivariate technique and is increasingly being found in scientific research to examine and evaluate multivariate causal relationships (Fan et al., 2016). SEM also examines the direct and indirect effects on previously assumed causal relationships. The use of SEM is also more recommended than multiple regression (Kline & Klammer, 2001).

The validity test can be seen from the Standardized Loading Factor (SLF) value from data analyzing using LISREL. An indicator is categorized valid if the SLF value is greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). In addition, Hair et al. (2019) also stated that SLF

value still considered as significant with a value of  $\geq 0.3$  if the minimum sample is 350 or with an SLF value of  $\geq 0.4$  with a sample size of at least 200.

Table 1
Results of Causality Test

Path	SLF	t-value	Result
Servant Leadership → Work Engagement	0,67	9,17	Significant
Servant Leadership <del>&gt;</del> Trust in Leader	0,84	10,03	Significant
Work Engagement → Adaptive Stress Management	0,72	7,57	Significant
Work Engagement → Adaptive Reactivity	0,74	8,21	Significant
Work Engagement → Adaptive Creativity	0,75	7,6	Significant
Work Engagement → Interpersonal Adaptability	0,53	6,1	Significant
Work Engagement <del>&gt;</del> Training and Learning Effort	0,68	6,92	Significant
Trust in Leader → Adaptive Stress Management	-0,02	-0,25	Not Significant
Trust in Leader > Adaptive Reactivity	-0,13	-1,64	Not Significant
Trust in Leader > Adaptive Creativity	-0,06	-0,73	Not Significant
Trust in Leader → Interpersonal Adaptability	0,23	2,89	Significant
Trust in Leader <del>&gt;</del> Training and Learning Effort	-0,09	-1,13	Not Significant

We also see Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to see the convergent validity of indicators and Construct Reliability (CR) to test the reliability of the instruments used in this study. Fornell & Larcker (1981) stated that an AVE value of less than 0.5 is still acceptable if the construct reliability value is greater than 0.6. In this study, the servant leadership variable AVE and the adaptive stress management dimension are 0,4 respectively and still considered valid because it has a high CR value, 0.82 on the servant leadership variable and 0.71 on the adaptive stress management dimension. Path diagram is used to see a structured standardized solution. This study is one-tailed where the tvalue is significant if it is less than -1.645 and greater than 1.645 at a significance level of 5% (Hair et al., 2019). Afterwards, the we also tested the mediation effect hypothesis with Sobel test. Hypothesis testing was carried out with a significance level of 0.05. In addition, the hypothesis in this study is a one-tailed

hypothesis where the effect between variables will be significant if the absolute number t-value ≥1.645 and has a p-value <0.05.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

#### 4.1 Result

The hypotheses were tested using SEM Lisrel 8.8 version. Based on the Table 1, it can be seen from 12 causal relationships, 8 of them have significant relationships, some of which are servant leadership variables that have a significant causal relationship to work engagement and trust in leaders. The relationship between servant leadership and work engagement variables produces a t-value of 9.17 and an SLF value of 0.67. Where relationship between servant leadership and trust in leaders has t-value of 10.03 and SLF of 0.84. Thus, we can conclude that H1 and H2 are accepted.

Table 2
Result of Mediation Test with Sobel Test

Path	a	b	Sa	$S_b$	Z Score	P-Value
Servant Leadership → Work Engagement → Adaptive Stress Management	0.67	0.72	0.07	0.1	5.754	0.000**
Servant Leadership <b>&gt;</b> Work Engagement <b>&gt;</b> Adaptive Reactivity	0.67	0.74	0.07	0.09	6.237	0.000**
Servant Leadership → Work Engagement → Adaptive Creativity	0.67	0.75	0.07	0.1	5.903	0.000**
Servant Leadership → Work Engagement → Interpersonal Adaptability	0.67	0.53	0.07	0.09	5.016	0.000**
Servant Leadership > Work Engagement > Training and Learning Effort	0.67	0.68	0.07	0.1	5.543	0.000**
Servant Leadership → Trust in leaders → Adaptive Stress Management	0.84	-0.02	0.08	0.07	-0.250	0.401

Table 3 (Continued)
Result of Mediation Test with Sobel Test

Path	a	b	Sa	$\mathbf{s}_{\mathrm{b}}$	Z Score	P-Value
Servant Leadership → Trust in leaders → Adaptive Reactivity	0.84	-0.13	0.08	0.07	-1.606	0.054
Servant Leadership → Trust in leaders → Adaptive Creativity	0.84	-0.06	0.08	0.07	-0.748	0.227
Servant Leadership → Trust in leaders → Interpersonal Adaptability	0.84	0.23	0.08	0.07	2.773	0.003**
Servant Leadership > Trust in leaders > Training and Learning Effort	0.84	-0.09	0.08	0.07	-1.118	0,132

Notes:

Based on the results of the mediation test (see Table 2), it shows that work engagement plays a significant role in mediating the effect of servant leadership on whole adaptive performance dimension: adaptive stress management (H3a), adaptive reactivity (H3b), adaptive creativity (H3c), interpersonal adaptability (H3d), and training and learning effort (H3e), with p-value 0.000 (p-value <0.05) through the Sobel test. Hence, H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d, H3e are accepted.

Another mediating variable in this study is trust in leaders. From the results of the Sobel test shows that trust in leaders has a significant role in mediating the influence of servant leadership on interpersonal adaptability with a p-value of 0.003. Other dimensions of adaptive performance is not significant, which are adaptive stress management, adaptive reactivity, adaptive creativity, and training and learning effort with a p-value of 0.127 (p-value >0.05). Therefore, H4d is accepted while H4a, H4b, H4c, and H4e are rejected.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The result of this study indicates that there is a direct effect from servant leadership on work engagement so that the H1 in this study is accepted. This result supports study conducted by Kaltiainen & Hakanen (2022) which stated that servant leadership has a positive influence on work engagement. Another study that is also in accordance with the results is from Ozturk et al. (2021) which explains that the implementation of servant leadership effectively increases employee work engagement. A good relationship between the company and employees can be built if the employee sees the boss as an example at work and keeps his promises. Under these conditions, employees will show a high level of work engagement. One of the theories that can explain work engagement is social exchange theory (SET), where in SET it is explained that obligations arise because there are a series of reciprocal interactions and dependencies between parties (Saks, 2006).

a: The coefficient of the independent variable on the mediating variable

b: The coefficient of the mediating variable on the dependent variable

SEa: Standard error of estimation from the influence of the independent variable on the mediating variable

SEb: Standard error of estimation from the effect of the mediating variable on the dependent variable

In this study we also found that servant leadership has a significant and positive influence on trust in leaders which causes the H2 hypothesis in the study to be accepted. The results of this study are also supported by previous research by Senjaya & Pekerti (2010) which states that subordinates who strongly perceive their superiors demonstrating servant leadership behavior have significantly higher level of trust compared to those who have a low perception of servant leadership in their superiors. Building trust is an important part of leadership, especially servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; .Russell & Stone, 2002). Russell & Stone (2002) states that the servant leader's integrity and concern are important for building the trust of his followers, especially in creating a positive climate of trust in the group. In addition, Joseph & Winston (2005) argue that servant leadership build trust through empowering employees, involving employees, consistently rewarding commitments, developing coaching skills, and taking risks.

The results of this study also found that work engagement mediates the influence of servant leadership on adaptive performance dimensions in a positive and significant manner, this makes the H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d, and H3e hypotheses were accepted. These results consistent with research are (Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022) which found that through increased work engagement, perceptions of servant leadership can improve the four dimensions of adaptive performance: adaptive stress management, adaptive reactivity, adaptive creativity, and adaptability. interpersonal The dimension of adaptive performance proposed by van Dierendonck (2011) is also included in this study, namely training and learning effort which was also proven to have a positive and significant influence from servant leadership. through the mediation of work engagement. Adaptive performance depends more on whether employees have excess resources, such as energy, motivation, and positive emotions where all these aspects are positively related to work engagement.

The hypothesis analysis revealed that trust in leaders can mediate the influence of servant leadership on one dimension of adaptive performance, specifically, interpersonal adaptability, leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis H4d. This finding finds support in the descriptive statistical results concerning the dimension of interpersonal adaptability, which exhibited the highest grand mean compared to other dimensions of adaptive performance. The highest-scoring indicator, AP13, states, "I try to understand my colleagues' perspectives to enhance my interaction with them." This illustrates that a majority of participants are willing to adjust communication style for better collaboration. This is particularly pertinent in digital technology companies where technical skills are distributed across individuals, emphasizing the significance of collaboration for project success (Bersin et al., 2020). In teams composed of various functions, IT professionals must adapt to communicate with other departments to achieve team objectives. For instance, a software developer might need to engage with the product development team to prioritize tasks.

The rejection of Hypotheses H4a, H4b, H4c, and H4e might be explained by the vulnerability employees feel when trusting their superiors due to their significant influence on resource allocation or decisionmaking impacting the employees (Knoll & Gill, 2011). Employees rely on their superiors for job assignments, performance evaluations, and opportunities for advancement (Wells & Kipnis; Knoll & Gill, 2011). This reliance leads employees to observe their superiors for traits like friendliness, concern, willingness to help, kindness, consistency, credibility, and integrity when deciding whether to place trust in them. When employees in Indonesian technology-based companies bestow trust in their superiors, they become more dependent on them in work-related decisions, often restraining themselves from being open, expressing new ideas or solutions, and taking initiatives to learn new things.

### 5. Conclusions

Following are the conclusions that can be drawn:

The implementation of the servant leadership style can positively influence the work engagement of employees in technologybased companies in Indonesia.

Servant leadership style can positively influence the trust in leaders of employees of technology-based companies in Indonesia.

Work engagement positively mediates the influence of servant leadership on adaptive stress management, adaptive reactivity, adaptive creativity, interpersonal adaptability, and training and learning effort for technology-based employees in Indonesia.

Trust in leaders solely mediates the positive influence of servant leadership on interpersonal adaptability among technology-based employees in Indonesia

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional method with limited time. To learn more deeply about this research, it is necessary to do it in the long term using semilongitudinal or longitudinal method.

As for the practical implication, This research highlights that servant leadership significantly influences and positively impacts work engagement and trust in leaders. This underscores the importance of implementing servant leadership within the managerial levels of technology-based companies in Indonesia. Consequently, to enhance work engagement and trust in leaders, managers or supervisors in Indonesia's technology industry can consider integrating characteristics inherent in servant leaders. This includes leading by example, involving employees in idea exchanges to find solutions, providing opportunities for employee development, engaging and supporting them in career planning, and more.

Moreover, technology-based companies in Indonesia can adapt their selection and recruitment processes to fill managerial positions with strong servant leadership traits. This involves selection criteria that prioritize the desired characteristics and values of servant leadership. Furthermore, to develop servant leadership competencies, the Human Resources department and company leadership can consider implementing mentoring or training programs aligned with the company's culture and objectives.

The study's findings also demonstrate the positive mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between servant leadership and adaptive performance. Once Human Resources ensures the implementation of servant leadership by managers or leaders, they can conduct surveys on employee work engagement. This enables them to gather insights into what aspects foster greater commitment among employees, aiding in enhancing their adaptive performance.

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