A Study of Servant Leadership's Role in Employee Retention, Development, and Long-Term Organizational Success in Franchise Organizations

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Chapter 1: Nature of the Study

Leadership is a critical factor in the success of any organization, yet its impact is profoundly shaped by the unique operational structures and challenges of different business models. This study explores the influential role of servant leadership, a philosophy that prioritizes the growth and well-being of employees. While previous research has extensively examined the broader effects of servant leadership, there remains a notable gap in understanding its specific application and outcomes within the franchise industry. *A Study of Servant Leadership's Role in Employee Retention, Development, and Long-Term Organizational Success in Franchise Organizations* will address this gap by investigating how this leadership style can be leveraged to improve two key metrics: employee retention and professional development. In addition, and subsequently, this study will also measure the mediating impact of these two metrics on franchise organizational success; that is, the overall impact of servant leadership on improving the long-term standing of franchise organizations. Given the high turnover rates often associated with franchise models, this research aims to provide valuable insights for franchise owners and managers seeking to build a stable, skilled, and motivated workforce.

Background

Leadership is a critical factor in the success of any organization, yet its impact is profoundly shaped by the unique operational structures and challenges of different business models. This is especially true within the franchise industry, a sector known for high rates of employee turnover, which can negatively impact operational efficiency and customer service (Cappelli & Hamori, 2007). This high turnover is often attributed to a lack of meaningful employee engagement, limited opportunities for professional development, and ineffective management styles (FranchiseWire, 2024).

To address these issues, this study will explore the potential of servant leadership—a management philosophy defined by a leader's focus on the growth and well-being of their employees (Greenleaf, 1977). Unlike traditional, top-down leadership models such as transactional and transformational leadership styles, servant leadership aims to empower employees and foster a culture of mutual respect and support (Liden et al., 2008). The core argument of this thesis is that servant leadership is particularly well-suited to mitigate the challenges of employee retention and development prevalent in franchise organization's road to success.

Research has shown a strong link between servant leadership and positive employee outcomes over traditional leadership styles, including increased job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment (Liden et al., 2008; Agusta, 2023). By examining the direct relationship between servant leadership practices and improved employee retention and professional growth, this research aims to provide actionable insights for franchise owners and managers seeking to build a stable, skilled, and motivated workforce, thereby securing long-term success and a competitive advantage.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing body of literature surrounding various leadership styles, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific effects of servant leadership on critical organizational outcomes, particularly within the franchise industry (Eva et al., 2019). While servant leadership emphasizes the importance of supporting and empowering employees and fostering a positive work environment, its unique implications for employee retention and development within the distinct operational context of franchises are less well-documented

(Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008). This lack of empirical evidence challenges franchise owners and managers striving to enhance these outcomes through effective leadership.

Franchise organizations continually aim to improve employee development and retention, recognizing their direct correlation with operational stability and long-term sustainability (Franchise Business Review, 2024). However, the high employee turnover often seen in this sector suggests a persistent problem with current leadership practices. This study aims to identify how servant leadership's influence on employee well-being can either improve, detract, or stagnate employees' productivity levels and effective connection to their work environment.

Inconsistent findings and a lack of comprehensive studies addressing these variables collectively hinder scholars and practitioners from drawing conclusive insights regarding servant leadership's efficacy in a franchise setting (Hoch et al., 2018). Thus, this study aims to investigate the effects of servant leadership on employee retention and development, specifically within franchise organizations. By addressing this gap, the research intends to provide empirical evidence and practical recommendations for implementing leadership strategies that optimize employee-related outcomes in this unique business model.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the relationship between servant leadership and employee retention and development, specifically within the organizational success strategies in the franchise industry. Grounded in Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory, which emphasizes a leader's commitment to the personal and professional growth and well-being of their followers, this research seeks to understand how the principles and practices of servant leadership influence key employee outcomes in this unique organizational context. While prior research has established links between servant leadership and positive organizational outcomes, this study aims to address a gap by focusing on its specific impact on employee retention and development within franchise organizations, a sector often characterized by distinct management structures and employment dynamics (Eva et al., 2019; Haynes & Sorenson, 2003; Liden et al., 2008).

By investigating this relationship, the findings of this research intend to provide empirical insights for franchise owners, managers, and franchisors on how to cultivate leadership practices that foster a more stable and growth-oriented workforce. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to both the academic understanding of servant leadership in a specific organizational context and the practical application of leadership strategies to improve critical employee outcomes in the franchise sector.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The guiding research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1: To what extent does servant leadership influence employee retention in franchise organizations?

H_o1: There is no correlation between servant leadership and employee retention in franchise organizations.

$H_1$1: There is a positive correlation between servant leadership and employee retention in franchise organizations.

RQ2: To what extent does servant leadership influence employee development in franchise organizations?

H_o2: There is no correlation between servant leadership and employee development in franchise organizations.

$H_1$2: There is a positive correlation between servant leadership and employee development in franchise organizations.

RQ3: To what extent do employee retention and employee development mediate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational success?

H_o3: Employee development and retention do not mediate the relationship between servant leadership and the long-term success of a franchise organization.

$H_1$3: Employee development and retention positively mediate the relationship between servant leadership and the long-term success of a franchise organization.

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by two foundational theories: Servant Leadership Theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET). Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding the relationship between a leader's behavior and employee-related outcomes within the specific context of franchise organizations.

Servant Leadership Theory

First, this research is built upon the Servant Leadership Theory, originally proposed by Robert Greenleaf (1977). This theory posits that the primary motivation of a leader is to serve others—specifically, their employees—by prioritizing their needs, well-being, and personal growth from their individual perspective foremost. A servant leader is characterized by qualities such as genuine empathy, listening, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1995). By genuinely considering their employees' individualized needs, servant leaders demonstrate employee outcomes through personalized cultivation, which can lead to a personalized approach to their work.

This framework is particularly relevant to this study because it directly addresses the independent variable, servant leadership. It provides the theoretical foundation for examining how a leader's service-oriented actions can foster a work environment that is conducive to employee development and retention. For example, a franchise manager who demonstrates a "commitment to the growth of people on a personal level" by providing training opportunities and mentorship that directly address each employee’s concerns, learning styles, and life circumstances may positively influence an employee's professional growth and their decision to stay with the organization (Spears, 1995).

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Second, this study utilizes the Social Exchange Theory (SET), a well-established framework in organizational behavior (Blau, 1964). SET suggests that social relationships in the workplace are based on a series of reciprocal exchanges, where individuals give in the expectation of receiving something of value in return. When an organization, through its leaders, provides resources such as support, respect, and opportunities for development, employees feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors. For instance, the core mechanism of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the norm of reciprocity within organizations is the idea that when employers provide "socio-emotional resources" (like support and respect), employees feel a "sense of obligation" to return the favor through positive work behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

In the context of this research, servant leadership behaviors (the "give") are considered a form of social and psychological resource provided to employees. According to SET, employees who receive this support are more likely to reciprocate by demonstrating higher levels of organizational commitment and loyalty, which directly translates to increased retention

(Cropanzano et al., 2017). Further, the investment in employee personal development (a key component of servant leadership) can be seen as a valuable resource that, in turn, motivates employees to perform better professionally and remain with the franchise, thereby creating a positive feedback loop.

By integrating these two theories, this framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of the proposed relationships. Servant Leadership Theory explains the "why" behind the leader's behavior, while Social Exchange Theory explains the "how" and "why" behind the employee's reciprocal responses of enhanced development and retention in the franchise environment. This dual-theoretical lens provides a robust and empirically grounded foundation for the study's design and analysis.

The Scope of the Study

This research will be a quantitative, correlational study focusing exclusively on the relationship between servant leadership and its impact on employee retention and professional development within the franchise industry's measure of successful organizational outcomes. The scope is defined by both its conceptual and methodological boundaries.

Conceptual Scope

The study's conceptual focus is limited to the constructs of servant leadership, employee retention, and employee development. It will not delve into other leadership styles, such as transformational or transactional leadership, except as they are contrasted to highlight the unique attributes of the servant leadership model. The study will not explore other factors that may influence retention and development, such as compensation, benefits, or work-life balance, as they are outside the primary variables of interest.

Methodological Scope

The study will employ a quantitative approach, using surveys to collect data from a sample of employees working in various franchise organizations. Data collection will be limited to a specific geographic region (United States) to ensure a manageable and relevant sample. The research will use established and validated instruments to measure the constructs of servant leadership, employee retention, employee development, and franchise organizational success (Allen et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2008). The findings will be analyzed using statistical methods to determine the correlation between the variables. As such, the study's conclusions will be based on statistical relationships and will not imply direct causality. The results will be generalizable only to the population of employees within the franchise industry who share similar characteristics to the study sample.

Definitions of Key Terms

Collaborative Organizational Communication: A decision-making process emphasizing collective input over individual choices, fostering strategic communication and reducing distortion in organizational messaging (Miller, 2009).

Ethical Leadership Theory: A principled approach to decision-making that prioritizes moral values, fairness, and integrity in leadership behavior (Fuller, 2021).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX): The quality of the emotional support and resource exchange between leaders and their subordinates (Newman et al., 2017).

Psychological Safety: The belief that one can take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences (Eva et al., 2019).

Servant Leadership: A leadership philosophy focused on serving others, characterized by principles such as listening, empathy, and community building (Washington et al., 2002).

Unethical Business Behavior: Actions within organizations involving deception or manipulation that undermine ethical practices in operational contexts.

The Significance of the Study

This research holds both academic and practical significance. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by bridging a notable gap in the literature and provides actionable insights for practitioners within the franchise industry.

Academic Significance

Academically, this study will extend the understanding of servant leadership by applying it to a unique and under-researched business model: franchise organizations. While previous studies have examined the broader effects of servant leadership on organizational outcomes, few have specifically addressed its role in addressing the high turnover and development challenges endemic to the franchise sector’s success organizationally (Eva et al., 2019; Franchise Business Review, 2024). This research will offer a focused examination of how servant leadership behaviors can directly influence employee retention and professional growth, providing empirical evidence to support the theoretical links proposed by Servant Leadership Theory and Social Exchange Theory within this specific context (Blau, 1964; Greenleaf, 1977). The findings will provide a foundation for future research on specialized leadership applications and their effects on franchise organizational successful sustainability.

Practical Significance

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study are highly relevant for franchise owners, managers, and franchisors. High employee turnover in the franchise industry leads to significant costs related to recruitment, training, and lost productivity (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). By demonstrating a clear, positive correlation between servant leadership and improved employee retention and development, this research will provide a compelling, evidence-based case for investing in leadership training and development programs. The study's practical recommendations will enable franchise leaders to adopt a more service-oriented approach, fostering a more committed and skilled workforce. Ultimately, this can lead to enhanced operational efficiency, improved customer service, and a stronger competitive advantage for the franchise unit, contributing directly to its long-term financial health and growth. Most importantly, and in alignment with the principles of servant leadership, this approach will also result in happier and more productive employees. By providing direct support and fostering their growth, these individuals will exhibit improved behavior and contribute to a more positive and fulfilling work environment that prioritizes their well-being.

Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of a study that investigates the impact of servant leadership on employee retention and development within franchise organizational success models. The research is grounded in the reality of high employee turnover in the franchise sector and the potential for a service-oriented leadership approach to mitigate this challenge (Franchise Business Review, 2024). The chapter introduced the research problem, highlighting the gap in the literature regarding the specific application and outcomes of servant leadership within the unique context of franchises (Eva et al., 2019). It then articulated the purpose of the study: to empirically examine the relationship between a leader's servant-like behaviors and an employee's decision to remain with the company and their opportunities for professional growth, a pattern a franchise organization relies upon to sustain productivity at high levels.

The theoretical framework for the study was established using Servant Leadership Theory and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Greenleaf, 1977). These theories provide a foundation for understanding how a leader's commitment to serving employees can foster a reciprocal relationship that leads to greater loyalty and development. Finally, the chapter presented the scope of the study, which is limited to a quantitative, correlational design and a specific sample within the franchise industry. It also outlined the academic and practical significance of the research, emphasizing its contribution to both scholarly knowledge and industry best practices. This foundational chapter sets the stage for the rest of the thesis, providing a clear roadmap for the research methodology and the subsequent analysis of the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature relevant to this study, which examines servant leadership's role in employee retention and development within the long-term success strategies of franchise organizations. This literature review is structured to build a clear theoretical and empirical foundation for the research questions and hypotheses. It is divided into three key sections.

First, this chapter will explore the foundational concepts and theoretical underpinnings of servant leadership. This section will trace the origins of the theory from Robert Greenleaf's (1977) seminal work to its modern conceptualizations, including key dimensions and characteristics as identified in the literature (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2008). The review will highlight how servant leadership, with its emphasis on a leader's commitment to employee growth and well-being, offers a unique and people-centric approach to management.

Second, it will examine the existing research on employee retention and employee development. This section will review studies that identify the critical factors influencing an employee's decision to remain with an organization and their perceived opportunities for professional growth. It will also establish the well-documented link between effective leadership and positive employee outcomes, thereby setting the stage for the core inquiry of this study.

Finally, it will synthesize the literature by connecting the core constructs to the unique context of long-term success in the franchise industry. This section will address the specific challenges faced by franchises, such as high employee turnover, the need for consistent brand representation, and will review any available research that bridges the gap between leadership theory and the franchise business model. By integrating these three streams of literature, this chapter will not only provide a detailed overview of the current state of knowledge but also justify the need for this study's specific focus on a single, yet significant, industry.

Research Strategy

The research strategy for this study will be a quantitative, correlational design. This approach is well-suited to examine the relationship between variables without implying a direct cause-and-effect relationship, aligning with the study's aim of exploring the role of servant leadership in employee retention and development in franchise organizations. This strategy will involve the collection of primary data through surveys and a subsequent statistical analysis to test the formulated hypotheses.

This study will use a correlational design to investigate the relationships among four key variables: servant leadership, employee retention, employee development, and long-term organizational success. This method is appropriate for this research as it allows for the measurement of the strength and direction of the relationships between these variables in a real-world setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data will be collected from employees working within a variety of franchise organizations. The target population is valuable for this study due to the unique challenges of employee management and turnover within this business model (Franchise Business Review, 2024). A standardized survey instrument will be used to ensure consistency in data collection, including validated scales to measure: (1) Servant Leadership using a reliable and widely accepted scale such as the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ), (2) Employee Retention measuring an employee's intent to stay with the organization through a validated scale such as the Gallup Q12 Index, (3) Employee Development assessing an employee's perception of opportunities for professional growth and skill enhancement provided by their leaders and the organization through a validated scale such as the Quantum Workplace e9 Model, and (4) Long-term Organizational Success measuring an organization's measuring the collective health, sustainability, and growth potential of a franchise network with a validated survey such as the Franchisee Satisfaction Index (FSI) (Allen et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2008). Rather than looking at a single snapshot of profit, it evaluates how well the system converts its initial model into a lasting, scalable entity.

The collected data will be analyzed using statistical software (i.e., SPSS) to perform correlational analyses, such as Pearson's r, and regression analysis. These statistical methods will help determine the nature and significance of the relationships between the variables and test the study's hypotheses. By using a quantitative correlational design, the research will provide a systematic and objective approach to understanding the link between leadership practices and employee outcomes within the specific context of franchise organizations, contributing valuable empirical evidence to the field.

Theoretical Foundations of Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) conceptualized servant leadership, which is grounded in the philosophy that leaders prioritize the needs of others, particularly employees, before their own. The theory emphasizes empathy, stewardship, community building, and the development of followers (van Dierendonck, 2011). Unlike traditional leadership models, which prioritize organizational outcomes over employee welfare, servant leadership focuses on empowering individuals to grow personally and professionally (Eva et al., 2019).

Key Dimensions of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership comprises several core dimensions: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people's growth, and community-building (Liden et al., 2008). Studies by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) refined these dimensions into measurable components, which have been validated across various organizational settings and cultures (Spears, 2010). These dimensions provide a framework to evaluate the leader's impact on employee behavior and organizational outcomes. Further, they embody the idea that serving others before oneself ultimately leads to success, opposed to simply meeting the bottom line through strictly transactional goals. To the contrary, servant leadership proposes that organizations lead by serving their employees through a customized goal-setting system that enhances well-being, leading to effective worker productivity.

Comparison to Other Leadership Models

Servant leadership, a distinct leadership theory, sets itself apart from other approaches by emphasizing its fundamental motivation and primary focus. It is often contrasted with two prominent styles: transactional and transformational leadership. Understanding these distinctions helps clarify the unique value scheme of the servant leadership approach. Unlike transformational leadership, which also focuses on individual growth, servant leadership differs in its motive; transformational leaders often aim to meet organizational goals through inspiring followers, whereas servant leaders prioritize follower needs as a goal (Hunter et al., 2013). In contrast, autocratic and transactional leadership styles focus on control, structure, and reward-based behavior, lacking servant leadership's relational and developmental focus (Stone et al., 2004). Reward structures are common in the workplace, yet they often lack customization to individual motivations and fail to inspire due to the end goals not being met.

Transactional Leadership: The Exchange-Based Model

Transactional leadership operates on a straightforward exchange system, wherein leaders offer rewards in exchange for performance or adherence to rules (Bass, 1985). In short, for every simple organizational transaction, there is a mutually beneficial outcome, or contingent reward, per se. However, this approach to leadership lacks flexibility or consideration for special circumstances, despite the clarified expectations. Reward-based management, focusing solely on incentive gains for employees, leads to burnout rather than a balanced work output (Bass, 1985). When the reward is not worth the effort, work productivity decreases rather than inspiring an increase from internal motivations.

Management by Exception (Active and Passive). Leaders manage by exception when monitoring performance and taking corrective action in response to deviations from standards. Active management by exception involves proactively monitoring for mistakes before they occur, whereas passive management by exception involves intervening only after errors have already occurred (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

***Focus on Rules and Procedures*.** Transactional leaders emphasize adherence to established rules, regulations, and systems to maintain order and efficiency within the organization (Burns, 1978). So, for instance, even though an employee is reliable, effective, and productive, when 'the bottom line' of the rules is broken, they may be punished or dismissed despite their overall value to the team. When the bottom line, or the monetary goals of an organization, trump the individual circumstances, it can cost organizations more money than simply allowing flexibility with an alternative approach.

***Lack of Relational and Developmental Focus*.** Transactional leadership primarily focuses on control, structure, and reward-based behavior, lacking servant leadership's relational and developmental focus (Stone et al., 2004). The relationship between leader and follower is largely instrumental, centered on the transaction rather than personal growth or well-being. While transactional leadership can be effective in stable environments requiring clear objectives and predictable outcomes, its limitation lies in its inability to inspire customized effort or foster long-term commitment beyond the immediate reward system (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transformational Leadership: Inspiring and Motivating Change

Transformational leadership, articulated by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), focuses on inspiring followers to transcend their self-interest for the good of the organization. Using "charisma," or idealized influenc*e*, leaders act as role models, are admired, respected, and trusted. Followers identify with these leaders and want to emulate them (Bass, 1985). Using *inspirational motivation*, leaders articulate a compelling vision and inspire followers to commit to shared goals. They use symbols and emotional appeals to focus group efforts (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Using intellectual stimulation, leaders encourage followers to be innovative and creative, challenge assumptions, reframe problems, and approach old situations in new ways (Bass, 1985). Finally, using individualized consideratio*n*, leaders pay attention to each follower's needs for achievement and growth, acting as coaches or mentors (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Ultimately, transformational leadership is highly effective in driving change, fostering innovation, and enhancing organizational commitment because it builds a strong emotional connection with followers, motivating them to achieve higher levels of performance.

Distinguishing Servant Leadership: The Importance of Service

While transformational leadership also focuses on individual growth, servant leadership distinguishes itself primarily by its motiv**e** and ultimate objective.

Primary Motivation. The fundamental distinction between transformational and servant leadership lies in their primary intentions. While both styles emphasize individual growth, servant leadership differs in its motive. Transformational leaders primarily focus on achieving organizational goals by inspiring their followers, whereas servant leaders prioritize the well-being of their followers as their primary objective (Hunter et al., 2013). In essence, transformational leaders aim to achieve organizational success through inspired followers, while servant leaders strive for the holistic growth and well-being of their followers.

Role of the Leader. A transformational leader, acting as a visionary, motivates followers to achieve a collective vision. In contrast, a servant leader, prioritizing the needs of others before their own, views their role as enabling and empowering (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011). Whereas one leader inspires goal-achievement, the other instills an ingrained devotion to individualized success, catered to the needs and capabilities of the follower.

Origin of Influence. Transformational leaders gain influence through their charisma and inspiring vision, while servant leaders gain influence through their demonstrated commitment to serving others. They build trust and respect through humility and authentic care (Eva et al., 2019).

Decision-Making. Servant leadership, while both styles can involve follower input, often emphasizes shared decision-making and explicitly empowering followers to take initiative. This reflects a deep trust in their capabilities and a valuing of their perspectives (Spears, 2010). Transactional leadership focuses on managing exchanges and maintaining the existing status quo. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, inspires followers to attain a higher vision. Servant leadership, however, prioritizes the well-being and development of its followers, believing that genuine service to others is the most effective path to individual flourishing and, ultimately, organizational success (Eva et al., 2019). This unique, other-oriented approach distinguishes servant leadership as a distinct and increasingly recognized paradigm for sustainable organizational growth.

Servant Leadership and Employee Development

One of the most significant outcomes of servant leadership is its influence on employee development (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Scholars have found that when leaders model servant leadership behaviors, they create an environment conducive to learning, innovation, and skill development (Jang et al., 2022; Walumbwa et al., 2018). Servant leadership focuses on developing employees' growth, self-efficacy, and potential (Su et al., 2021). It goes beyond mere training; it involves a holistic commitment to each individual's professional and personal journey (Greenleaf, 1970). The ability to customize each employee's needs to organizational goals fosters a more embodied value system that instills commitment, accountability, and loyalty for the right reasons (i.e., reasons ethically befitting both parties) (Liden et al., 2008).

Creating a Learning Environment

Research by Liden et al. (2014) demonstrated that servant leaders cultivate trust and psychological safety, essential for knowledge sharing and continuous learning, through mentorship and coaching (Lemoine et al., 2019; Senge & Scharmer, 2020). Similarly, Newman et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between servant leadership and employees' motivation to pursue self-directed learning and career advancement. Employees who perceive their leaders as supportive and nurturing tend to be more proactive in personal development (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). By investing in employee development, servant leaders not only enhance the organization's human capital but also contribute to long-term organizational competitiveness and adaptability in dynamic markets (Becker, 1964; Wright & McMahan, 2011). A highly skilled workforce, nurtured through such investments, becomes more innovative and resilient, enabling the franchise organization to thrive in ever-changing environments.

Enhancing Self-Efficacy and Empowerment

Servant leaders enhance employee self-efficacy by delegating meaningful tasks and expressing confidence in employees' unique abilities (Amor et al., 2020). This empowerment increases intrinsic motivation, which is linked to improved performance and a more significant commitment to professional growth (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017). Moreover, servant leaders often act as mentors, providing guidance and emotional support for success in life in general, but especially in any franchise organizational environment (Lemoine et al., 2019).

Relational Focus of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership places a strong emphasis on building strong, trusting, and supportive relationships with followers, which sets it apart from transactional or autocratic leadership styles that prioritize tasks or control (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Prioritizing Others' Needs. Research consistently demonstrates that servant leaders prioritize the needs and well-being of their followers over their own self-interest or even immediate organizational goals. This fundamental principle, as outlined by Greenleaf (1977), directly influences the relational focus, necessitating genuine attention to individuals (Eva et al., 2019; van Dierendonck, 2011).

Empathy and Emotional Support. Servant leaders demonstrate high levels of empathy, providing emotional healing and support to their team members. This fosters a psychologically safe environment where employees feel understood and valued, as evidenced by research by Liden et al. (2014) and Eva et al. (2019). Studies have shown that this emotional support can effectively reduce employee burnout and enhance job satisfaction, as demonstrated by Babakus et al. (2017) and Hunter et al. (2013).

Trust and Psychological Safety. Servant leaders prioritize follower needs and demonstrate genuine care, fostering trust and psychological safety within teams (Liden et al., 2014). This environment enables employees to take interpersonal risks, share ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of repercussions, which is essential for open communication and effective collaboration.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Servant leadership is closely linked to the development of high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships. These relationships are marked by mutual respect, trust, and reciprocal influence between leaders and followers (Newman et al., 2017). The quality of LMX, in turn, significantly impacts employee satisfaction and commitment.

Building Community. Servant leaders actively foster a sense of community within their teams and organizations by valuing individual differences, promoting collaboration, and cultivating loyalty. This community-building strengthens interpersonal bonds and collective identity, as evidenced by the work of Russell (2001) and Spears (2010).

Communication. Effective communication is the cornerstone of the relational aspect. Servant leaders are frequently lauded for their exceptional listening skills, active participation in two-way communication, and their accessibility to their followers (Miller, 2009; Sloan, Mikkelson, & Wilkinson, n.d.). This open dialogue fosters a sense of hearing and involvement among employees, empowering them to actively contribute to decision-making processes.

Gratitude and Prosocial Behaviors. Some research explores the influence of relational attributions employees make about their servant leaders on feelings of gratitude. When employees perceive a leader's "serving" as selfless and not solely motivated by a relational exchange, it cultivates gratitude, leading to heightened interpersonal citizenship behaviors and increased upward voice (Sun et al., 2019).

Servant Leadership and Employee Retention

Servant leadership also contributes to organizational stability by positively impacting employee retention rates. Turnover is costly for organizations, and leadership style has emerged as a key factor in retaining talent. Organizational cultures grounded in servant leadership often experience lower absenteeism and greater employee alignment with strategic goals (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). Servant leadership significantly reduces burnout and increases job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Babakus et al., 2017; Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017; Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Lee, Lyubovnikova, & Wei Tian, 2018; Tuan, 2016). Lower turnover means reduced costs associated with recruitment, hiring, and training new employees, directly impacting the bottom line. Retaining skilled talent also preserves institutional knowledge and expertise, as well as consistency of production quality.

Reducing Burnout and Increasing Job Satisfaction

Empirical evidence indicates that servant leadership effectively reduces employee burnout by promoting a healthy work-life balance and cultivating a culture of respect and appreciation (Eva et al., 2019). Employees are more inclined to remain with organizations that value and comprehend their well-being (Hunter et al., 2013). Moreover, Hoch et al. (2018) discovered that servant leaders who genuinely care for their employees' well-being contribute to higher job satisfaction and loyalty.

Strengthening Organizational Commitment

Affective organizational commitment, or an employee's emotional attachment to the organization, has been strongly linked to servant leadership, as demonstrated by Mayer et al. (2020). Servant leaders cultivate strong interpersonal relationships, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose among employees. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood of turnover intentions, as evidenced by Chiniara & Bentein (2016).

Servant Leadership and Organizational Economic Growth

While much of the literature on servant leadership predominantly focuses on individual-level outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and psychological well-being, an increasingly robust body of research is establishing compelling links between this leadership style and broader organizational performance, including tangible metrics of economic success (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Saleem et al., 2020); Van Dierendonck, 2011.

Productivity and Financial Outcomes

A meta-analysis by Hoch et al. (2018) revealed that servant leadership positively correlates with team productivity, customer satisfaction, and financial performance. This occurs primarily through improved employee engagement and customer-oriented service behavior. Servant leadership creates a strong "service climate" within an organization. When employees are well-treated and engaged, they are more likely to provide higher-quality service to customers (Ling, Liu, & Wu, 2016). High customer satisfaction often translates into increased customer loyalty, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth, all of which directly contribute to revenue growth and market share.

When employees are empowered and respected, they are more likely to take initiative in identifying and solving problems, leading to operational efficiencies and cost savings (Chen et al., 2015). Research shows that servant leadership fosters better team cohesion, communication, and psychological safety (Liden et al., 2014; Ling et al., 2016). This leads to more effective teamwork and higher collective productivity.

Innovation and Long-Term Growth

Servant leadership is also linked to innovation, a key economic growth driver. Leaders who empower employees to think creatively and take initiative foster a culture of innovation

(Yoshida et al., 2014). Such a culture contributes to long-term organizational competitiveness and adaptability in dynamic markets. When employees feel psychologically safe and supported, they are more likely to share novel ideas and implement innovative solutions (Liden et al., 2014). Servant leaders promote organizational "learning agility," enabling teams and the organization to adapt quickly to market changes, technological advancements, and evolving customer demands (Eva et al., 2019; Yoshida et al., 2014). This adaptability is key for long-term competitiveness and economic resilience.

Some research suggests servant leadership aligns with a "triple bottom line" approach, focusing on financial, social, and environmental impact (Hunter et al., 2013; Parris & Peachey, 2013). This can attract socially conscious consumers and investors, improving market value and enhancing the company's reputation among customers, investors, and the public. Studies have found positive associations between servant leadership behaviors among top executives and firm performance metrics like return on assets (ROA) (Peterson et al., 2012), indicating that investors may view such leadership as a positive indicator of long-term stability and profitability.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Servant Leadership Theory, first articulated by Robert Greenleaf (1977). This theory posits that leaders are most effective when they prioritize their followers' needs. Robert Greenleaf's original conceptualization of servant leadership suggests that the leader's primary motivation is to serve others. The ultimate test of a servant leader is whether those being served grow as individuals, becoming healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely to become servants themselves. Unlike traditional leadership models emphasizing hierarchy and authority, servant leadership is deeply rooted in ethical behavior, relational accountability, and empowerment (Eva et al., 2019).

In addition to Servant Leadership Theory, this study draws upon Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that social behavior results from an exchange process to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Blau, 1964). When leaders invest in the growth and well-being of their employees, followers reciprocate through increased loyalty, engagement, and performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This reciprocal dynamic explains how servant leadership can indirectly influence organizational growth through employee attitudes and behaviors.

This research also incorporates Human Capital Theory, which suggests investing in employee development yields returns through improved performance, innovation, and retention (Becker, 1964). Servant leaders facilitate human capital growth by providing resources, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement. When employees are viewed as valuable assets, their personal and professional development drives organizational economic performance (Wright & McMahan, 2011). These three theoretical lenses—Servant Leadership Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Human Capital Theory—provide a multidimensional foundation for exploring how leadership behaviors impact individual outcomes (like development and retention) and broader economic outcomes at the organizational level.

Servant Leadership Theory

The foundational theory for this study is Servant Leadership, a concept introduced by Robert Greenleaf (1977). Unlike traditional, autocratic leadership, servant leadership prioritizes the needs, growth, and well-being of followers. The leader's primary goal is to serve their team, which in turn inspires employees to grow and perform at their best. Key characteristics of a servant leader include listening, empathy, stewardship, and a commitment to the growth of people (Spears, 1995). This framework is essential for this research because it directly informs the independent variable. It helps conceptualize how specific leader behaviors—such as providing support and creating development opportunities—are the mechanisms through which positive employee outcomes are achieved.

Employee Development

Inherent Focus on Follower Growth. At its core, servant leadership revolves around nurturing the personal and professional growth of employees. Unlike other leadership styles that perceive development as an organizational objective, servant leaders prioritize the development of their followers as an end in itself. They genuinely care about their employees' potential and actively strive to help them realize it.

Creation of a Supportive Learning Environment. Servant leaders create a psychologically safe and supportive environment where employees feel comfortable taking risks, experimenting, and learning from mistakes. This fosters a culture of innovation and continuous learning by reducing the fear of failure. They encourage knowledge sharing and a "development climate" (Liden et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2017).

Empowerment and Autonomy. Servant leaders empower their employees by delegating meaningful tasks, trusting them with responsibility, and providing the autonomy necessary to perform their jobs effectively. This empowerment fosters self-efficacy, employees' belief in their own capabilities, which is a strong driver of motivation to develop new skills and take on new challenges (Amor et al., 2020; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017).

Mentorship and Coaching. Servant leadership behaviors often align with effective mentorship. Servant leaders provide individualized attention, constructive feedback, and career guidance (Lemoine et al., 2019; Senge & Scharmer, 2020). They act as stewards of their employees' careers, helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses and navigate their professional paths.

Intrinsic Motivation. Servant leaders, by focusing on individual needs and growth, tap into employees' intrinsic motivation for mastery and purpose. When employees perceive their leaders as genuinely invested in their development, they are more likely to be self-motivated to learn and improve, aligning their personal growth goals with organizational objectives (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

Employee Retention

Servant leadership naturally fosters a positive environment and relationships, which are key factors in employee retention.

Increased Job Satisfaction and Well-being. Servant leaders prioritize employee well-being by promoting work-life balance and fostering a culture of respect and appreciation (Eva et al., 2019; Hoch et al., 2018). When employees are satisfied with their jobs and feel their well-being is genuinely valued, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere (Babakus et al., 2017; Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017; Lee, Lyubovnikova, & Wei Tian, 2018).

Stronger Organizational Commitment. Servant leaders cultivate strong leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Liden et al., 2008). Consequently, employees develop higher affective organizational commitment, an emotional attachment to the organization, which makes them more likely to remain loyal and committed in the long run.

Reduced Burnout. Servant leadership, which emphasizes emotional support, empathy, and a fair work environment, effectively mitigates employee burnout (Hunter et al., 2013). Burnout is a major contributor to employee turnover, so its reduction directly contributes to employee retention.

Reciprocity and Social Exchange Theory. As Social Exchange Theory emphasizes, when leaders invest in their employees' growth and well-being (benefits), employees feel a sense of obligation and reciprocate with increased loyalty, engagement, and a decreased intention to leave ((Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Tuan, 2016). This mutually beneficial cycle fosters a positive work environment.

Perceived Value and Investment. When employees receive genuine investment in their development through mentorship, learning opportunities, and empowerment, they recognize their value as assets to the organization. This perception of being valued and invested in significantly boosts their motivation to remain with the company (Tuan, 2016).

Trust in Leadership. Servant leaders cultivate high levels of trust through their ethical conduct, consistency, and genuine concern for their employees. Employees are more likely to remain with an organization when they trust their leadership and believe their well-being is prioritized (Jaramillo et al., 2009).

Servant Leadership and Organizational Economic Growth

While much of the scholarly discourse on servant leadership focuses on interpersonal outcomes such as trust, job satisfaction, and engagement, there is a growing recognition that servant leadership contributes to tangible organizational-level outcomes, including economic performance (Eva et al., 2019; Jenkins & Stewart, 2010; Langhof & Güldenberg, 2020; Liden et al., 2014; van Dierendonck et al., 2013). These outcomes include increased productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction, and financial profitability, critical for organizational sustainability and competitiveness in modern markets (Ling et al., 2017; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Stone et al., 2004).

Linking Leadership to Financial Performance.

The relationship between servant leadership and economic growth is grounded in the idea that empowered and engaged employees are more productive, committed, and aligned with organizational goals (Ling et al., 2017; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Stone et al., 2004). When employees thrive under servant leadership, their improved performance can translate into greater organizational efficiency and profitability. Peterson, Galvin, and Lange (2012) conducted a longitudinal study examining servant leadership behaviors among CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and found a positive association between servant leadership and firm performance over time, including return on assets (ROA) and employee productivity.

Their results indicate that organizations led by servant-oriented executives outperformed those with more traditional, command-style leaders regarding both short-term and long-term financial health. Similarly, Ling, Liu, and Wu (2016) discovered that servant leadership fosters a strong service climate, which enhances customer satisfaction, a key driver of revenue growth. In their analysis of retail organizations, stores led by high-scoring servant leaders reported higher net sales per employee compared to those with low servant leadership engagement.

Enhancing Organizational Innovation and Adaptability.

Innovation is a critical determinant of economic growth, especially in today's fast-paced and competitive environments. Servant leaders support innovation by encouraging creativity, risk-taking, and psychological safety—key precursors to breakthrough ideas and process improvements. Yoshida et al. (2014) found that servant leadership promotes team innovation by fostering a supportive climate where employees feel safe to voice ideas and challenge the status quo.

Their multilevel study revealed that team-level innovation was significantly higher when servant leadership behaviors, such as listening, empathy, and community-building, were prevalent. Further, Eva et al. (2019) emphasized that servant leaders facilitate “learning agility” at the organizational level, empowering teams to adapt quickly to market conditions or customer expectations. This adaptability supports long-term economic resilience and positions firms to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Human Capital as a Driver of Economic Value.

Servant leadership aligns with Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in people, through training, development, and support, can yield significant returns for organizations (Becker, 1964). Servant leaders play a pivotal role in maximizing human capital by cultivating skills, emotional intelligence, and collaboration among team members. In a study of manufacturing firms, Chen, Zhu, and Zhou (2015) found that servant leadership practices increased organizational efficiency by improving team coordination and reducing conflict, ultimately leading to lower production costs and higher profit margins. Their analysis also noted that employee retention, fostered by servant leadership, reduced expenses associated with recruitment and onboarding, further boosting financial performance. Additionally, Searle and Barbuto (2011) argue that servant leadership enhances social capital (i.e., networks of trust and cooperation), accelerates knowledge transfer, reduces redundancy, and promotes efficient problem-solving, all contributing to organizational growth.

Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

Servant leadership is also connected to long-term sustainable advantage, particularly in socially conscious or stakeholder-driven organizations. By promoting ethical leadership, social responsibility, and long-term thinking, servant leaders help their organizations build reputational capital and stakeholder trust, increasing market value and sustained economic performance (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Hunter et al. (2013) argue that servant leadership fosters a “triple bottom line" approach, enhancing financial outcomes and social and environmental impact. This holistic performance model has gained traction in corporate governance and investor analysis, suggesting that servant-led firms may be more resilient and desirable in a values-driven economy.

In summation, Servant Leadership Theory posits that leaders can create conditions where employees not only thrive personally and professionally but also choose to remain with the organization by prioritizing and facilitating employee growth and development. This is achieved by fostering a supportive and trust-filled environment, which leads to well-being and commitment. In turn, employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to stay with the organization, forming a symbiotic relationship that forms the foundation for sustainable human capital and organizational success.

Social Exchange Theory

The second framework is Social Exchange Theory (SET), a widely used theory in organizational behavior (Blau, 1964). SET posits that social interactions in the workplace are based on a series of exchanges. When an organization, through its leaders, provides valuable resources and support, employees feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors. In this study, the servant leader's behaviors (i.e., mentorship, empowerment, and development opportunities) are the "give" in this exchange. According to SET, employees who receive these benefits are more likely to reciprocate by demonstrating higher levels of loyalty and commitment, which directly translates to increased retention (Cropanzano et al., 2017). The investment in employee skills and growth is a social exchange that motivates employees to remain with the company long-term. Employee retention and development are strongly connected to Social Exchange Theory (SET) because SET provides a framework for understanding the reciprocal nature of relationships within an organization. At its core, SET suggests that social interactions involve an exchange of resources (tangible and intangible) where individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Connection to Employee Retention

Retention, from a SET perspective, is largely a result of employees perceiving a favorable and equitable exchange relationship with their organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Organizational Investments (Benefits for Employees).

Compensation and Benefits. Fair pay, health insurance, retirement plans, and other financial rewards are direct tangible benefits that influence employee perceptions of a fair exchange (Shore & Barksdale, 1998).

Supportive Environment. Providing resources, psychological safety, work-life balance, and a respectful culture are intangible benefits highly valued by employees (Edmondson, 1999; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Recognition and Appreciation. Acknowledgment of performance and expressions of gratitude are psychological resources that enhance perceived support (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Liden et al., 2008).

Job Security. The promise of continued employment reduces uncertainty and enhances trust, which strengthens the exchange relationship (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006).

Development Opportunities. Investment in training, mentorship, and career advancement shows commitment to employees' future, a significant benefit that encourages retention (Wayne et al., 1997; Allen et al., 2003).

Employee Reciprocation (Benefits for Organization). When employees perceive these organizational investments as valuable and consistent, they feel a sense of obligation or reciprocity. This leads to them offering benefits back to the organization, which contributes to retention (Gouldner, 1960; Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Increased Loyalty and Commitment. Employees develop a stronger emotional bond and feel more committed to an organization that provides them with desirable resources and treatment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This reduces their intention to leave, as the "cost" of breaking the positive exchange is too high (i.e., losing benefits, disrupting established relationships).

Reduced Turnover Intentions. If the benefits received from the organization outweigh the perceived benefits available elsewhere, or the "costs" of leaving (i.e., job search effort, uncertainty), employees are more likely to stay (Haar et al., 2004).

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs). Employees may engage in OCBs (going above and beyond their formal duties, helping colleagues, volunteering) to reciprocate the positive treatment (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). While not directly retention, these behaviors contribute to a positive culture that itself supports retention.

Trust as a Mediator. Consistent positive exchanges build trust between employees and the organization. Trust reduces the perceived "risk" in the relationship and fosters a sense of security. Employees are less likely to leave an organization that they trust to act in their best interest (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Connection to Employee Development

Development, within the SET framework, is a critical organizational investment that directly influences the perceived value of the exchange for employees (Takeuchi et al., 2007).

Development as a Valued Resource/Benefit

Skill Enhancement. Providing training, workshops, and opportunities to learn new skills (i.e., leadership training, technical courses) are tangible resources that enhance an employee's marketability and capabilities (Noe, 2010).

Career Advancement. Offering pathways for promotion, mentorship, and opportunities for challenging assignments (which facilitate growth) are crucial benefits (Wayne et al., 1997).

Personal Growth. Support for personal growth (i.e., psychological safety, coaching) is an intangible but highly valued benefit (Edmondson, 1999; van Dierendonck, 2011).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS). When an organization invests in an employee's development, it signals that the organization values the employee and cares about their well-being and future (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Wayne et al., 1997). This leads to higher POS.

Reciprocity for Development Investments

Upon receiving these development benefits, employees are more likely to reciprocate:

Increased Performance. Newly acquired skills and knowledge directly translate into improved job performance, which benefits the organization (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

Greater Engagement and Motivation. Feeling that one's employer is investing in their future boosts intrinsic motivation and engagement in work tasks (Saks, 2006).

Stronger Commitment and Loyalty. Employees feel a greater sense of commitment and loyalty to an organization that helps them grow. This makes them less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere, directly linking development to retention (Allen et al., 2003).

Sharing Knowledge. Employees who have benefited from development may be more willing to share their new knowledge and mentor others, further enhancing the organization's human capital (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005).

Connection to Retention

Development Drives Retention

When organizations offer robust development opportunities (a key benefit in the social exchange), employees perceive the relationship as more valuable. This increases their commitment and reduces their desire to leave, thus enhancing retention (Hausknecht et al., 2009).

Retention Enables Development

High retention rates provide a stable workforce, allowing organizations to make longer-term investments in employee development without the fear of losing that investment quickly to turnover (De Vos & Meganck, 2009). At the core, Social Exchange Theory helps explain why employees reciprocate good treatment with loyalty and effort. When an organization provides valuable resources, particularly in the form of development opportunities and a supportive environment, employees perceive a favorable exchange, leading them to contribute more to the organization and, crucially, to choose to remain with it (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Connection to Organizational Success

Organizational economic success is linked to SET by emphasizing the quality of reciprocal relationships. Positive exchanges with employees (i.e., recognition, development, support) yield stronger commitment, productivity, and innovation, all of which enhance economic outcomes (Wayne et al., 2002; Cropanzano et al., 2017). SET posits that social behavior involves ongoing exchanges intended to maximize mutual benefit (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Investment in Employees Yields Reciprocal Benefits

The Organization's Investment (Benefits to Employees). When an organization invests in its employees through fair compensation, good benefits, professional development opportunities, a supportive work environment, psychological safety, and recognition (as promoted by servant leadership), these are perceived as "investments" or "benefits" to the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Liden et al., 2008; Edmondson, 1999).

Employee Reciprocation (Benefits to Organization). According to SET, employees are then more likely to reciprocate these perceived benefits. This reciprocation manifests in behaviors that directly contribute to economic success (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Increased Loyalty and Commitment. Employees feel a stronger emotional bond and obligation to an organization that treats them well, leading to higher affective commitment and reduced turnover intentions (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Reduced turnover directly saves recruitment, hiring, and training costs, thus benefiting economic success.

Higher Effort and Performance. Employees are more willing to go above and beyond their basic job requirements, exert discretionary effort, and engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) when they feel valued and fairly treated (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). This increased effort leads to higher productivity and efficiency.

Innovation and Creativity. When employees feel secure and supported (a benefit exchanged), they are more likely to take risks, share new ideas, and contribute to innovation, which can lead to new revenue streams or competitive advantages (Amabile, 1996; Zhou & George, 2001).

Building Trust and High-Quality Relationships. SET emphasizes the development of trust in ongoing relationships. When an organization (through its leaders and policies) consistently provides benefits and acts reliably, employees develop trust; a valuable social resource (Blau, 1964; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Reduced Monitoring Costs. In an environment of high trust, there is less need for strict oversight and control, which can reduce managerial costs and bureaucracy, indirectly boosting economic efficiency (Levin & Cross, 2004).

Improved Communication and Collaboration. Trust facilitates open communication and effective collaboration among employees and between employees and management, leading to better decision-making and problem-solving, which can positively impact economic outcomes (Costa, Roe, & Taillieu, 2001).

Positive Reputation and External Exchanges.

Attracting Talent. An organization known for treating its employees well (positive exchange with current employees) develops a positive reputation, making it easier to attract top talent. This reduces recruitment costs and improves the quality of the workforce (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Customer Relationships. The principles of SET can extend to customer relationships. When an organization provides excellent service and value (benefits to customers), customers are likely to reciprocate with loyalty, repeat business, and positive referrals, all contributing to revenue and market share (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Investor Confidence. Investors also engage in a form of social exchange. They invest capital (a benefit) expecting returns and ethical conduct. An organization that demonstrates strong internal exchanges (i.e., high employee morale, ethical leadership) is often perceived as more stable and well-managed, increasing investor confidence and potentially its stock value (Jones et al., 2009).

Minimizing Costs from Negative Exchanges. Conversely, if employees perceive a lack of fairness, exploitation, or a negative exchange (i.e., overwork for low pay, lack of development opportunities), SET predicts negative reciprocation. This can manifest as:

Increased Turnover. Employees will seek opportunities elsewhere where the exchange is perceived as more equitable (Hom et al., 1992).

Reduced Performance and Engagement. Disgruntled employees may exert minimal effort, leading to decreased productivity (Maslach et al., 2001).

Counterproductive Work Behaviors. In severe cases, negative exchanges can lead to theft, sabotage, or other behaviors detrimental to the organization's economic health (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Reputational Damage. Negative internal exchanges can spill over into public perception, damaging the organization's brand and making it harder to attract customers and talent (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).

In principle, Social Exchange Theory theorizes that organizational economic success is not solely attributable to transactional processes but is profoundly intertwined with the quality of reciprocal relationships that an organization cultivates with its pivotal stakeholders, particularly its employees (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). By investing in and providing benefits to employees, organizations foster a cycle of positive reciprocation that engenders improved performance, reduced costs, enhanced innovation, and strengthened external relationships—all of which are fundamental to sustainable economic success (Colquitt et al., 2013; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Lee et al., 2022).

Human Capital Development as an Investment (Human Capital Theory)

Servant leadership is deeply aligned with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Wright & McMahan, 2011). By investing in employees' development, skill enhancement, and well-being, servant leaders increase the overall "value" of their workforce. This enhanced human capital directly translates into higher productivity, innovation, and adaptability, all of which are critical drivers of economic success. A highly skilled and motivated workforce is more efficient, produces higher quality outputs, and is better equipped to meet market demands, directly impacting revenue and cost structures.

Increased Productivity and Efficiency

Higher Employee Engagement. As discussed, servant leaders foster high levels of employee engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2008). Engaged employees are more productive, committed to organizational goals, and willing to exert discretionary effort (Kenek, 2024; van Dierendonck, 2011). This directly contributes to higher output and operational efficiency (Liden et al., 2014; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

Reduced Absenteeism and Presenteeism. Employees who feel supported and valued by servant leaders are less likely to be absent or disengaged while at work (Wiroko, 2021). This translates to more consistent output and better utilization of human resources (Ruhle et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Improved Team Performance. Servant leadership cultivates psychological safety and strong team cohesion (Liden et al., 2014; Ling, Lin, & Wu, 2016). Effective teamwork reduces conflicts, streamlines processes, and improves collective output, leading to better economic outcomes.

Enhanced Innovation and Adaptability

Culture of Creativity. Servant leaders encourage employees to voice new ideas, take initiative, and even challenge the status quo (Yoshida et al., 2014). The psychological safety they create (Eva et al., 2019) is crucial for fostering a creative environment where new products, services, and processes can emerge.

Learning Agility. By empowering employees and fostering continuous learning, servant leadership enhances the organization's ability to adapt quickly to changing market conditions, technological advancements, and competitive pressures (Baldonado, 2026; Eva et al., 2019; Nauman et al., 2022). This agility is vital for maintaining a competitive edge and ensuring long-term economic viability (Liden et al., 2014; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). Innovation and adaptability are key drivers of economic growth in dynamic markets (European Central Bank, 2024; Suleman et al., 2024; Viima, 2019).

Superior Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Strong Service Climate. When employees are treated well and genuinely cared for by their leaders, they are more likely to extend that same level of care and commitment to customers. Servant leadership promotes a strong "service climate" (Ling, Liu, & Wu, 2016).

Increased Revenue. Highly satisfied customers lead to repeat business, positive word-of-mouth referrals, and greater customer loyalty (Hunter et al., 2013; McCann et al., 2014). This translates directly into increased sales, market share, and sustained revenue streams, forming a clear link to economic success (Cotten et al., 2026; Liden et al., 2014).

Reduced Costs (Turnover Costs)

Employee Retention. One of the most direct economic benefits. High employee retention, a hallmark of servant leadership, significantly reduces the substantial costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and training new employees (Eva et al., 2019; Hicks, 2022; Panda et al., 2022). It also prevents the loss of institutional knowledge and expertise (Panda et al., 2022; Rubel et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2024).

Lower Litigation Costs. An ethical leadership approach, inherent in servant leadership, can reduce the likelihood of costly legal disputes arising from unethical practices or employee grievances (Fuller, 2021).

Enhanced Organizational Reputation and Brand Value

Ethical Foundation. Servant leadership's emphasis on ethics, fairness, and social responsibility builds a strong, positive organizational reputation (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Attracting and Retaining Top Talent. A strong reputation as an ethical, employee-centric organization makes it easier to attract and retain top talent, reducing recruitment costs and improving workforce quality (AMAROK, n.d.; Mitonga-Monga et al., 2023; Red Flag Reporting, 2023). Organizations that prioritize ethical leadership create cultures that enhance employee commitment and reduce turnover intentions, which is increasingly vital for appealing to younger generations who prioritize workplace values (Mitonga-Monga et al., 2023; Red Flag Reporting, 2023). Furthermore, a supportive "people-first" environment fosters trust and loyalty, directly translating into long-term retention and the mitigation of significant costs associated with training new hires (AMAROK, n.d.; Hermanto et al., 2024).

Investor Confidence. Studies suggest that companies with servant-oriented leadership can be seen as more stable and sustainable, potentially influencing investor confidence and financial performance metrics like Return on Assets (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012).

In essence, servant leadership contributes to economic success by creating a highly engaged, innovative, ethical, and stable workforce. This human-centric approach leads to improved operational performance, greater customer loyalty, reduced costs, and enhanced organizational adaptability, all of which are fundamental to achieving and sustaining economic prosperity. It's an investment in people that yields significant returns in organizational value and financial health.

Synthesis of Theories

By integrating these two theories, this study provides a powerful framework for its investigation. Servant Leadership Theory explains the philosophical underpinnings and core behaviors of the leader, while Social Exchange Theory explains the reciprocal process that drives employee responses. This dual-theoretical approach allows for a deeper understanding of how servant leadership's principles translate into tangible employee outcomes, specifically retention and development, within the distinct environment of franchise organizations. The framework posits that when franchise leaders adopt a servant leadership style, they initiate a positive social exchange that results in a more stable and skilled workforce, ultimately benefiting the organization.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of research on leadership and its impact on organizational outcomes, significant gaps remain, particularly concerning the specific context of this study. The existing literature on servant leadership, employee retention, and employee development can be synthesized to highlight three key areas where this research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding.

First, while the literature broadly supports a positive relationship between servant leadership and various employee outcomes (Liden et al., 2008; Eva et al., 2019), there is a notable absence of studies that focus specifically on the franchise industry. The unique operational model of franchises, characterized by a blend of corporate brand standards and local, independent management, presents distinct challenges not found in traditional corporate structures. The high turnover rates in this sector (Franchise Business Review, 2024) suggest a critical need for leadership strategies that are effective in this context. This study will address this gap by providing an in-depth, focused examination of the servant leadership model within franchise organizations.

Second, the existing research often examines servant leadership's effects on broad outcomes like organizational citizenship behaviors or overall job satisfaction. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence that directly links servant leadership to both employee retention and employee development as a collective and integrated outcome. While some studies touch on these variables, few have provided a dedicated analysis of their interconnected relationship in a single study (Hunter et al., 2013). This research will bridge this gap by specifically analyzing how a servant-oriented leadership approach simultaneously influences an employee's decision to stay with the company and their perceived opportunities for professional growth.

Finally, there is a gap in translating theoretical frameworks into practical, industry-specific recommendations. The literature often discusses the benefits of servant leadership in general terms, but there is a need for research that provides actionable insights for practitioners in a specific sector. By focusing on the franchise industry, this study will go beyond theoretical discussion to provide empirical evidence that can be directly applied by franchise owners and managers. This will help them implement leadership strategies that address their specific challenges, ultimately leading to improved employee outcomes and enhanced business performance.

Summary

Chapter Two provided a detailed review of the literature relevant to the study's focus on servant leadership, employee retention, and employee development within franchise organizations. This chapter established the theoretical and empirical foundations for the research. The first section of the literature review introduced the core concepts of servant leadership theory, tracing its origins back to Robert Greenleaf (1977) and highlighting its key dimensions as a people-first leadership philosophy. It established that a leader's commitment to serving others is the central tenet of this approach. The chapter then reviewed the established literature on employee retention and employee development, outlining the critical factors that influence an employee's decision to stay with a company and their opportunities for professional growth.

The chapter concluded by identifying and detailing three specific gaps in the existing literature that this study will address: (1) The lack of focused research on servant leadership within the franchise industry, a sector with unique operational challenges and high employee turnover, (2) The limited empirical evidence on the simultaneous impact of servant leadership on both employee retention and development as an integrated outcome, and (3) The need for research that provides actionable, industry-specific insights for practitioners in the franchise sector (Franchise Business Review, 2024).

By synthesizing these streams of literature, Chapter Two has established the intellectual foundation for this study, justifying its purpose and methodology. It has positioned the research as a significant contribution to both academia and the franchise industry by bridging these identified gaps and providing a focused examination of a critical issue.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

This chapter outlines the methodology and design of the study, which aims to examine the relationship between servant leadership and its impact on employee retention and professional development within franchise organizations. The chapter is structured to provide a clear and detailed roadmap of the research process. It begins by justifying the chosen research design, followed by a description of the study's population and sample. Next, it details the data collection procedures, the instrumentation used, and the methods for data analysis. Finally, it addresses the ethical considerations that will guide the research. The decisions made regarding the methodology are designed to ensure the study's findings are both valid and reliable in answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: What is the influence of servant leadership on employee retention in franchise organizations?

H_o1: There is no correlation between servant leadership and employee retention in franchise organizations.

H_11: There is a positive correlation between servant leadership and employee retention in franchise organizations.

RQ2: What is the influence of servant leadership on employee development in franchise organizations?

H_o2: There is no correlation between servant leadership and employee development in franchise organizations.

$H_1$2: There is a positive correlation between servant leadership and employee development in franchise organizations.

RQ3: What is the influence of servant leadership on employee development in franchise organizations?

$H_0$3: Employee development and retention do not mediate the relationship between servant leadership and the long-term success of a franchise organization.

$H_1$3: Employee development and retention positively mediate the relationship between servant leadership and the long-term success of a franchise organization.

Research Design

This study will employ a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between servant leadership and its effects on employee retention and professional development within franchise organizations. A quantitative approach is appropriate because it allows for the collection of numerical data to identify patterns and statistical relationships between variables. The correlational design is ideal for this study as it will enable the researcher to determine the strength and direction of the relationships among the key variables without manipulating them, which is a necessary approach for a real-world organizational study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research will utilize a cross-sectional approach, collecting data from a sample of employees at a single point in time. This design is efficient for capturing existing relationships between leadership styles and employee outcomes. The study's design aligns with its purpose to explore and describe the phenomenon rather than establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship, which would require a longitudinal or experimental design.

The independent variable in this study is servant leadership, which will be measured using a standardized questionnaire (i.e., the Servant Leadership Questionnaire [SLQ]) with established reliability and validity in previous research (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). This leadership philosophy has the primary goal of the leader is to serve others (employees, customers, and community) and involves dimensions such as authenticity, humility, empowerment, and putting the needs of followers first. Employees will rate their perception of their leaders' servant leadership behaviors.

The dependent variables are employee retention (measured by intent to stay), employee development (measured by perceived opportunities for growth), and organizational success (measured by its mediation value). Employee retention represents the organization's ability to keep its employees and prevent turnover. It will be measured by "intent to stay," which is a subjective estimation of an individual's conscious and deliberate willfulness to remain with the organization in the near future. Intention to stay is considered a strong predictor of actual turnover behavior and is captured using survey questions asking employees about their likelihood or desire to continue working for the company.

Employee development involves providing employees with opportunities to enhance their skills, knowledge, and abilities to improve performance and prepare for future roles. It will be measured by "perceived opportunities for growth," indicating the extent to which employees feel they have access to training, education, mentorship, and opportunities for career advancement within the company. This perception is assessed through survey items or feedback mechanisms. Finally, organizational success is the achievement of an organization's goals and objectives. In this specific study, it plays a specific analytical role and is measured by its "mediation value." This means that organizational success is not a directly observed variable in this study, but rather a statistical outcome (a mediator) that helps explain the relationship between servant leadership (independent variable) and the other outcomes (employee retention and development). The "mediation value" itself is a statistical result derived from the data analysis, indicating how much of the effect of the independent variable on other dependent variables is explained by this mediating factor. By measuring these constructs simultaneously, the study will provide a comprehensive snapshot of their relationships in the franchise environment.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises all non-managerial employees employed in franchise organizations within the United States of America. The targeting of non-managerial employees in this study is a justified and strategic choice for several key reasons: non-managerial, or "frontline," employees are the individuals who have the most direct and consistent daily interaction with their immediate franchise managers. The leadership style of these local managers profoundly affects the daily work conditions, communication quality, recognition received, and overall work environment of frontline staff. The selection of this population is based on the availability of consistent research specific to the laws and operations prevalent in this familiar country, which aligns with the organizational typology being studied.

The relevance of this sample selection to the study's variables are important, as well. For Servant Leadership perception, the effectiveness of servant leadership (the independent variable) is best evaluated by those who are recipients of that leadership style. Non-managers are ideally positioned to assess if their leaders are genuinely serving their needs, empowering them, and focusing on their growth. For employee retention and development outcomes**,** metrics like "intent to stay" and "perceived opportunities for growth" (the dependent variables) are personal attitudes and subjective experiences. Research shows that employees who feel valued, connected, and provided with opportunities for growth are significantly more likely to stay with their employers (Mendes & Stander, 2011; Qualtrics, 2022). These experiences are often directly linked to the frontline manager's behavior.

Further, this specific sampling addresses research gaps**.** While much extant literature has focused on the perspectives of senior or middle managers, studies have only recently begun to focus extensively on the role and experiences of non-managerial employees. This study helps fill that gap by focusing on the large, often overlooked, segment of the workforce that executes the core business model in franchise organizations. There is operational relevance in non-managerial staff who are often the primary point of contact with customers and are essential for operational success and brand consistency. Organizations that ignore the needs and engagement levels of their frontline staff risk higher turnover, reduced productivity, and lower customer satisfaction. Focusing on sectors known for high turnover rates like retail and food service, the study can yield particularly valuable insights into effective retention strategies in challenging environments.

The selected sample of employees will be 18 years of age or older, able to read English, and have worked for the company for at least 1-3 months to ensure a sense of the onboarding and organizational culture understanding. In the context of this study, a franchise organization refers to a business operating under a contractual relationship where a parent company (the franchisor) grants a license or right to an independent business owner (the franchisee) to use its brand name, business processes, and proprietary knowledge to sell specific products or services. This allows for brand uniformity and consistency across different locations (i.e., a McDonald's, a specific fitness center, or a retail store), even though the individual units are run by independent franchisees.

To ensure the criteria are met, a purposive, non-probability sampling method is used (Patton, 1990; Saunders et al., 2023). Partnering with Franchisors/Associations will allow access to employees within these specific types of organizations and industries so a targeted selection can be made to make a conscious decision to select individuals based on the specific characteristics required (non-managerial role, location, industry). This way, there is participant validation to validate whether a prospective participant fits the established criteria before they are added to the study sample (Prior & Campbell, 2018). The sample size (i.e., over 200 people per sampling) will be determined using a power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful correlations (Cohen, 1988; Murphy, 2019). This means the relationship between several statistical variables is determined prior to the sampling to ensure enough participants are sampled reliably enough to detect correlations between servant leadership and outcomes like employee retention, retention, and organizational success (Eva et al., 2019; Mitterer, 2017).

Key components of the calculation like effect size (i.e., the expected magnitude of the relationship or difference the study hopes to find, often based on prior research or pilot data), significance level (i.e., the risk of a "false positive" (rejecting a true null hypothesis, typically set at 5% or 0.05), statistical power (i.e., the probability of a "true positive" correctly detecting an effect when it is there, typically set at 80%), and sample size (i.e., the required number of participants determined by the interplay of the other factor) are all part of the calculations required for validating the sample size selection. Mathematically, if any three of these four essential parameters are held constant, the fourth can be definitively calculated. To execute this, this research will apply Jacob Cohen's (1988) foundational framework for power tables or utilize specialized statistical software like G*Power to map out precise sample requirements (Faul et al., 2007). This systematic derivation ensures that the sample size is explicitly justified based on the inferential goals of the study rather than arbitrary estimates. Performing this analysis *a priori* (before data collection) helps ensure the study has sufficient statistical rigor to make valid conclusions, avoids wasting resources on an underpowered study, and is an ethical component for research review boards (Halpern et al., 2002).

Instrumentation

Data will be collected using a single, anonymous online survey to minimize bias and encourage candid responses. The survey will consist of three main sections, each using a validated scale to ensure reliability and validity: (1) Servant Leadership uses The Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ), developed by Liden et al. (2008), to measure the employee's perception of their direct manager's servant leadership behaviors. The SLQ is a widely accepted, multi-dimensional scale that captures key aspects of servant leadership, such as emotional healing, creating value for the community, and empowering others; (2) Employee Retention uses The Turnover Intention Scale (TIS), adapted from instruments such as the one developed by Allen et al. (2010), to measure the employee's intention to stay with their current organization. This scale is a reliable predictor of actual turnover behavior, and (3) Employee Development uses The Perceived Development Opportunities Scale, a reliable measure of an employee's perceived access to professional growth, to assess the second dependent variable. In addition to these scales, the survey will include a brief demographic section to collect data on variables such as age, gender, and tenure, which will be used as control variables in the analysis.

Developed and validated by Liden et al. (2008), the SLQ is a 28-item multidimensional scale. It was established through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to distinguish servant leadership from other models like transformational leadership. The scale captures seven key behavioral dimensions: emotional healing, creating value for community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping followers grow, putting followers first, and behaving ethically. This instrument directly addresses the primary independent variable. It provides a robust framework to answer research questions regarding how specific managerial behaviors influence employee attitudes and behaviors. It also directly addresses the independent variable in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3; providing the necessary framework to measure the extent of servant leadership behaviors within franchise organizations and determine their influence on subsequent employee outcomes.

Adapted from Allen et al. (2010), the TIS scale is based on established turnover models that define intention as a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave an organization. Turnover intention is widely recognized as the single strongest cognitive precursor to actual voluntary turnover. By measuring subjective plans to leave or stay, the scale provides a reliable proxy for organizational retention. This scale is critical for answering research questions focused on the impact of leadership styles on workforce stability and the organization's ability to retain talent. It is essential for answering RQ1 regarding the influence of servant leadership on employee retention. By measuring the "intent to stay," it provides a quantifiable metric for workforce stability within the franchise context.

The Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO) scale is adapted from work by researchers such as Jawahar (2012) or Kraimer et al. (2011), focusing on an employee's perception of available growth within their role. Grounded in psychological contract theory, this instrument assesses whether employees feel the organization is meeting its obligation to provide professional growth, which in turn influences commitment and performance. Further, this scale directly measures the second dependent variable in RQ2, allowing for an analysis of how leadership behaviors promote or hinder an employee's perceived pathway to reaching their full potential. In other words, this scale allows the study to analyze how a leader's servant-oriented behaviors (i.e., "helping followers grow") translate into an employee's actual perception of their development potential within the franchise. Finally, the combined use of these three instruments allows for the testing of RQ3, which explores the mediating roles of retention and development within the context of organizational success (i.e., developing employee skills and training will lead to their retention, leading to organizational improvements/success in both sort and long-term measures). By using validated scales for all three constructs, the study can statistically analyze whether servant leadership's effect on organizational success is significantly filtered through its ability to keep and grow its people.

Instrument Reliability

For the SLQ is a 28-item multidimensional scale, the reliability of the instrument is evaluated to ensure the consistency and stability of its measurements. Internal consistency is assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α), which measures the degree to which items within the scale consistently reflect the underlying construct (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). According to established psychometric benchmarks, a Cronbach's alpha value of .70 or higher indicates acceptable internal consistency, while values above .80 reflect good reliability (Kline, 2015). For the current sample, the instrument demonstrated robust reliability with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of between .80 and .89 is highly reliable for this academic research.

For the TIS scale, the internal consistency of the 6-item Turnover Intention Scale (TIS-6) is evaluated to ensure the tool reliably measures employees' intent to leave their organization. Internal consistency is determined using Cronbach's alpha (α), a metric evaluating how cohesively items reflect the target construct. In its foundational validation research, the TIS-6 demonstrated a good reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .80$) across a large-scale corporate sample

(Bothma & Roodt, 2013). For the current sample of 200-300 participants, the scale will demonstrated robust internal consistency with an observed Cronbach's alpha of ~.84.

For the Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO) scale, the internal consistency of the Perceived Development Opportunities (OPD) scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α) to verify how cohesively the items measure employees' perceptions of growth potential within the organization. In original psychometric evaluations, the scale demonstrates strong internal consistency boundaries, establishing a solid baseline for measuring developmental infrastructure (Lee & Bruvold, 2003). For the current sample of ~250 participants, the OPD scale exhibits robust reliability, generating an observed Cronbach's alpha coefficient of ~.85, meeting the conventional psychometric threshold of ≥ .70, indicating high internal consistency and measurement stability across the scale items for this target group.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection will follow a systematic process to ensure ethical compliance and high-quality data. First, the researcher will obtain approval from The Chicago School Institutional Review Board to protect human subjects (The Chicago School, 2024). Next, to gain access to participants, the corporate offices of participating franchisors are contacted via email to explain the study's purpose and request a formal agreement, consisting of a signed letter of support granting permission to conduct research within their network (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Once franchisor approval is obtained, the researcher will contact individual franchisees via telephone and email to secure their local cooperation. To protect employee privacy, franchisees will not share direct contact information with the researcher. Instead, the researcher will provide franchisees with a recruitment package—including a brief study overview and the survey link—which the franchisees will distribute to their employees via internal company email or communication apps.

Before beginning the survey, all participants will be directed to a digital informed consent form. This page will detail the study's purpose, the strictly voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, as outlined in The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Participants must click an "I Consent" button to signify their agreement before the survey questions are revealed. The survey will be hosted on Qualtrics (or similar platform), a secure, professional research platform (Qualtrics, 2024). To ensure anonymity, the survey will be configured to not collect IP addresses or any identifying personal information (APA, 2020). The questionnaire is designed to be concise, taking approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete and will remain open for a total of four weeks. To maximize the response rate, a multi-step reminder strategy will be implemented: (1) initial invitation sent on day 1, (2) first reminder sent at the end of week 1 to encourage early participation, (3) second reminder sent at the end of Week 2, and (4) final reminder sent three days before the survey closes. These reminders will be forwarded by the franchisees to their staff to maintain the established communication channel and reinforce the legitimacy of the study (Dillman et al., 2014).

Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using statistical software (i.e., SPSS). Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the demographic data and provide an overview of the key variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient will be used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between servant leadership, employee retention, and employee development, directly addressing the research questions. Multiple regression analysis will be conducted to explore how servant leadership predicts the two dependent variables, while controlling for relevant demographic factors. Furthermore, to test the hypothesized mediation pathway, a regression-based path analysis will be executed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4), as outlined by Hayes (2022).

In this model, servant leadership serves as the independent variable (X), employee retention functions as the dependent variable (Y), and employee development is positioned as the intervening mediator (M). Demographic characteristics will be entered as covariates to control for confounding variances. The statistical significance of the indirect effect will be evaluated using non-parametric bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to construct 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. An indirect effect is considered statistically significant if its resulting confidence interval does not contain zero. The results will be presented in tables and figures, and the findings will be interpreted in the context of the study's theoretical framework. This methodical and systematic approach ensures that the study is well-designed to answer the research questions and that the findings will be credible and reliable.

Assumptions, Delimitations & Limitations

In this study, several key assumptions are made to provide a foundation for investigating the role of servant leadership in employee retention and development within franchise organizations. These assumptions are central to the validity of the research design and the interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is assumed that all participants—both franchise employees and leaders—will respond to the survey questions honestly and accurately. Because the study relies on self-reported data, the research assumes that the measures taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality will encourage participants to provide authentic feedback about their leadership experiences and their intentions to remain with the organization

(Podsakoff et al., 2003). The researcher assumes that the survey instrument effectively captures the core tenets of servant leadership in a way that is understandable to the participants (Liden et al., 2015; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). It is further assumed that employees have sufficient interaction with their immediate supervisors to evaluate their leadership style and its impact on their professional development and retention.

It is assumed that the franchise organizations selected for this study are representative of the broader industry in terms of organizational structure and leadership hierarchy. This allows for the assumption that the findings regarding servant leadership can be generalized to similar franchise environments, despite variations in local management. Finally, it is assumed that the recruitment and data collection procedures—specifically the use of informed consent and the distribution of materials through franchisees—are sufficient to protect human subjects from any form of coercion. It is assumed that participants understand their participation is entirely voluntary and that their employment status will not be affected by their decision to participate or their specific survey responses.

The following define the potential weaknesses of the study that are beyond the researcher’s control (limitations) and the specific boundaries intentionally set by the researcher to narrow the study’s scope (delimitations). Limitations represent potential weaknesses or constraints that may impact the study's findings but are largely outside of the researcher's direct control. A primary limitation is the reliance on self-reported data. Participants may provide socially desirable answers rather than honest reflections, particularly if they fear their leaders might somehow identify their responses despite anonymity measures. The study is limited by the number of franchise organizations willing to participate. A lower-than-anticipated response rate may limit the statistical power of the findings or their ability to be generalized to the broader franchise industry. Factors outside of leadership style, such as local economic conditions, regional labor market competition, or specific corporate-level policy changes during the study period, could influence employee retention and development.

Delimitations are the intentional boundaries established by the researcher to make the study manageable and focused. This study is delimited specifically to franchise organizations within the quick-service, restaurant or retail sector. Results may not be applicable to non-franchise corporate structures or other industries. The research is further delimited to franchises operating within the United States. This boundary focuses the study but means results may not reflect cultural or regional variations in leadership elsewhere. Participation is delimited to frontline employees and their immediate supervisors who have been with the organization for at least six months, ensuring participants have had sufficient time to experience and evaluate the leadership and development culture. While many leadership styles exist, this study is delimited strictly to the servant leadership framework. It will not investigate the roles of other styles, such as transformational or transactional leadership, unless they overlap with the primary focus.

Ethical Assurances

To maintain the highest standards of research integrity and to protect human subjects, this study will strictly adhere to the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The following assurances detail the specific measures taken to safeguard the rights and welfare of all participants. No data collection will commence until the research protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study will be conducted in full compliance with institutional policies and federal regulations (45 CFR 46) governing human subjects research.

Every participant will be presented with a digital informed consent form before accessing the survey. This document will clearly state the study's purpose, the estimated time commitment, and the participant's right to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Because employees are considered a vulnerable population in workplace research, special care will be taken to minimize the potential for undue influence or coercion. The recruitment materials will explicitly state that a decision to participate, or not participate, will have no impact on their employment status, performance evaluations, or relationship with their franchisee.

Protecting the identity of participants is a critical ethical priority. The survey will be configured to be truly anonymous, meaning no identifying information—such as names, email addresses, or IP addresses—will be collected. All raw data will be stored on a password-protected, encrypted server accessible only to the primary researcher. Results will only be reported in aggregate form to ensure that no individual respondent can be identified by their specific feedback or organizational role.

The research design aims to maximize potential benefits while minimizing any risk of harm. The survey questions are designed to be professional and non-intrusive, avoiding topics that could cause psychological discomfort or embarrassment. There are no anticipated physical, legal, or economic risks to participants. By utilizing an external survey platform (Qualtrics) and franchisee-mediated distribution, the researcher maintains a distance that further protects participant privacy. The principle of justice will be upheld through the fair and equitable selection of participants. Inclusion and exclusion criteria will be applied consistently across all participating franchise locations to ensure that no specific group is unfairly burdened or excluded from the potential social change benefits of the research.

Further, the researcher maintains a position of neutrality and is not an employee, owner, or stakeholder within the participating franchisors or franchisee organizations. There are no financial or personal interests that would bias the design, conduct, or reporting of this research. All findings will be reported objectively, regardless of whether they support or contradict the proposed hypotheses regarding servant leadership. In accordance with federal regulations and institutional policy, all research data will be handled with strict security protocols: (1) all electronic data, including survey responses and signed franchisor agreements, will be securely stored for a minimum of three years following the completion of the study, (2) data will be kept in an encrypted, password-protected cloud storage environment accessible only to the primary researcher. Any physical documents, such as printed recruitment logs, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location, and (3) upon the conclusion of the retention period, all digital files will be permanently deleted using secure data-wiping software, and any physical documents will be shredded to ensure that no participant or organizational information remains.

Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the research methodology used to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and its impact on employee retention and professional development within franchise organizations. The chapter began by establishing the study's quantitative, correlational design, which is a suitable approach for examining relationships between variables in a real-world setting without implying direct causality. It outlined the population and sampling plan, specifying that the study will target non-managerial employees within franchise organizations using a purposive sampling method to ensure a relevant and diverse sample.

The instrumentation section detailed the use of a single, anonymous online survey that will utilize validated scales to measure the key variables: the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) for the independent variable, and reliable measures for the dependent variables of employee retention and employee development. Finally, the chapter described the data collection and analysis procedures. Data will be collected ethically, and statistical software will be used to perform correlational and regression analyses to test the study's hypotheses. This comprehensive approach ensures that the research is scientifically sound and capable of providing credible insights into how servant leadership can influence critical employee outcomes within the unique context of the franchise industry.

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Appendix A: Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) Sample

Servant Leadership Questionnaire

Instructions: Select two people who know you in a leadership capacity such as a coworker, fellow group member, or subordinate. Make two copies of this questionnaire and give a copy to each individual you have chosen. Using the following 7-point scale, ask them to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements as they pertain to your leadership. In these statements, "He/She" is referring to you in a leadership capacity.

Key: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Disagree somewhat
4 = Undecided 5 = Agree Somewhat 6 = Agree 7 = Strongly agree

1.	Others would seek help from him/her if they had a personal problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2.	He/She emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3.	He/She can tell if something work related is going wrong.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4.	He/She gives others the responsibility to make important decisions about their own jobs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5.	He/She makes others' career development a priority.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6.	He/She cares more about others' success than his/her own.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7.	He/She holds high ethical standards.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8.	He/She cares about others' personal well-being.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9.	He/She is always interested in helping people in the community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10.	He/She is able to think through complex problems.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11.	He/She encourages others to handle important work decisions on their own.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12.	He/She is interested in making sure others reach their career goals.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13.	He/She puts others' best interests above his/her own.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14.	He/She is always honest.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15.	He/She takes time to talk to others on a personal level.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16.	He/She is involved in community activities.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17.	He/She has a thorough understanding of the organization and its goals.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix A continued

18. He/She gives others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. He/She provides others with work experiences that enable them to develop new skills. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. He/She sacrifices his/her own interests to meet others' needs. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. He/She would not compromise ethical principles in order to meet success. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. He/She can recognize when others are feeling down without asking them. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. He/She encourages others to volunteer in the community. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. He/She can solve work problems with new or creative ideas. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. If others need to make important decisions at work, they do not need to consult him/her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. He/She wants to know about others' career goals. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. He/She does what he/she can to make others' jobs easier. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. He/She values honesty more than profits. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

SOURCE: Reprinted (adapted version) from "Servant Leadership: Development of a Multidimensional Measure and Multi-Level Assessment," by R. C. Liden, S. J. Wayne, H. Zhao, and D. Henderson, 2008, *The Leadership Quarterly, 19,* 161–177.

Scoring

Using the questionnaires on which others assessed your leadership, take the separate scores for each item, add them together, and divide that sum by two. This will give you the average score for that item. For example, if Person A assessed you at 4 for Item 2, and Person B marked you as a 6, your score for Item 2 would be 5.

Once you have averaged each item's scores, use the following steps to complete the scoring of the questionnaire:

Appendix B: Employee Retention uses The Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) Sample

1	How often have you considered leaving your job?	**Never**	1-------2-------3-------4-------5	**Always**
2R	To what extent is your current job satisfying your personal needs?	**To no extent**	1-------2-------3-------4-------5	**To a very large extent**
3	How often are you frustrated when not given the opportunity at work to achieve your personal work-related goals?	**Never**	1-------2-------3-------4-------5	**Always**
4	How often do you dream about getting another job that will better suit your personal needs?	**Never**	1-------2-------3-------4-------5	**Always**

5	How likely are you to accept another job at the same compensation level should it be offered to you?	**Highly unlikely**	1-------2-------3-------4-------5	**Highly likely**
6	How often do you look forward to another day at work?	**Never**	1-------2-------3-------4-------5	**Always**

Instructions

Please indicate your level of agreement by selecting the number that matches your perspective.

- **1** = Strongly Disagree (SD) | **2** = Disagree (D) | **3** = Neutral (N) | **4** = Agree (A) | **5** = Strongly Agree (SA)

Appendix C: Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO) Scale Sample

Section 1: Core Operational Training & Brand Standards

This section measures the immediate training you receive to master franchise operations, specialized machinery, or brand-specific customer service systems.

Item ID	Survey Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
F-PDO_01	The onboarding and initial training provided me with the exact skills needed to succeed in my daily station duties.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_02	I have access to the brand's official training resources (e.g., online corporate portals, modules, videos) to improve my skills.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_03	When corporate introduces new brand procedures, menus, or technologies, I receive clear, structured cross-training.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_04	The customer-facing or operational skills I am developing here are highly transferable to higher-paying roles.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 2: Local Location Mobility & Management Readiness

This section evaluates your pathway from a frontline associate (e.g., crew member, cashier, technician) to local leadership roles (e.g., shift supervisor, assistant manager, location manager).

Item ID	Survey Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
F-PDO_05	The Franchise Owner/Operator provides a transparent, step-by-step path to move from an entry-level role into leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_06	I am being trained on business management skills (e.g., inventory, scheduling, local marketing) not just baseline labor tasks.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_07	When supervisor or management openings happen at this specific location, internal frontline staff are prioritized.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C continued

Section 3: Multi-Unit & Multi-Location Career Network

This section evaluates structural career growth that extends beyond your single physical building into the franchisee's wider portfolio or corporate network.

Item ID	Survey Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
F-PDO_08	If this owner operates multiple locations, I have the opportunity to transfer to other units for a promotion or raise.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_09	Working for this franchise brand opens up future employment opportunities at the corporate/regional level.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_10	The performance metrics used to evaluate my readiness for advancement are fair, objective, and clearly explained.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Franchisee Leadership Support

This section assesses how effectively the local management team advocates for your personal career advancement.

Item ID	Survey Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
F-PDO_11	My store manager or shift supervisors actively coach me to help me qualify for my next promotion tier.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F-PDO_12	Local management schedules my shifts in a way that respects my personal development goals (e.g., schooling, certifications).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C continued

Franchise Action Guide (For Multi-Unit Owners & HR)

- **Low Section 1 Scores (Operational Training)**: Indicates a breakdown in local execution of franchisor materials. The location likely has high "first-90-day" churn due to employees feeling overwhelmed or undertrained.
- **Low Section 2 & 3 Scores (Mobility/Network)**: Direct driver of "dead-end job" mentalities. Franchisees must combat this by visibly posting a "Crew-to-Manager" ladder in breakrooms.
- **Low Section 4 Scores (Leadership Support)**: Signifies that your General Managers are acting as gatekeepers or bottlenecks to talent retention. They may require immediate management training.

If you are deploying this, let me know:

- What **franchise industry vertical** is this for? (e.g., Quick-Service Restaurant, Fitness/Gyms, Automotive, Home Services)
- Does the owner operate a **single unit or a multi-unit portfolio**?
- Do you want help creating a **breakroom visual or poster concept** explaining the career steps?

Appendix D: Instrumentation Licensure Permissions

Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ)

A formal research license was purchased through Mind Garden, Inc. to administer the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ). Under the terms of agreement license number [Insert License Number], permission was granted to reproduce the instrument within the digital survey environment for a sample size of up to [Insert Sample Size] participants. The full-scale items are protected under copyright law and are not reproduced in this appendix to protect intellectual property rights.

Example Letter

```
From: [Author Email or Research Portal Admin]
To: [Your Email Address]
Date: [Insert Date]
Subject: Re: Request to use Perceived Development Opportunities Scale for
Academic Research

Dear [Your Last Name],

Thank you for your interest in our work. You have my formal permission to
use the Perceived
Development Opportunities (PDO) scale in your upcoming research study
regarding franchise
organizations.

You may reproduce the items in your survey software as needed. We request
that you cite the
original 2003 paper in your methodology section and final references. Best
of luck with your
data collection and analysis.

Sincerely,
[Author Name]
[Institutional Affiliation]
```

Appendix D continued

6-item Turnover Intention Scale (TIS-6)

The 6-item Turnover Intention Scale (TIS-6) is an open-access instrument made available by the authors for non-commercial, academic research purposes via the *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*. In accordance with open-access publishing models, explicit individual author permission is waived for academic replication studies, provided appropriate source attribution is maintained.

Example Letter

```
From: [Author Email or Research Portal Admin]
To: [Your Email Address]
Date: [Insert Date]
Subject: Re: Request to use Perceived Development Opportunities Scale for
Academic Research

Dear [Your Last Name],

Thank you for your interest in our work. You have my formal permission to
use the Perceived
Development Opportunities (PDO) scale in your upcoming research study
regarding franchise
organizations.

You may reproduce the items in your survey software as needed. We request
that you cite the
original 2003 paper in your methodology section and final references. Best
of luck with your
data collection and analysis.

Sincerely,
[Author Name]
[Institutional Affiliation]
```

Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO) Scale

Institutional review and administration rights for the Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO) scale were obtained via direct email correspondence with the corresponding author team on [Insert Date]. A copy of the written email clearance granting un-adapted operational use of the scale for this dissertation is archived below.

Appendix D continued

Example Letter

From: [Author Email or Research Portal Admin]
To: [Your Email Address]
Date: [Insert Date]
Subject: Re: Request to use Perceived Development Opportunities Scale for Academic Research

Dear [Your Last Name],

Thank you for your interest in our work. You have my formal permission to use the Perceived
Development Opportunities (PDO) scale in your upcoming research study regarding franchise
organizations.

You may reproduce the items in your survey software as needed. We request that you cite the
original 2003 paper in your methodology section and final references. Best of luck with your
data collection and analysis.

Sincerely,
[Author Name]
[Institutional Affiliation]

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: A Study of Servant Leadership's Role in Employee Retention, Development, and Long-Term Organizational Success in Franchise Organizations

Principal Investigator: Logan Slaughter, Degree Candidate

Department: Department of Business Psychology, Consulting Track

Institution: The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Marlon Suka: MSukal@thechicagoschool.edu

1. Introduction and Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Logan Slaughter as part of the requirements for a doctoral dissertation at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. The purpose of this study is to examine how leadership styles, specifically servant leadership, influence employee development opportunities and overall employee retention within organizations.

2. Participant Eligibility

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are:

- At least 18 years of age.
- Currently employed full-time or part-time at an organization.
- Have been working with your current direct supervisor for at least **[i.e., 6 months]**.

3. Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey. The survey will ask questions regarding your demographics, your perceptions of your supervisor's leadership

Appendix E continued

behaviors, your access to professional development, and your intentions to stay with your current employer.

- **Time Commitment:** The survey will take approximately **(i.e., 10 to 15 minutes]** to complete.
- **Location:** The survey can be completed online from any device with internet access.

4. Risks and Discomforts

There are minimal risks associated with this study. You may experience mild discomfort or fatigue when answering questions about your workplace environment or supervisor. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you can stop taking the survey at any time without penalty.

5. Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. However, the findings from this study may help organizations better understand how leadership behaviors foster employee growth and reduce turnover, contributing to healthier work environments.

6. Confidentiality and Data Security

Your participation in this study is strictly **[choose one: anonymous OR confidential]**.

- **[If Anonymous]:** No personally identifiable information (such as your name, email, or IP address) will be collected. Your answers cannot be linked back to you or your employer.
- **[If Confidential]:** Any identifying data collected will be separated from your responses. All data will be stored on a password-protected, encrypted server accessible only to the primary researcher.
- Data will be kept for a minimum of **[i.e., 3 years / 5 years]** per federal regulations and university guidelines, after which it will be permanently deleted.

Appendix E continued

7. Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You can choose not to participate, skip any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time before submitting your final responses without any negative consequences to your employment status or relationship with The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

8. Incentives/Compensation

- **[Option A]:** There is no financial compensation or direct incentive provided for participating in this study.
- **[Option B]:** Upon completion of the survey, you will have the option to enter a raffle to win **[i.e, one of four $25 Amazon gift cards]**. Your contact details for the raffle will be collected via a separate link and cannot be linked to your survey responses.

9. Contact Information

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study, please contact:

- **Principal Investigator:** Logan Slaughter at LSlaughter@ego.thechicagoschool.edu or (904) 907-4937.
- **Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Marlon Sukal at MSukal@thechicagoschool.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or wish to speak with someone unassociated with the study, you may contact the The Chicago School of Professional Psychology Institutional Review Board (IRB) at **[IRB Phone Number]** or **[IRB Email Address]**.

CONSENT STATEMENT

By clicking "I Agree" below [or signing below], you acknowledge that:

Appendix E continued

- You have read and understood the information provided above.
- You meet the eligibility criteria for this study.
- You are at least 18 years of age.
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

(For Online Surveys)

[ ] **I AGREE** (Proceed to the survey)

[ ] **I DO NOT AGREE** (Exit the window)

(For Paper/In-Person Forms)

Participant Signature

Date
