



Servant leadership and thriving at work: perceived insider status and caring climate effects

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Abstract

This research aims to explore how servant leadership fosters thriving at work by testing the mediating role of perceived insider status and the moderating role of psychological climate for caring. Data were gathered with a cross-sectional survey. A total of 145 full-time employed respondents working in different industries involved in the research. The data analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that servant leadership increases thriving at work both directly and indirectly via perceived insider status. In addition, psychological climate for caring climate is shown to strengthen the relationship between servant leadership and thriving, implying that supportive organizational environment enhances leadership effectiveness. This study contributes to the existing literature on positive organizational behavior by identifying perceived insider status as a key psychological mechanism and demonstrating that a caring climate serves as an important boundary condition shaping the servant leadership and thriving relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

The changes of today's workplace have increased employees' concerns about workload, digital transformation, and job stability. According to PwC's Global Workforce Hopes and Fears survey in 2024, 76% of Indonesian workers experienced more organizational change than in the previous year. Nearly half reported increased workloads and approximately 40% continued to face financial pressure. Despite these challenges, employees generally remain optimistic and show a willingness to adapt. This phenomenon underscores the importance of leadership that protect well-being and strengthen resilience (PwC, 2024).

These pressures appear across diverse sectors in Indonesia, including in service firms, construction sites as well as energy industries. In such situation, the concept of thriving at work becomes critical. Thriving at work reflects an intrinsic sense of growth and well-being that enable employees to remain productive and resilient even within uncertainty (Edenites et al, 2021)

Leadership is critical in nurturing such flourishing. However, many employees still feel unsupported by their supervisors, suggesting the need for leadership styles that genuinely care about employee well-being. In this sense, servant leadership best illustrate the ideas. It emphasises authentic communication, humility, and sincere concern for



followers' growth. These qualities foster respect and sense of mattering which in turn, generate commitment and positive energy at work (Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2008)

Servant leadership fits this expectation. It emphasises authentic communication, humility, and sincere concern for followers' growth. These qualities promote respect and a feeling of being valued. which in turn generate commitment and positive energy at work (Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2008). Prior studies have linked servant leadership to thriving at work via mechanisms such as basic psychological needs (Jiang et al., 2024) and meaningful work (Jang et al., 2023). However, most studies remain limited in scope and rarely explore broader organizational contexts or contextual boundary conditions. Eva et al. (2019) also noted that servant leadership's wider influence on organisational and societal outcomes remains under-examined.

To fill these gaps, this study explores how servant leadership helps employees thrive at work through perceived insider status and within a caring organisational climate. Indonesian workplaces are characterised by collectivism, relational orientation, and high-power distance. Such condition that makes employees particularly responsive to humble and caring leadership. Thus, servant leadership may have a distinctive influence in the Indonesian context.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

This study draws on Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). Servant leaders, from SDT view, assist employees in meeting their basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are essentials to the two dimensions of thriving, namely, vitality and learning. Employees are more likely to thrive when they feel valued and supported by their leaders. SET explain this process through reciprocity. Perhaps the best illustration of this reciprocity is perceived insider status (PIS). Employees with higher PIS are more willing to expend discretionary effort toward organizational objectives. The Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) also suggests that a caring organizational climate can strengthen the link between leadership and employee outcomes.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is recognized a positive approach for individuals, teams, and organizations, because of its follower-centred and service-oriented nature (Coetzer et al., 2017). It is an ethical and stakeholder-focused style characterized by integrity, compassion, and genuine caring for people (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Servant leaders build trust and collaboration ethical relational networks through empathetic listening, ethical behavioral integration, and the alignment of values surrounding the organizational purpose. Servant leadership also fosters employees' innovative behavior through the commitment to a shared purpose (Wang et al., 2019; Yeh et al., 2022). These behaviors resonate strongly with the Indonesian cultural context where humility, harmony, and collective well-being are highly valued. Recent literature emphasizes its important role in developing followers' competence and performance as well as sustaining positive organizational outcomes (Thai et al., 2024). In addition, servant leaders enable employees to contribute to innovation and agility which is very essential in today's workplace (Agusta & Azmy, 2023).

Thriving at Work

Thriving at work is a psychological state characterized by vitality and learning in their daily work (Kleine et al., 2019). Vitality reflects the feeling of energy, enthusiasm and aliveness at work. On the other hand, learning refers to the sense of acquiring and applying new knowledge or skills. When experience both, they feel energized and continuously growing. The concept was first introduced by Spreitzer and colleagues (Spreitzer et al., 2005). As a dynamic experience of personal growth and psychological well-being within the workplace. Later studies view thriving as an important indicator of positive functioning that helps employees remain resilient, adaptive and engaged amid the demands (Kleine et al., 2023). A supportive work environment can stimulate thriving among employees (Zhai et al., 2020). When supervisors and peers provide encouragement and opportunities employees are more willing to take initiative and perform at higher levels. Thus, thriving is both a result of social and organisational support and a source of positive work outcomes.

Perceived Insider Status

Perceived insider status (PIS) refers to employees' sense of belonging and acceptance as valued organizational members (Li & Jia, 2024). In cultures that value relational closeness like Indonesia, feeling like an insider carries additional motivational meaning and may enhance employees' vitality and learning. Those with stronger PIS, feel more included, communicate better and collaborate more effectively. Supportive environments that avoid excessive control and treat mistakes as part of the learning help nurture PIS and build resilience and well-being (Li & Zhang, 2022). Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrates the impact of PIS on leadership-outcome dynamics. This illustrates important role of PIS as a key psychological mechanism linking leadership and employee well-being.

Psychological Climate for Caring

Psychological climate for caring (PCC) reflects employees' perception that the organization genuinely cares for their well-being and personal development. (Yudiatmaja et al., 2021). A caring climate Such climates creates trust and validation, strengthening positive response to leadership behavior. From the social exchange theory perspective, when employees feel that their leaders and colleagues care for their well-being, they are more likely to reciprocate their trust, commitment, and positive organizational behaviors (Awar et al., 2023). PCC strengthen leadership effectiveness. As an organizational resource, PCC enhances the impact of servant leadership on employee thriving by aligning caring behaviours with employees' needs. Investing in a caring climate benefits the organization beyond immediate outcomes as it fosters sustainable practices for employee well-being, organizational performance, and long-term productivity (Weziak et al., 2023).

Hypotheses Development

Servant leadership aims to stimulate psychological fitness and learning potential. These two elements are essentials for flourishing at work. By serving others and supporting their development, servant leaders create an environment that encourages vitality and growth. This reasoning is aligned with Self-Determination Theory. The theory suggests

leaders who meet the employees' autonomy, competence, and relational needs help them thrive. A previous study (Zhang, et al., 2021) confirms a positive correlation between servant leadership and thriving. Based on these insights we propose

H₁: Servant leadership is positively related to thriving at work.

Servant leadership also provides foundation for empowerment, recognition and humility which foster a stronger sense of belonging. When leaders act authentically and show genuine cares for employees' wellbeing, employees' identification with the organization increases. Yeh et al. (2022) found that servant leadership improves perceived insider status among servicing workers in Taiwan and Opoku et al. (2019) observe similar results in the manufacturing industry of Ghana. Therefore, we suggest that:

H₂: Servant leadership is positively related to perceived insider status.

Perceived insider status (PIS) reflects how much employees feel accepted and valued as legitimate members in the organization (Li & Jia, 2024). Employees with higher PIS usually tend to experience more vitality, stronger motivation to learn and greater well-being. The study of Zhang et al. (2022) confirm this relationship in several provinces across China contexts. Therefore, we argue that:

H₃: Perceived insider status is positively related to thriving at work.

Servant leadership may promote thriving through PIS because it focuses on followers' growth and service. Employees who feel like insiders are more likely to invest energy and learning towards the organization's goals. PIS has been recognized as a mediating mechanism. Aldabbas and Bettayeb (2024) found that managerial caring influenced well-being through a psychological climate for caring and PIS. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) showed that PIS mediated the link between differentiated leadership and thriving. Liu et al. (2021) confirmed this relationship Hence we propose the following hypothesis:

H₄: Perceived insider status mediates the relationship between servant leadership and thriving at work.

Supportive organizational climates also enhance leadership effectiveness. Employees respond more positively when they believe their organization and colleagues genuinely care for their well-being. Employees tend to be more supportive of leadership behaviors if they believe that the organization and peers are truly concerned for their well-being. Aldabbas and Bettayeb (2024) showed that managerial caring enhanced employee well-being through psychological climate for caring, and Okros and Virgă (2024) showed that psychologically safe climates strengthened the relationship between personal resources and thriving. Thus, we hypothesize:

H₅: Psychological climate for caring moderates the relationship between servant leadership and thriving at work.

Based on these hypotheses, the proposed research framework illustrated in Figure 1.

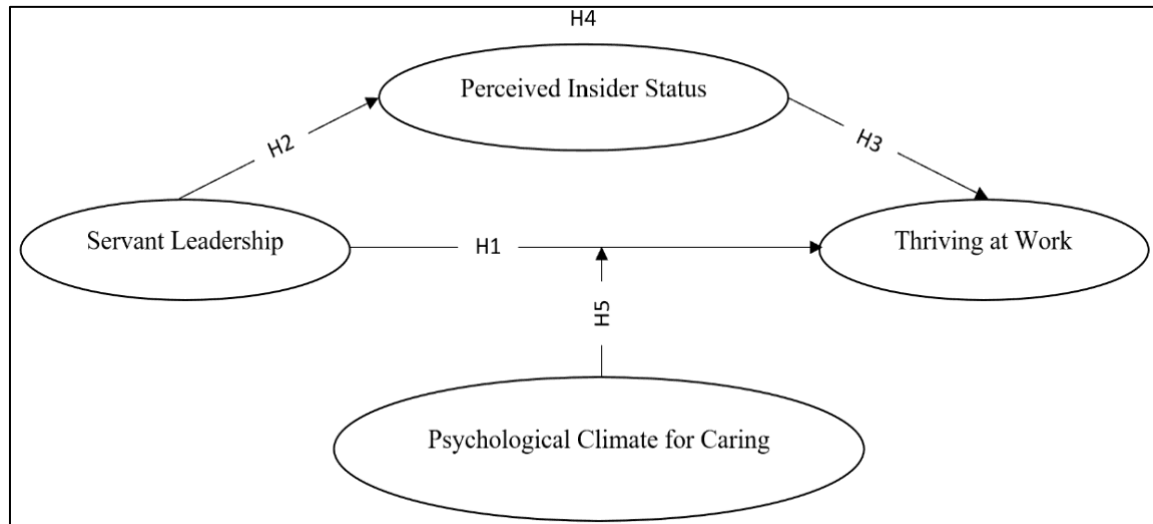


Figure 1. Research Model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey distributed via Google Forms. Respondents were full-time employees across various sectors in the Indonesian labour market. Of the 155 questionnaires received, 10 were removed for not meeting inclusion criteria, leaving 145 valid responses. As shown in Table 1, most of the respondents were male (68.27 percent). The majority were young adults, with 64.5 percent aged 25 to under 30 years, followed by 27.7 percent aged 30 to under 40 years. Most respondents held a bachelor’s degree (90.3 percent), and the dominant tenure group consisted of employees with one to less than five years of work experience (68.4 percent). In terms of industry distribution, the largest proportion worked in the services sector (45.2 percent), followed by healthcare (18.7 percent) and manufacturing (20 percent), with smaller representations from construction, energy, and pharmaceuticals

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male/Female (94/51)	64.8%/35.2%
Age	<25 years/25 - < 30 years/30 - < 35 years/35 - < 40 years/> 40 years	5.8%/44.5%/27.7%/20%/2%
Education	High School/Diploma/Undergraduate	1.4%/8.3%/90.3%
Tenure	1 - < 5 years/5 - < 10 years/10 - <15 years	73.6%/25.8%/0.6%
Sector	Service/Manufacturing/Healthcare/Construction/Energy/Pharmaceutical	45.2%/18.7%/20%/6.5%/5.8%/3.8%

All constructs were operationalized using validated existing scales, and the responses were collected using five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Servant leadership construct was assessed using seven items from Wang et al (2019). Thriving at work, was assessed using ten items, five on vitality and five on learning from the same source. Perceived Insider Status and Psychological Climate for Caring were each measured using six items adapted from Aldabbas and Bettayeb (2024). Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) was used for data analysis. This approach was

chosen for its suitability in testing mediation and moderation within models involving moderate sample sizes and minimal distribution assumption.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SmartPLS Software was used to carry out data analysis employing Structural Equation Modelling based on Partial Least Squares approach (PLS-SEM). In keeping with the approach suggested by [Hair et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Hadi \(2023\)](#), the first step of the analysis was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model followed by analysis of the structural model to assess the explained variance (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and the significance of hypothesized relationships.

Measurement Model

The outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) criteria were used to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. As compared with the constructs depicted in Table 2, all instruments used were above the 0.70 threshold for reliability and convergent validity (CR, α , and AVE all > 0.70).

Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Items	Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Servant Leadership (SL)	7	0.742–0.856	0.904	0.924	0.635
Thriving at Work (TW)	10	0.731–0.885	0.947	0.955	0.680
Perceived Insider Status (PIS)	6	0.724–0.898	0.888	0.915	0.643
Psychological Climate for Caring (PCC)	6	0.760–0.817	0.874	0.905	0.613

Discriminant validity was further examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As reported in Table 3, the square root of AVE (values on the diagonal) was higher than the pairwise correlations between the AVE constructs which confirms the existence of adequate discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell - Larcker Criterion)

Construct	SL	TW	PIS	PCC
Servant Leadership (SL)	0.797			
Thriving at Work (TW)	0.706	0.824		
Perceived Insider Status (PIS)	0.728	0.757	0.802	
Psychological Climate for Caring (PCC)	0.619	0.688	0.671	0.783

Structural Model

The structural model demonstrates acceptable explanatory power. Servant leadership accounts for 15.9% of the variance in perceived insider status ($R^2 = 0.159$). For thriving at work, the predictors jointly explain 60.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.602$), which indicates strong explanatory capacity. The effect size analysis shows that servant leadership has the largest impact on thriving ($f^2 = 0.296$), followed by perceived insider status ($f^2 = 0.178$) and psychological climate for caring ($f^2 = 0.171$). The interaction between servant leadership and

PCC shows a small but meaningful moderation effect ($f^2 = 0.047$). These results are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Structural Model Results (R^2 and f^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Key Predictors	f^2 Effect Size
Perceived Insider Status	0.159	0.153	Servant Leadership → PIS	0.189
Thriving at Work	0.602	0.590	Servant Leadership → TW	0.296
			Perceived Insider Status → TW	0.178
			Psychological Climate for Caring → TW	0.171
			Servant Leadership × PCC → TW (moderation effect)	0.047

Hypotheses Testing

As shown in Table 5, the results of the bootstrapping analysis demonstrated that Servant Leadership positively and significantly impacted Thriving at Work (H_1) as well as Perceived Insider Status (H_2). Also, Perceived Insider Status significantly enhanced Thriving at Work (H_3). Perceived Insider Status served as a mediator (H_4) and confirmed that Servant Leadership has both direct and indirect effects on Thriving at Work. The Psychological Climate for Caring moderated the relationship between Servant Leadership and Thriving at Work (H_5) and showed that the effect was stronger when employees reported higher levels of The Psychological Climate for Caring in the organizational context.

Table 5. Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β (Original Sample)	t Statistic	p Value	Result
H_1	Servant Leadership → Thriving at Work	0.421	3.684	0.000***	Supported
H_2	Servant Leadership → Perceived Insider Status	0.399	4.715	0.000***	Supported
H_3	Perceived Insider Status → Thriving at Work	0.311	4.135	0.000***	Supported
H_4	Servant Leadership → Perceived Insider Status → Thriving at Work (Mediation)				Supported (indirect effect significant)
H_5	Servant Leadership × Psychological Climate for Caring → Thriving at Work (Moderation)	0.102	2.101	0.018*	Supported

Moderation Effect

The interaction term between servant leadership and psychological climate for caring (PCC) was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.018$), indicating that PCC strengthens the positive effect of servant leadership on thriving at work. This suggests that servant leadership becomes more effective in promoting employees' vitality and learning when the surrounding climate signals genuine care and support.

A simple slope analysis further illustrates this pattern (Figure 2.). When PCC is high, the positive association between servant leadership and thriving becomes substantially stronger. Conversely, when PCC is low, the slope becomes noticeably flatter, indicating a weakened effect. This means that employees interpret servant leadership more positively and respond with higher thriving when they perceive their organization as caring and supportive.

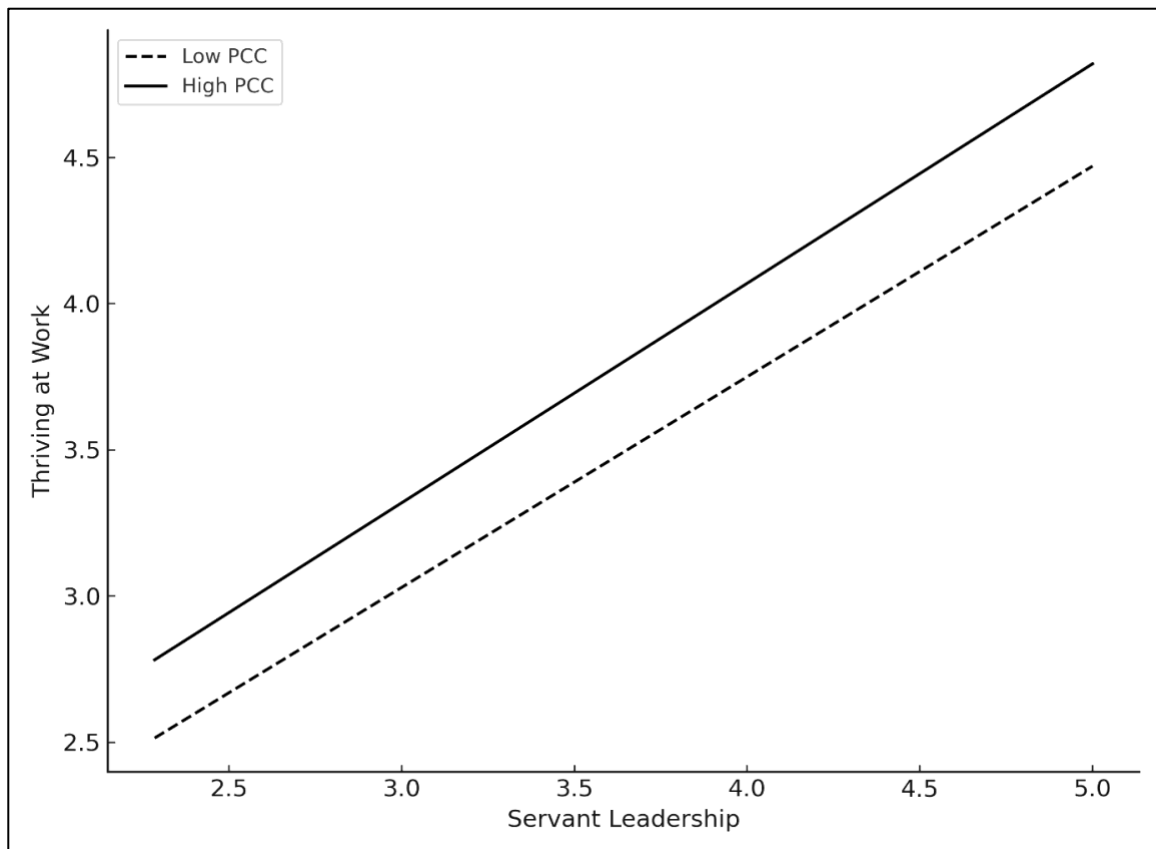


Figure 2. Simple Slope of the Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Thriving at Work

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research investigates the influence of servant leadership on thriving at work. It also examines whether perceived insider status serves as a mediator and a caring climate function as a potential moderator. As shown in the results, thriving at work is directly influenced by servant leadership. Such leadership is also found to indirectly affect thriving at work via perceived insider status. On one side, the findings indicate that belongingness serves as a psychological facilitator in the relationship. On the other side, it also confirms

that the relationship is stronger in the presence of a caring climate, implying that such a climate is essential for servant leadership effectiveness.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that perceived insider status operates as a mediating mechanism and caring climate functions as a boundary condition linking servant leadership to thriving. Practically, this research suggests that organization seeking to enhance employees' thriving should cultivate servant leadership behaviours and foster a caring climate.

This study has several limitations. First, the use of self-reported questionnaire may restrict the depth of insight and results in potential common method bias. Second, the research did not include part-time employees and was limited to a city in Central Java, therefore, care must be taken to generalize the findings.

Future studies are advised to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a richer and a more contextual insight. The use of interviews, for example, enables future research to gain a deeper understanding of respondents' perceptions toward variables under investigation. The use of a broader sample across various industries and geographic is also suggested as it will help strengthen external validity

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