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## ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN REDUCING EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTIONS IN A BLENDED WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of hybrid work environments has made employee retention even more challenging, as these new work models have transformed traditional leadership and workplace structure. While hybrid work offers flexibility and greater autonomy, it can sometimes diminish employee sense of belonging and weaken interpersonal relationship, potentially increasing their likelihood of leaving the organization. In this context servant leadership has emerged as a crucial and meaningful leadership approach, focusing on ethical values, empathy, and genuine care for employee well-being. This conceptual study explores how servant leadership influences employee turnover intention in diverse and varied work environments. Based on insights from leadership and organization behavior research, this study argues that servant leadership helps foster trust, strengthen emotional connection, and improve employees' perception of organization support in physical and virtual work settings. By considering turnover intention as a relational and psychological outcome, this study adds value to the current understanding of modern leadership and hybrid work practices. Furthermore, it provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical research to test and validate this relationship.

**KEYWORDS:** Employee leadership, Employee turnover intentions, Hybrid work environment, Hybrid model Leadership.

### INTRODUCTION

In modern organization, hybrid work environment that combine working from the office and remotely have become a common reality. The advancement of digital technologies and the evolving expectations of employee have accelerated this shift, particularly in knowledge-based industries (Allen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021). While hybrid work models offer employee greater flexibility and a better work-life balance, they also create challenge in maintaining effective communication,



strong employee, and long-term employee retention (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2018). Employee turnover intention has become a significant concern in hybrid work environments, as employees may feel less socially connected, receive less direct recognition from managers, and experience a weaker emotional bond with the organization (Hom et al., 2017; Tetrick & Meyer, 1993). In such contexts, leadership plays a crucial role in shaping how employees think and feel through trust, support, and relationship interaction (Blau 1964; Wayne et al., 1997). Traditional leadership styles that primarily focus on close monitoring and rigid hierarchical structure may not be effective in hybrid work settings (Allen et al., 2010). On the other hand, servant leadership, which focuses on employee well-being, empowerment, and trust-based relationships, offers a meaningful solution for managing employee retention challenges (Greenleaf, 1997; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Although servant leadership has gained increasing importance in modern organizations, there are very few theoretical studies that have examined how it affects employee turnover intentions in hybrid work environments (Eva et al., 2019; Wheeler et al., 2010).

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Leadership style has become a crucial organizational factor influencing employee attitudes and retention. Servant leadership, first introduced by Greenleaf (1997), focuses on serving employees, upholding ethical values, empowering employees, and supporting their personal growth. Unlike traditional leadership styles that focus on hierarchy and authority, servant leadership prioritizes employee well-being and fostering trust, making it highly relevant in people-centric organizations. Subsequently, conceptual studies by Spears (2010) and Van Dierendonck (2011) described servant leadership as a moral and relationship-based leadership approach that can build strong leader-employee relationships and positive work attitudes. Empirical studies have consistently shown the positive effects of servant leadership on employee behavior. Liden et al. (2008) developed a multidimensional scale for measuring servant leadership and found that it enhances employees' satisfaction and organizational commitment. Later, Liden et al. (2014) showed that servant leadership helps create a service-oriented organizational culture, which increases employees' emotional attachment to the organization. Eva et al. (2019), through a systematic review, concluded that servant leadership is strongly associated with lower turnover intentions, higher employee engagement, and better psychological well-being across different organizational settings. The relationship between servant leadership and turnover intentions has been directly examined in several research studies.

Wheeler et al. (2010) found that servant leadership reduces turnover intentions by enhancing trust and perceived organizational support. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2012) found that servant leadership reduces employee turnover intention by promoting fairness, ethical treatment, and emotional connection. Newman et al. (2017) further showed that servant leadership indirectly reduces turnover behavior by promoting organizational citizenship behavior and value alignment. Many of these relationships are



explained using social exchange theory. Blau (1964) explained that employees reciprocate positive treatment from leaders with loyalty and a willingness to remain with the organization. Supporting this, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) showed that perceived organizational support creates a strong emotional bond, reducing turnover intention. Wayne et al. (1997) also highlighted that strong leader-member relationship increase employees' commitment to staying with the organization.

The rise of hybrid and blended work environment has created new challenges in reattaining employees. Studies on remote work suggest that if not properly managed, physical distance can reduce social cohesion and organizational identification. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that depending on leadership support and communication quality, remote work can have both positive and negative effects on employee attitudes. Allen et al. (2015) highlighted that successful remote work largely depends on management trust and leadership behaviour. Recently, Wang et al. (2021) emphasized that leadership support is crucial for maintaining employee motivation and well-being in remote and hybrid environments. In hybrid workplace settings, leadership becomes even more critical in fostering, trust, and inclusivity. Wilkinson et al. (2018) found that employees' perceptions of fairness in flexible work arrangements strongly influence their commitments and decision to remain in their jobs. Gundu and Latha (2017) showed that supportive leadership practices enhance employee retention by addressing employees' emotional and relational needs. These findings suggest that servant leadership, which focuses on empathy, support and empowerment, can be highly effective in reducing turnover intentions in hybrid work environments.

### **BLENDED WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT: NATURE AND CHALLENGES**

A hybrid work environment refers to a work arrangement where employee combine working in person at the office with remote to complete their tasks. This model primarily relies on digital communication technologies, flexible work schedules, and performance evaluation based on results rather than mere attendance (Allen et al., 2015; wang et al.,2021). While hybrid work increases employee autonomy and flexibility, it also alters how employees and leaders interact with each other by reducing direct physical contact and spontaneous interaction in the workplace (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007)

Employees working in hybrid work environment often experience challenges such as feeling social isolated, having fewer informal interactions, on facing uncertainty in role clarity and expectations (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2018). The lack of regular face-to-face interaction can gradually weaken interpersonal relationship and diminish employees' sense of belonging to the organization (Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). These challenges can lead to decreased employee engagement, reduced job satisfaction, and increased psychological distance from the organization, which may increase employees' intention to leave their jobs (Moblely, 1997; Hom et al. ,2017). Therefore, if employees' emotional and relational needs are not adequately supported



through effective and supportive leadership practices, hybrid work environments may increase turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2010; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

### **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: CONCEPT AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE**

Servant leadership is a leadership approach that focuses on serving others, prioritizing employee development, and fostering ethical and caring relationship in the workplace. Unlike traditional leadership styles that primarily focus on power and control, servant leadership emphasizes compassion, humility, trust, and responsibility towards others (Greenleaf, 1997; Spears, 2010). Servant leaders genuinely listen to their employees, support their personal and professional growth, and prioritize the collective good over personal interests (Van Dierendonck, 2011). In modern organizations, particularly in hybrid work environments where physical interaction between leaders strive to bridge this distance by maintaining open communication, showing genuine care, and creating a supportive and positive work environment (Allen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021). By focusing on ethical behavior and personalized employee support, servant leadership helps maintain strong leader-employee relationship and enhances employees' sense of belonging to the organization (Liden et al., 2014; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), making it highly relevant for hybrid work environment.

### **EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTIONS**

Employee turnover intention refers to the conscious and deliberate decision or desire of an employee to leave an organization. It represents a psychological withdraw state that typically precedes the actual decision to quit the job (Mobley, 1977; Tetrick & Meyer, 1993). Turnover intention is influenced by several factors, including job satisfaction, the level of organizational commitment, the quality of leadership, and the strength of workplace relationship (Hom et al. ,2017; Allen et al., 2010).

In hybrid work environment, turnover intention may increase due to reduced social interaction feelings of a lack of organization support, and a weakened sense of connection with the organization (Gajendran & Wilkinson et al., 2018). Employee who feels emotionally disconnected from their leadership and colleagues are more likely to lose their engagement and being searching for other job opportunities (Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, leadership practices that foster trust, provide support, and build emotional connection play a crucial role in influencing employees' decision to remain with the organization (Van Dierendonck, 2011; Wheeler et al., 2010).

### **IMPACT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTIONS IN BLENDED WORKPLACES**

In hybrid work environment, servant leadership plays a crucial role in reducing employee turnover intentions by addressing employees' emotional and relational needs. Through empathic behavior, ethical actions, and consistent support, servant leaders help build strong trust and sense of belonging



among employee, even when regular face-to-face interaction is limited (Greenleaf, 1997; Liden et al., Van Dierendonck, 2011). Employee who perceives their leaders as caring and service-oriented feel valued, respected, and emotionally supported (Newman et al., 2017; Wheeler et al., 2010).

In hybrid work settings, servant leadership strengthens employees' emotional connection with the organization by fostering open communication and providing psychological safety (Allen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021). This supportive leadership style helps mitigate feelings of isolation and disengagement, which in turn reduces employees' intention to leave the organization (Eva et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2012). Therefore, in hybrid work environment where maintaining strong human connection is paramount, servant leadership serves as an effective retention-oriented leadership approach (Spears, 2010; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper examined how employee-centric leadership impacts employee turnover intentions in hybrid environments. The ethical and people-centric nature of employee-centric leadership aligns closely with the challenges posed by hybrid work arrangements. Trust, emotional connection, and continuous employee support fostered through employee-centric leadership play a crucial role in reducing employee's intention to leave in hybrid work settings. People-centric leadership approaches, such as employee-centric leadership, help improve employee retention and support organization stability in the evolving world of work. Employee-centric leadership has strong theoretical and empirical support in addressing employee turnover intentions. While previous studies have examined employee leadership and turnover intentions separately, the conceptual integration of these concepts in hybrid workplace environments remains limited. This research gap highlights the need for robust theoretical explanation of how employee-centric leadership can help organization manage new retention challenges in hybrid and flexible work arrangements. Future research can empirically test and validate this proposed relationship in different organisational contexts.

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