

**OSLOMET**

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**The Rollercoaster of Leadership**  
**Riding the Curvilinear Journey of Ethical and Servant  
Leadership with Follower Outcomes**

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## **Abstract**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a considerable emphasis on moral forms of leadership and how this impacts the organization and its followers. This thesis will focus on the ethical and servant form, where previous research mostly has examined the linear consequences on follower outcomes. Drawing on social exchange and social learning theory, positive relations between outcomes and the ethical and servant leadership approach were hypothesized. However, an expanding collection of empirical data in the management literature suggests that antecedent variables that normally provide desirable outcomes, cease to do so when taken too far. Thus, inspired by the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect, we aim to extend the research by examining the non-linear relationships between these leadership styles and the follower outcomes organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and performance.

The study is quantitative, using 131 leader-subordinate dyads. Followers' organizational citizenship behavior and performance was rated by the leaders while subordinates rated their own satisfaction with work and their perception of the leader's ethical and servant leadership behavior. We found both ethical and servant leadership to significantly predict job satisfaction. We did not find ethical leadership, nor servant leadership to predict OCB or job performance in a linear manner. This challenges the existing empirical framework as these relationships may not be as straightforward as initially expected and suggests that the effect of these leadership approaches may be mediated or moderated by other variables. Also, the findings did not support that too much ethical leadership predict follower outcomes as curvilinear.

However, we found high levels of servant leadership to positively predict organizational citizenship behavior and performance. Despite the fact that we expected a negative curvilinear effect, these findings still suggest that a non-linear relationship may exist in the dynamics between servant leadership and follower outcomes.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Leadership is an important factor in shaping the followers' behavior and has been under thorough research over the years (Chen et al., 2002). In the 21st century, there was a significant shift in focus towards understanding the impact of leadership on organizations and followers, especially regarding moral leadership. In this thesis, two types of moral leadership – ethical and servant – and their optimal levels are examined, along with their consequences on positive follower outcomes as organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and performance.

Moral leadership is an umbrella term that emphasizes personal virtues in leaders, such as integrity, selflessness, altruism and accountability, and role modeling (Cheng et al., 2004). As a result of these characteristics, this leadership style positively influences employees' identification and trust with their leaders, which in turn affects employee behavior (Wu et al., 2012; Gu et al., 2015).

Ethical leadership is a blend of traits and actions that encompasses behaviors such as consideration, honesty, trust-building, and demonstrating integrity and high ethical standards in which employees are treated fairly (Brown et al., 2005). Research has found that ethical leadership predicts several follower outcomes, including job satisfaction, dedication, well-being, organizational citizenship behavior, job performance, and reduced turnover (Brown et al, 2005; Avolio & Walumbwa, 2009; Avolio et al., 2009; Kalshoven & Boon, 2012; Stouten et al, 2013).

Servant leaders prioritizes meeting the needs of others and focuses on employee development in the areas of task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership potential (Greenleaf, 1977). Research has found that servant leadership also positively predicts follower outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior and job performance (Elche et al., 2020; Graham, 1991; Liden et al., 2008), showing a stronger relationship with job performance than ethical leadership (Hu & Liden, 2011). While existing research has documented the benefits of ethical and servant leadership can

provide, it is important to consider the potential of a curvilinear relationship between these leadership styles and follower outcomes. The too-much-of-a-good-thing effect argues that antecedents that are typically advantageous may reach an inflection point and potentially lead to negative outcomes if taken too far (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013). From a theoretical perspective, this challenges the assumption that more ethical- or servant leadership *always* leads to better follower outcomes.

Existing research on the effects of too much ethical leadership (Stouten et al., 2013) and a recent study on the curvilinear relationship between servant leadership and work-life balance (Xie et al., 2021) suggests that there may be optimal levels of these leadership styles for achieving positive follower outcomes. The study on too much ethical leadership found that the absence of ethical leadership could lead to a lack of ethical standards and values, which could create an environment in which deviant behavior is more likely to occur, while suggesting that too much ethical leadership has a negative effect on followers' OCB (Stouten et al., 2013). Xie et al. (2021) found that younger female employees reported higher levels of work-family conflict when their leaders exhibited a moderate level of servant leadership, compared to those who experienced low or high levels of leadership. In contrast, senior female employees reported lower levels of work-family conflict when they perceived a moderate level of servant leadership, compared to those who experienced very low or high levels.

This suggests that there are instances where non-linear functions for ethical and / or servant leadership should be considered, and is supported by both theoretical and empirical data (Antonakis et al., 2017). Building on social learning (Bandura, 1977) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), we argue how ethical and servant leadership may in some instances, become "too much" and turn into unintended negative outcomes.

Specifically, we argue that excessive ethical leadership may be seen as being overly strict or inflexible in decision making, which could result in reduced followers' discretionary behaviors like helping others or going beyond their job requirements (Mallick et al., 2015). Furthermore, excessive ethical leadership can be perceived as beyond the followers' reach, causing



employees to question their own ethical standards, and feel inferior. This may result in employees viewing their leaders as arrogant, leading to an uncomfortable dynamic between them (Stouten et al., 2013). On the other hand, we argue that low ethical leaders may encourage counterproductive work behavior (Tepper et al., 2009; Thau et al., 2009) and thus, negatively affect followers' willingness to engage in positive behaviors that benefit the organization (Stouten et al., 2013).

We also argue that servant leadership may have a curvilinear relationship with several follower outcomes. Specifically, we argue that excessive servant leadership could foster follower dependence on the leader for direction and decision making (Choudhary et al., 2013) and limit the followers' own growth, development of leadership skills and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). As the focus is on meeting the needs of others, such leaders may be perceived as easy targets for manipulation, leading to a lack of respect and accountability (Sun et al., 2018). However, with low servant leadership, we argue that this may leave the followers without the necessary support and guidance, negatively affecting motivation, job satisfaction and job performance (Sun et al., 2019).

Drawing on the *too-much-of-a-good-thing* (TMGT) effect, we wish to investigate whether there is an optimal level of ethical and servant leadership styles in relation to positive follower outcomes. This research contributes to the literature within this field, by replicating the study on ethical leadership and also extending the research with curvilinear relationships between servant leadership and follower outcomes. By identifying potential optimal levels of ethical or servant leadership, organizations and leaders can prevent negative employee behaviors while maintaining positive follower outcomes, and our research question reads as follows:

*“How do followers’ experiences of “too much” ethical and servant leadership influence their sense of job satisfaction, their performance, and their demonstration of organizational citizenship behavior?”*

## **2.0 Theoretical background**

In this theory chapter, the principles and characteristics of ethical and servant leadership will be introduced. We will also introduce the role of social exchange and social learning theories in shaping leader-follower interactions, along with the organizational outcomes organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and performance. By drawing on previous literature, we have developed several hypotheses which will also be introduced in this chapter.

### **2.1 Ethical leadership**

#### **2.1.1 Ethical characteristics**

Ethical leadership is most commonly defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). According to Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership refers to behaving in ways that conform to appropriate moral standards, both in personal actions and in interactions with others, while also encouraging followers to adopt to similar behavior. The definition highlights that ethical leaders serve as examples to their employees in terms of following ethical guidelines and regulations, while also promoting ethical conduct through systems of rewards and consequences. Ethical leadership is a result of a combination of characteristics and behaviors, which includes exhibiting integrity and upholding high ethical standards, treating employees fairly and with consideration, and ensuring that employees are held accountable for their ethical behavior (Brown et al., 2005).

### **2.1.2 Ethical behaviors**

Ethical leaders are expected to be both “moral persons”, displaying fairness and honesty in their relationships with subordinates, and “moral managers”, promoting and reinforcing ethical behavior (Brown et al., 2005; Treviño et al., 2000). They establish clear ethical standards that are frequently communicated to their followers, and they treat their employees with respect, fulfill their promises, solicit input from employees in decision-making, and clarify expectations and responsibilities (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Ethical leaders behave ethically both in their personal and professional lives (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership encompasses behaviors such as consideration, honesty, and the building of trust (Brown et al., 2005).

### **2.1.3 Antecedents of Ethical Leadership**

As Brown et al. (2005) pointed out, it is acknowledged that behaviors such as consideration, honesty and trust are essential for the functioning and success of ethical leadership. A leader’s ethical behavior can be predicted by numerous characteristics, however not all leaders have the ability to lead with moral standards. Studies have identified several personality characteristics that are more likely to be present in leaders who are perceived as ethical by their followers. Among these characteristics we have personal values and beliefs, company culture, ethical education and training, social norms and other (Brown et al., 2005).

Studies suggest that conscientiousness and agreeableness are consistently positively correlated ethical leadership, while the effects of other personality traits vary across different studies (Walumba & Schaubroeck, 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Özbağ, 2016). Conscientiousness has been found to be significantly and positively correlated with ethical leadership even after controlling for other personality traits (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Agreeableness has shown mixed results, with some studies revealing a positive correlation when controlling for other personality traits, and other studies revealing partial or no support (Kalshoven et al., 2011;

Özbağ, 2016).

The role of neuroticism as an antecedent of ethical leadership has been questioned, with some studies revealing no support for its negative correlation (Walumba & Schaubroeck, 2009), while others reveal a significant negative impact of neuroticism on ethical leadership (Özbağ, 2016). The correlation between openness to experience and extraversion as antecedents for ethical leadership have been inconsistent, with some studies supporting a positive correlation for openness to experience and no support for extraversion (Özbağ, 2016), and others finding no significant correlation for these traits (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Finally, Babalola et al. (2017) wanted to examine the mediating role that decision-making autonomy and leader moral reflectiveness played between leader conscientiousness and ethical leadership. Two samples were examined: one including CEOs and direct reports from three organizations in Nigeria, while the other was a larger sample drawn from seven ICT firms in China. While the correlation between conscientiousness and moral reflectiveness, and between leader moral reflectiveness and ethical leadership was significant in both samples, the first sample proved no correlation for the mediating role of moral reflectiveness, however moral reflectiveness had a significant correlation as the mediating role in sample 2.

Other research, such as Rahaman & Guo (2019) examine that the followers' perception of an ethical leader is ultimately influenced by the leader's attitude towards ethical behavior, subjective norms for ethical behavior, and perceived behavioral control. In regard to the subjective norm, the societal pressure of having one's own behavior reflects the expectations of others, it was not supported for this as an antecedent of ethical leadership. However, a leader's intentions to act ethically were likely to increase when there was a positive attitude towards ethical behavior and perceived behavioral control, which in turn contributes to the demonstration of ethical leadership and the follower's perception of it.

Research conducted by Mayer et al. (2012) examined moral identity as an antecedent of ethical leadership. When looking at moral identity, they look at the two dimensions of symbolization

and internalization. Symbolization shows that one possesses moral qualities by acting morally and exhibiting moral behavior, thus manifesting ethical leadership. Those with strong moral identity symbolization act in ways that are aligned with how they see themselves and might therefore be more likely to act ethically towards their followers. Moral identity internalization is the moral qualities that are ingrained in an individual's conception of themselves. Those having strong internalization are more likely to refrain from behaviors that are unethical as it would go against their self-concept, and might therefore be more likely to notice, address and condemn unethical behavior. The study concluded that both moral identity symbolization and internalization are significantly and positively correlated to ethical leadership as antecedents.

## **2.2 Servant leadership**

### **2.2.1 Servant characteristics**

The concept of servant leadership was introduced by Greenleaf (1977) more than 40 years ago and has recently regained attention from scholars (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). In 2019, over 100 articles that study servant leadership had been published in the last four years alone (Eva et. al., 2019). The leadership philosophy of servant leadership is based on the idea that the most effective leaders strive to serve others, rather than seeking power or control. "Others" may refer to customers, partners, colleagues and the community at large (Tucci, 2008). The theory of servant leadership is characterized as more ethical and people-centered (Clegg et al., 2007) which explicitly emphasizes the needs of followers (Patterson, 2003). Spears (2004) sought to clarify Greenleaf's' (1977) work by identifying ten prominent characteristics to describe a servant leader: (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to the growth of people, and (10) building community (Spears, 2004).

### 2.2.2 Different Takes on Defining Servant Leadership

The fact that servant leaders are sincerely concerned with followers constitutes the biggest difference with other types of leadership, that are generally concerned with the well-being of the organization (Greenleaf, 1977). However, Greenleaf (1977) did not provide a precise conceptual definition of servant leadership, and neither has there been a general agreement upon what defines a servant leader in terms of leader behavior (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Recently, even the vast majority of studies on servant leadership offer vague explanations of the behavior, motivation, and methods that servant leaders use when interacting with their followers, apart from Greenleaf's own description "The Servant-Leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead." (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 6). By conducting a systematic literature review of 285 articles on servant leadership from 1998 – 2018, Eva et al. (2019) provides a contemporary conceptual clarity of servant leadership:

"Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community." (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

Thus, the definition provides us with a fundamental aspect of servant leadership, which sets it apart from other leadership perspectives; the essential role of personal motivation in assuming leadership responsibilities. Servant leaders are guided by a strong commitment to prioritizing the needs of others, which reflects their firm beliefs, unwavering conviction, and unyielding resolve. This stands in sharp contrast to other leadership approaches that emphasize the fulfillment of the leaders' personal ambitions or agendas (Eva et al., 2019).

### 2.2.3 Antecedents of Servant Leadership

As Greenleaf (1977) pointed out, servant leadership emphasizes the importance of meeting followers' needs while encouraging their development, while putting their well-being ahead of one's own interests. Previous studies have identified factors that contribute to the emergence of servant leaders, including personal values and beliefs, emotional intelligence, mindfulness and their desire to serve others.

In the study conducted by Du Plessis et al. (2015) they wanted to examine the relationship between servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and trust in leader on 154 respondents in the media and pharmaceutical industries within South Africa. While previous research has shown that a leader's ability to understand the emotions of others can result in the followers maintaining enthusiasm, productivity, cooperation and trust in other followers (George, 2000), and those able to understand their own emotions and show self-control act as role models for their followers resulting in greater trust and respect (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Schlechter & Strauss, 2008), Du Plessis argued for the relationship between emotional intelligence and servant leadership. The study found that there are significant and positive correlations between emotional intelligence, trust in leader and servant leadership (Du Plessis et al., 2015). Newer research looked at the relationship between emotional intelligence and servant leadership in the context of athletic directors working in public high schools in the United States and found that emotional intelligence has a significant and positive correlation to servant leadership (Lee, 2018).

Other studies have looked at the connection between mindfulness and servant leadership behaviors. The state of mindfulness refers to being present in the current moment while maintaining a nonjudgmental and accepting attitude toward one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Verdorfer (2016) examined the relationship between mindfulness and servant leadership behavior in a two-part study. The first study, where the sample consisted of non-leaders from the German population, found support for the correlation between mindfulness

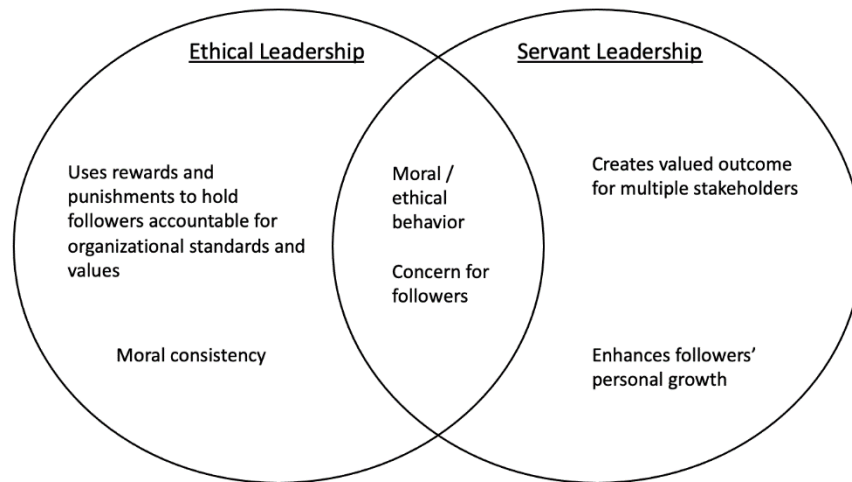
and expressed humility, additionally supporting mindfulness as a significant antecedent of motivation to lead. The second study analyzed data from 82 leaders with background in healthcare, consulting, public service, engineering and more, together with 223 followers. This study found that the follower's perception of a leader's mindfulness is positively correlated with the servant leadership characteristics of humility, standing back and authenticity (Verdorfer, 2016).

In a study conducted by Amah (2018), the antecedents and outcomes of servant leadership was examined on leaders and followers from different organizations in Nigeria. The study proposed that the factors of motivation to serve, self-efficacy and motivation to lead as antecedents of servant leadership. Motivation-to-serve refers to a leader's willingness to support the followers' interests, while motivation-to-lead refers to the effort one takes at leading, their willingness to take on leadership education, responsibilities, and the role as a leader. The study found that while both motivation-to-serve and self-efficacy are significant and positive predictors of servant leadership, it only found support for one of the dimensions of motivation-to-lead (Amah, 2018). The dimensions that found no support are social normative and affective identity which respectively refers to the sense of responsibility and desire of leading others. The dimension that was correlated to servant leadership is non-calculative, which refers to the positive attitude towards leadership opportunities despite the consequences and costs that it can bring.

### **2.3 Comparing Ethical and Servant Leadership**

In this subchapter, a short summary comparing ethical to servant leadership will follow. Figure 1 is created for illustration:





*Figure 1: Leadership Comparison*

### **2.3.1 Similarities between Ethical and Servant Leadership**

Ethical and servant leadership share several similarities, including their foundation in moral and ethical behavior, concern for followers, commitment to integrity and trustworthiness, and dedication to the betterment of the community and the organization they serve. Both leadership styles prioritize ethical decision-making processes and interactions with their followers while demonstrating a genuine concern for their well-being, growth, and development. Additionally, they are known for their integrity, which helps them build strong relationships with their followers, and their commitment to working towards the improvement of the community.

### **2.3.2 Differences between Ethical and Servant Leadership**

Despite these similarities, there are some key differences between ethical and servant leadership (Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leaders place a stronger emphasis on directing and enforcing specific behaviors and norms within the organization, using rewards and punishments to hold followers accountable for organizational standards and values (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Servant leaders, on the other hand, are less concerned with enforcing organizational norms and instead focus on enabling individuals to explore their potential and preferences. This makes servant leadership more people-centered, as they explicitly prioritize the needs of their followers and nurture their growth and development (Greenleaf, 1977).

Thus, while both leadership styles are concerned with the well-being of their followers, ethical leaders place greater emphasis on maintaining ethical standards and behaviors within the organization. In contrast, servant leaders are more flexible in their approach to leadership, focusing on meeting the individual needs of their followers.

Research by Hu and Liden (2011) suggests that servant leadership has a stronger relationship with employee job performance and a more positive impact on employee creativity and innovation compared to ethical leadership. Additionally, ethical leaders tend to have stronger moral consistency, which can manifest as a more rigid adherence to organizational values and standards (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Servant leaders, while still morally grounded, are more adaptable in their approach to leadership and prioritize meeting the individual needs of their followers (Clegg et al., 2007; Patterson, 2003).

### **2.4 Social Exchange and Social Learning Theory**

The exploration of the dynamic relationship between moral leadership and organizational outcomes has long been an arena of interest for researchers and practitioners. In this part of the chapter, we delve into the intricacies of how ethical and servant leaders can impact the

effectiveness and success of their organizations. To enrich our understanding of this complex relationship, we will draw upon two well-established theoretical frameworks: social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). These theories provide us with valuable insights into the mechanisms through which these leaders can inspire, motivate, and influence their followers, ultimately shaping the way organizations function and thrive.

#### **2.4.1 Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory is a social psychological and sociological perspective that aims to understand the interactions and relationships between individuals based on the concept of exchange. Blau (1964) states the social exchange as: "voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others" (p. 91). The main idea behind this theory is that people interact with others in order to increase their rewards and minimize their costs.

One key idea in social exchange theory is the rule of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Reciprocity is a constant process of exchange between two interdependent partners where the individuals expect that the rewards they receive from an interaction will be proportional to the costs they incur. In other words, individuals will generally respond to positive actions with positive actions, and to negative actions with negative actions (Blau, 1964).

The theory can be applied in the study of leadership, where a leader who offers followers more benefits or acknowledgement than costs or burdens to followers, receives assistance in achieving organizational goals in exchange (Hollander & Julian, 1969). Ethical leaders emphasizes the importance of demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and promoting such conduct among followers (Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leaders treat their employees fairly and with consideration, holding them accountable for their ethical behavior. They establish clear ethical standards, frequently

communicating these standards to their followers, and reinforcing ethical conduct through systems of rewards and consequences. When employees experience recognition and rewards for extra-role behaviors, social exchange theory suggests that they may be more motivated to engage in activities beyond their formal job requirements, such as organizational citizenship behavior. The theory also suggests that the ethical leader will adopt a more structured approach when followers underperform and focus more on consideration when they perform well.

Servant leaders, on the other hand, are characterized by a strong focus on meeting followers' needs and treating them fairly (Greenleaf, 1977). Therefore, these leaders are likely to establish trust-based social exchange relationships with their followers, which may encourage followers to reciprocate with positive behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behavior (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). For instance, a servant leader who demonstrates empathy and support for a followers' professional development may create an environment where the follower feels an obligation to reciprocate with gratitude and productive work habits (Kacmar et al., 2011). This can lead to increased engagement in organizational citizenship behavior, as individuals seek to fulfill their desire for achievement, belonging, competence, or affiliation (Organ, 1988).

#### **2.4.2 Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory is a psychological framework that was developed by Albert Bandura in the early 1960s and emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling, as well as imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reaction of others (Mcleod, 2023). Key components include observational learning, modeling and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). This theory is also regarded as highly relevant in understanding the impact of ethical and servant leadership on follower outcomes, as both leadership styles involve positive behaviors and attitudes that can be learned through observation and modeling.

*Observational learning* is a process in which individuals acquire new behaviors, skills, or

knowledge by observing others (Bandura, 1977). For example, followers can pick up on appropriate behaviors in social settings in the workplace, by imitating the reliable role models they come across. As ethical leaders demonstrate normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, we argue that ethical leaders could serve as role models for their followers by displaying fairness, honesty and respect, and thus, foster an environment where followers can adopt similar behaviors (Brown et al., 2005).

Servant leaders are characterized by their genuine concern for their followers' well-being, emphasizing the needs of others over the organization. We argue that this people-centered approach may encourage followers to adopt similar behaviors, as servant leaders demonstrate empathy, active listening, and commitment to the growth of people (Greenleaf, 1977).

*Modeling* refers to the demonstration of specific behaviors, attitudes, or emotional responses by a person who serves as a model for others. Ethical leaders behave in ways that conform to appropriate moral standards, both in personal actions and in interactions with others while also encouraging followers to adopt to similar behavior (Brown et al., 2005). Treating employees fairly and with consideration, as well as upholding high ethical standards may inspire followers to imitate these behaviors.

Similarly, servant leaders use strategies to cultivate an environment that prioritizes the needs and well-being of others. By demonstrating empathy, active listening, and a commitment to the growth of their followers, servant leaders may serve as models for positive behaviors.

Followers, in turn, may be inspired to adopt similar behaviors to their colleagues or clients (Bavik et al., 2017).

*Reinforcement* is a crucial part of social learning theory, as this can influence the repetition of behavior (Bandura, 1977). Positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards, increases the likelihood that a behavior will be repeated. Negative reinforcement, such as punishment, decreases the likelihood. Ethical leaders promote ethical conduct among followers through rewards and consequences (Brown et al., 2005). As a result, social learning theory suggests that followers are more likely to make sure that the way they act is in line with acceptable

behavioral standards that are rewarded (for example, citizenship behavior) as well as refrain from unacceptable behaviors that are punished (for example, deviant behavior) when they are exposed to these ethical leaders.

## **2.5 Organizational Consequences of Ethical and Servant Leadership**

This subchapter will provide a thorough examination of the various outcomes associated with ethical and servant leadership styles within organizations. Additionally, this part of the chapter will present the hypotheses that serve as the foundation for our analysis. The hypotheses are derived from comprehensive literature review on ethical and servant leadership styles, as well as their respective relationships with various organizational outcomes, namely *organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and job performance*.

### **2.5.1 Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as a concept has received a variety of different definitions. Organ (1988) introduced the concept as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization” (p. 4). The definition includes that the individual behavior is discretionary – practiced at one’s own choice, unrelated to a formal reward system and is an advantage for organizational effectiveness. With criticism that employees consider elements of OCB as part of their job – thus blurring the line between discretionary behavior and job performance, and that OCB could lead to rewards that are contractually guaranteed such as promotion (Organ, 1997), the definition was redefined to “performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place” (Organ, 1997, p. 95). While there are different definitions of OCB, the key points that remain is that OCB is the behavior of employees that go beyond the job description or expectations of the role, voluntary behavior that is beneficial to the organization.

Such voluntary behavior includes helping your coworkers, participating in events that are not required, etc. (Lee & Allen, 2002).

Organ (1988) also conceptualized the behaviors with five dimensions, including altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy and civic virtue. Altruism describes the voluntary behavior of helping others with a work-related task or problem such as assisting a colleague with work overload.

Conscientiousness describes the ability to go farther than what is required to fulfill a role. While altruism has its focus on helping a colleague, conscientiousness is focused on impersonal behavior such as regular attendance and punctuality.

Sportsmanship refers to the ability to engage in less-than-ideal conditions without complaining. While it is expected for organizations to encounter problematic times that may be unpleasant for the employees, the ability to refrain from complaining about unimportant issues the managers can concentrate on their jobs rather than dealing with the issues.

Courtesy refers to behaviors that can aid in preventing problems from materializing by providing coworkers with a notice in advance or reminding others of certain things. While altruism also refers to helping others, these dimensions differentiate as altruism is behavior where you help with an already existing problem, and courtesy is aimed at preventing problems from occurring.

Lastly, civic virtue refers to the sense of involvement in the decision-making. Behaviors such as partaking in vital meetings that are not mandatory or events that further the image of the organization are examples of civic virtue.

Former studies on OCB found that engaging in OCB could lead to greater job satisfaction among the employees. The employee's engagement in OCB lead to a greater perception of a positive work environment leading to a higher level of job satisfaction than those not engaging

(Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ & Ryan, 1995). Study conducted by Podsakoff et. al. (1997) also found a positive relation between the engagement in OCB and job satisfaction, while controlling for various variables such as job involvement and organizational commitment. Later studies have also shown a positive relation between OCB and job satisfaction in the service industry (Kim & Brymer 2011). The employees may feel a greater connection with their organization and have a stronger feeling of purpose and fulfillment in their work by going above and beyond their statutory job responsibilities.

Previous studies have also found that engaging in OCB is positively related to a greater sense of organizational commitment. Smith et. al. (1983) found that those engaging in OCB were more committed than those not engaging, while the relation was still present when controlling for job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Podsakoff et. al., 2000). Newer studies have also shown a positive relation between the OCB and affective commitment (Kim & Brymer, 2011), and continuance commitment in healthcare industry (Choi et. al., 2018). As employees go beyond what is their formal responsibilities, they may feel a greater sense of loyalty and attachment to the organization, thus resulting in greater outcomes for both the employee and organization as the job satisfaction increases and intentions to leave decreases.

As stated in social learning theory, followers learn new behaviors through imitating and observing others (Bandura, 1977). Employees in businesses pick up skills from role models through observation, imitation, and modeling. Ethical leaders set an example for others around them and show a commitment to ethical behavior in the workplace. They have higher moral standards that are trustworthy and sincere, and they punish those who violate the rules of ethics (Brown et al., 2005). They are also focused on their followers. The actions of their leaders will serve as a model for the staff. Followers will most likely also care about colleagues and go above and beyond to assist their clients. As a result, ethical leaders can encourage and inspire their workforce to perform at a greater level (Avolio et al., 2009). Leaders also treat their subordinates fairly. Based on social learning theory, we argue that followers are likely to engage



in OCB.

*Hypothesis 1a: Ethical leadership is positively related to followers' OCB.*

Furthermore, as servant leaders are known for caring about their followers, prioritizing their needs and treating them fairly, this may create an environment where followers are motivated due to the rule of reciprocity, to engage in activities beyond their job description (Elche et al., 2020; Graham, 1991). Previous studies have also found servant leadership to be positively related to OCB (Malingumu et al., 2016). Following social exchange theory, we argue that employees who receive support and training may want to give back to the organization:

*Hypothesis 1b: Servant leadership is positively related to followers' OCB.*

### **2.5.2 Job Satisfaction**

In the study of organizational behaviour, job satisfaction presents a key concept as it is often used as an indicator of the employees' general attitude regarding their jobs. There have been many definitions of job satisfaction, however one of the most used ones is "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1304).

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) were some of the earliest in proposing a theory of job satisfaction. Their theory suggested that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction were different concepts that were influenced by various factors. Herzberg et al. (1993) argued that dissatisfaction was associated with the circumstances that surrounded the completing of the task – such as supervision, salary, physical working conditions, company policies and job security. Job dissatisfaction arises when these factors decrease to a level below what the

employees consider acceptable. However, when these factors are optimal, they will not result in job satisfaction but remove the barriers to positive job attitudes as they satisfy the need for self-actualization (Herzberg et al., 1993). On the other hand, they argued job satisfaction was associated with the job itself. The fulfilment of motivators, factors related to their tasks, achievement, and recognition in the performance of their work, and the possibility of professional growth, were the main factors influencing job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1993).

Research has identified several factors that are associated with increased job satisfaction. Perceived autonomy, or the degree to which workers believe they have control over their job, is one of these factors. Research on independent and self-employed individuals has shown that a greater sense of task autonomy, and being one's own boss is a significant factor in job satisfaction (Hundley, 2001; Benz & Frey, 2004). Other research has provided support for autonomy and its correlation with job satisfaction, and other job characteristics as skill variety, task identity, task significance and feedback (Humphrey et al., 2007).

We argue in this study that there is a positive relation between ethical leadership and job satisfaction. Specifically, we argue that as ethical leaders encourage a sense of justice as they exhibit fairness and consistency, while also acting as role models that embodies the values set by the organization, they inspire pride in and satisfaction with their work and organization as a whole. By treating their employees with respect and seeking their input in decision-making, ethical leaders create an ethical work environment that encourages autonomy and cares for their personal professional development (Avolio et al., 2009). These elements establish a work environment in which the employees experience trust, support, and ability to contribute, resulting in greater job satisfaction:

*Hypothesis 2a: Ethical leadership is positively related to job satisfaction.*

We also argue for the positive relation between servant leadership and job satisfaction. As servant leaders focus on the well-being of the employees and emphasizing their professional

development, the employees get a greater sense of feeling valued and have greater opportunities to sharpen their skillset becoming better at their role. As they develop a supportive environment that builds trust through active listening and feedback, servant leaders create an atmosphere in which the employees can strive for greatness. Lastly, by promoting autonomy and the employees' decision-making authority, they further build trust in the employees and develop a sense of responsibility. Previous studies have also found servant leadership to be positively related to job satisfaction (Akdol & Arikboga, 2017). These factors are the reasoning as to why we argue for the positive relation between servant leadership and job satisfaction (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2009):

*Hypothesis 2b: Servant leadership is positively related to job satisfaction.*

### **2.5.3 Job Performance**

Job performance, as with job satisfaction, presents a key concept in the discussion of organizational behaviour along with leadership as it measures how well the follower performs the given tasks and responsibilities of their position. There are many different definitions of job performance, one of the definitions referred to job performance as the actions and behaviours that are important to the organization's goals, which can be measured by their degree of contribution (Campbell, 1990).

There are many factors that can have an impact on job performance, such as organizational factors, work characteristics and lastly individual characteristics. Training, evaluations of performance, and compensation are some of the organizational factors that are proved correlations with job performance (Park et al., 2018; Zafar et al., 2020). Characteristics of the work executed, such as task variety, autonomy and feedback are connected to the job performance of the followers (Humphrey et al., 2007). Previous research has shown that individual characteristics such as conscientiousness and emotional stability are positively correlated to job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Le et al., 2011).

Within job performance there are many important theories, such as job characteristics model and social cognitive theory. The Job characteristic model (JCM) is a theoretical framework developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980) which argues that an employee's motivation, satisfaction, and performance are significantly impacted by the design of their job. The JCM presents five job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Skill variety, task identity and task significance are factors that contribute to the experienced meaningfulness of the work, autonomy provides the employees with the experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, while feedback provides the knowledge of the results of the work activities (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The model proposes that the employee experiences positive effects to the degree that the individual learns (knowledge of result), that the specific individual (experienced responsibility), performed well on the given task (experienced meaningfulness), which in turn acts as encouragement to continue with good performances (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, the model recognizes that individual differences in competence, knowledge and need for personal development influence the effects that job characteristics bring (Hackman, 1980).

This study argues for the positive relation between ethical leadership and job performance. In particular, we argue that as ethical leaders establish clear standards and expectations, the employees have a greater understanding of their responsibilities and role, additionally improving employee engagement by building trust via regular communication and treating everyone fairly. Ethical leadership creates a positive work environment that promotes performance and discourages misconduct by fostering an ethical culture in which leaders set an example for others and employees are held accountable for their actions (Avolio et al., 2009). Lastly, ethical leaders increase motivation, commitment, and sense of responsibility by prioritizing the growth of the employee and autonomy. These aspects of ethical leadership create a work environment that encourages high levels of performance from employees.

*Hypothesis 3a: Ethical leadership is positively related to job performance.*

In this study we also argue for the positive relation between servant leadership and job performance. Servant leaders cultivate greater levels of engagement and provide their employees the opportunity to advance their skills by placing a high priority on their well-being and emphasizing their professional growth. Servant leaders develop trust and sense of responsibility in the work carried out by creating a positive work environment characterized by active listening and feedback while supporting autonomy and decision-making authority. These aspects of servant leadership work together to establish a positive work environment that results in greater job performance:

*Hypothesis 3b: Servant leadership is positively related to job performance.*

## **2.6 Can Leaders be Too Ethical or Servant?**

The “Too much of a good thing” effect is a phenomenon that uncovers the potential downsides of possessing excessive positive traits in the context of organizational life. The too-much-of-a-good-thing effect happens if what we usually regard as positive antecedents (predictor variables), eventually reach an inflection point. At this point, the desired outcome either ceases to be linear and positive or turns negative. Going beyond the inflection point is always unwanted, because it either leads to waste, providing no additional benefit, or to undesirable outcomes, such as decreased individual or organizational performance. Ultimately, predictors that usually are viewed as beneficial can lead to negative outcomes when taken too far (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013). Empirical evidence supports the existence of the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect in various leadership qualities. Antonakis et al. (2017) found a curvilinear relationship between a leader's intelligence and their perceived effectiveness, with moderate levels of intelligence being associated with the highest ratings of effectiveness. Similarly, Vergauwe et al. (2017) found a significant U-shaped relationship between charismatic personality and observer-rated leader effectiveness, indicating that moderate levels of charisma are more effective than either low or high levels.

This concept is essential to comprehend as it questions the traditional beliefs that “more is always better”. Additionally, knowledge about the effect may aid scholars in identifying the ideal balance for leadership attributes. This section will further discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect, by also exploring its relationship with social exchange and social learning theory. We will also provide empirical evidence from various studies to demonstrate what previous research has found on the too-much-of-a good-thing effect in organizations.

### **2.6.1 From a Social Exchange Perspective**

By integrating theoretical insights from social exchange theory, we argue that we can better understand the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect and its implications for leadership outcomes. The social exchange theory postulates that social interactions are guided by the rule of reciprocity, where individuals exchange resources, such as trust and support, based on the expectation of future benefits (Blau, 1964). At the same time, individuals vary; some keep careful track of their debts score (score keeping), while others only casually repay. We argue that the social exchange connection may be put at risk if one side fails to reciprocate. This can ultimately result in stress for the individual, which may prevent them from performing as well as they normally do (Murstein et al., 1977). Excessive positive traits in a leader may create an imbalance in social exchange if the follower fails to reciprocate, creating an imbalance in the relationship. For instance, *too much* leader assertiveness (Ames & Flynn, 2007), *too much* leader-member-exchange (Harris & Kacmar, 2006), and *too much* contingent-reward leadership (Harris & Russel, 2013) was found to be potentially harmful for leadership outcomes. Furthermore, Xie et al. (2021) found that when employees failed to sustain reciprocity in the relationship with a servant leader, this had a positive impact on perceived work-family conflict.

### **2.6.2 From a Social Learning Perspective**

By integrating theoretical insights from social learning theory, we argue that we can better understand the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect and its implications for leadership outcomes. The social learning theory suggests that individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others. As followers may observe and imitate leaders with extreme positive traits, we argue that this may lead to followers adopting to dysfunctional behaviors. For example, highly charismatic leaders may display overconfidence and narcissism, which can negatively affect their overall effectiveness. Furthermore, highly charismatic leaders risk tolerance and persuasiveness of charismatics may turn into manipulative and exploitative behavior (Vergauwe et al., 2017).

## **2.7 The Curvilinear Effects from Too Much Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leaders set transparent ethical standards which they frequently communicate to their followers, treat their employees with respect, keep their commitments, seek input from employees in decision-making, and clarify expectations and responsibilities (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

### **2.7.1 On OCB**

In line with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), we anticipate that employees will be motivated to comply with the ethical norms that are required of them. Especially since ethical leadership involves promoting and reinforcing these fundamental ethical behaviors as an essential aspect of their everyday duties (Brown et al., 2005). However, even if ethical leadership predicts positive outcomes for organizations, the current research suggests that the leadership approach could be represented by a curvilinear (too much of a good thing) rather than a linear relationship (more is better). Specifically, we argue that employees may perceive leaders who exhibit exceptionally high ethical standards as unattainable ethical role models. Even though

ethical leadership indeed has positive effects, it can also be demanding and frankly, exhausting for followers. We argue that this could decrease followers' willingness to engage in discretionary behaviors; helping others or going above and beyond their job requirements (Mallick et al., 2015). Also, there is already evidence suggesting that this leadership style can have unintended effects on followers' OCB when taken too far (Stouten et al., 2013). Replicating the findings of Stouten et al. (2013), the hypothesis reads as follows:

*Hypothesis 4a: Ethical leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).*

### **2.7.2 On Job satisfaction**

Furthermore, the literature concludes that ethical leadership has a positive influence on employees' behavior, satisfaction and performance, and reduces employees' turnover intentions (Shafique et al., 2018). However, we argue that employees may perceive too ethical leaders as being beyond their reach ethically. This can cause employees to question their own ethical standards and feel inferior compared to their superiors. Consequently, employees may view their leaders as arrogant, leading to an uncomfortable dynamic between leaders and followers (Stouten et al., 2013). Furthermore, we argue that in high levels of ethical leadership, leaders may become overly strict or demanding, leading to decreased motivation and performance, and job satisfaction among followers.

*Hypothesis 4b: Ethical leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with job satisfaction.*

### **2.7.3 On Job performance**

Stouten et al. (2013) found a negative, linear correlation between ethical leadership and employee deviance. This means that as the leaders' ethics increase, the risk of moral failure



among employees decreases. However, the curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and OCB shows that the likelihood of voluntary pro-social, cooperative behavior decreases at high and low levels of ethical leadership, but peaks in between (Stouten et al., 2013). In essence, this indicates that highly ethical leaders are effective at preventing negative behavior but may not be as successful in promoting positive ones. This may lead to a paradoxical situation where the focus on limiting negative behaviors could demotivate the organization, as there is less emphasis on encouraging employees to make positive contributions.

*Hypothesis 4c: Ethical leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with job performance.*

## **2.8 The Curvilinear Effects from Too Much Servant Leadership**

A servant leader places a priority on the development and welfare of individuals as well as the communities they are a part of. While traditional leadership typically entails the acquisition and use of authority by one at the "top of the pyramid," servant leadership is distinct from this. The servant leader shares authority, prioritizes the needs of others, and aids in the growth and peak performance of others (Greenleaf, 1977).

Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which refers to "voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others" (p. 91), reciprocity is an important rule. When equilibrium is met between the two parties (leader and follower), the connection continues in a satisfying manner. However, the social exchange connection may be in jeopardy and become stressful when one part fails to reciprocate (Murstein et al., 1977). In what way the follower reacts in this situation may depend on the individual. If the follower strongly feels that they should repay a favor (such as genuine concern and support for their personal growth received from servant leaders) but fail to do so, this may lead to tension for some employees, and result in unintended follower outcomes.

### **2.8.1 On OCB**

As anticipated in hypothesis 1b, we expect servant leadership to be positively related to followers' OCB. This relationship has also been confirmed in a study by Liden et al. (2008). However, leaders who are too servant run the risk of instilling a reliance in their followers unintentionally. Specifically, we argue that followers who are overly dependent on their leaders for direction, may wait for instructions or approval from the leader, which can limit followers' ability to take initiative and display OCB. Additionally, we argue that too serving behaviors can turn the followers into being proactive, and thus, less likely to engage in OCB. The "too" servant leader may unintentionally create an environment where followers are less motivated to go above and beyond their job requirements.

*Hypothesis 5a: Servant leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with OCB.*

### **2.8.2 On Job satisfaction**

Furthermore, as servant leaders are known for caring about their followers, prioritizing their needs and treating them fairly, this may create a connection of social exchange between leader and follower. According to the reciprocity rule in social exchange theory, this means that when one person acts kindly toward the other in a connection between the two individuals, there may be a psychological imbalance as the second person may feel obligated to do the same for the first. However, should the follower fail in the perception of reciprocity, this may cause stress and decrease job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5b: Servant leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with job satisfaction.*

### **2.8.3 On Job performance**

Servant leaders prioritize the needs of others, and aids followers in their growth and peak performance (Greenleaf, 1977). However, continuous involvement by leaders in resolving employee issues may have negative consequences (Kokemuller, 2013). It may diminish the leaders' authority (Gomez, 2022; Quain, 2018; Whiteside, 2023) hindering their ability to provide valuable guidance and support to improve the lives of employees. Additionally, leaders who are overly involved in problem-solving may unintentionally discourage employees from finding solutions on their own and, thus, be demotivating for employees (Gomez, 2022; Tucci, 2018; Whiteside, 2023). Furthermore, we argue that high levels of servant leadership may lead followers to become overly dependent on their leaders for guidance, support, and decision-making. The feeling of overdependency may reduce followers' sense of responsibility, autonomy and ownership, and thereby have negatively impact their job performance.

*Hypothesis 5c: Servant leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with job performance.*

## **3.0 Methodology**

This chapter provides a description of how the data for this study was collected. A description of the method used to carry out the study will follow. The research design, research approach, data collection tools, study population, sampling strategy, sample size and data analysis method will be described in detail. Our measuring variables will also be presented and explained.

By providing a detailed explanation of the methods used we hope to establish the credibility and validity of the research that was conducted and establish the trustworthiness and accuracy of the research. This will be commented on at the end of this chapter. Furthermore, this will

allow other researchers to follow the same procedures and build on the research and advance the research in the field of moral leadership and its effect on follower outcomes.

Importantly, it helps in guiding the reader through the process of this research and gain an understanding of the process and steps taken to collect and analyze the data, while also demonstrating our understanding and knowledge of research methods, and why we believe this is the most appropriate method for this study.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design outlines how the research question is addressed (Saunders et al., 2019). The design will include the specific goals that has been drawn from the research question, from which sources one intends to collect data from and analyzing the date, and the discussion of limitations encountered, whether it be time, location, or access to data. When designing research, it is designed to fulfil a purpose, which might be exploratory, descriptive, evaluative, or explanatory, or a combination of these purposes (Saunders et al., 2019).

In our study, we aimed to understand the relationship between moral leadership styles and follower outcomes, such as job performance, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). To achieve this, we employed an explanatory research design, which allowed us to explore the causal relationship between these variables (Saunders et al., 2019). By performing a thorough research study using the appropriate data collection and analysis techniques, we were able to effectively address the research question and provide insightful information on the relationship between moral leadership styles and follower outcomes.

### **3.1.1 Research Approach**

In this study, we aim to study the relationship between moral leadership styles and follower outcomes. In order to achieve this, we have adopted a deductive approach, which is theory-driven and involves testing of existing theory through the collection of data (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 51). We deem this approach to be appropriate as there is already plenty of research on the linear relationship between the different variables, which provided us with a clear theoretical foundation.

Our focus point is on studying the curvilinear relationship between moral leadership styles and follower outcomes, a field we found to be with limited research conducted. Furthermore, we aimed to replicate the study on curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and follower outcomes, while seeking to advance the field with research looking at the relationship between servant leadership and follower outcomes as well.

By utilizing a deductive approach in the research, our study is grounded in existing theory while also contributing to new insights and understanding to the relationship between moral leadership styles and follower outcomes.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Research Method**

A cross-sectional study design was used to gather quantitative data from respondents at a single moment in time (Campbell & Katona, 1953). This research design aligns with the scope of the thesis, and at the same time allowed us to gather a sizeable sample of participants to compare differences. We do, however, acknowledge the advantages of a longitudinal research design to prevent any method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

For this study, we utilize primary data to approach the specific research problem at hand, as it

provides relevant and accurate information for our specific problem. While secondary data offers easy accessibility and cost-effectiveness, primary data allows us to collect data that directly addresses our problem at hand (Malhotra & Dash, 2016).

We decided to use a quantitative approach to conduct our research, which involves collecting numerical data. The ability to analyze the collected data and test preexisting theories makes this method ideal for our deductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2019). While qualitative research offers non-numerical data, the quantitative approach is more in line with the aims and objectives of our study.

Our study effectively examines the relationship between moral leadership styles and follower outcomes by utilizing primary data collection and a quantitative research approach. This method allows us to test the theories while ensuring that the data collected is relevant and accurate.

### **3.3 Survey and Sample**

The sample was employed using a snowballing method, where respondents first were asked to fill an online survey and asked colleagues, friends or family to do the same (van Dijke et al., 2010). The survey was promoted through social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and by directly contacting several of Norway's largest organizations to gain a diverse and large sample.

The survey was conducted in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Considering that our hypotheses are based on the parties involved being as honest as possible in their assessment of the other, we found it favorable to use a quantitative approach to secure that the participating respondents remained anonymous throughout the research process (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The participants were assured to remain anonymous to reduce the presence of response distortion (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The information regarding anonymity was explained once they entered the questionnaire and that participation would not be linked to them. The respondents were also informed that participation was fully voluntary and that they were free to stop answering the survey at any given time. The exact purpose of the study was not revealed, and respondents were asked to answer honestly in order to reduce distortion (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

To reduce bias and avoid any favoritism, we first contacted leaders to complete the survey, and then requested the email address of the subordinate with whom they had worked the longest. We then invited the subordinates to participate in the survey. We ensured confidentiality by assuring our participants that their responses would be kept confidential and not linked to their identities.

Upon completing the survey, our sample consisted of 84 participants, meaning 42 complete leader-subordinate dyads. We further added a random sample of 100 Belgian dyads to increase the sample size. Participants were required to meet several specific criteria to participate, such as being at least 21 years old, having 2 or more years of work experience, and working 80% or full time. We removed three participants who did not meet these criteria and an additional eight participants who failed the attention checks that were spread out in the survey, leaving us with a total of 131 complete dyads for analysis.

Participants were from a variety of different organizations in Norway and Belgium.

The leaders were 52 % male. The mean age was 45.53 years old ( $SD = 9,70$ ). 53 % had higher education from university. 51 % reported daily contact with their subordinate. Most leaders were working in “engineering, production and construction” (28 %), while the smallest represented sector was “agriculture, nature and fishing” with only 1,5 %.

The followers were 37 % male. The mean age was 40.48 years old ( $SD = 11,16$ ). 39 % had higher education from university. 47 % reported daily contact with their supervisor. Most followers

also reported to work in “engineering, production and construction” (21 %), while “agriculture, nature and fishing” was only represented in 0.07 % of the population.

### **3.4 Measuring Variables**

Our study consisted of two separate survey modules – one for the leaders and one for the followers. The module sent to the followers contained questions regarding their perception of their leader, while the leader module included a personality test and questions about their perception of their follower.

All items employed the same five-point rating scale format, from 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree* (Ringdal, 2018).

The modules included various control variables such as demographic information (gender, age, education level, sector, type of business, tenure at the organization, tenure as a leader or under the leader, and contact frequency). For leaders, we also collected data on their specific management level and span of control.

As our research is part of a larger data collection effort, the original survey questions were already established in English and Dutch. However, as Norwegian is the official language of the population, we found it necessary to conduct a translation to provide the survey in this language. To ensure accurate translations and minimize misunderstandings, we employed a back-translation conversion process among our group members to avoid the risk of misunderstanding or misconception (Cavusgil & Das, 1997).

#### **3.4.1 Control Variables**

By including certain extrinsic variables, we intended to increase the internal validity of our findings and rule out the possibility that preexisting disparities, such as sociodemographic



characteristics, may account for the observed relationships (Buch et al., 2010). We selected age, gender and span of control as control variables for our research, as they represent standard demographic factors (Berneth & Aguinis, 2016).

As age often corresponds with experience, older individuals have had more time to learn from their past experiences – gaining a greater understanding of the potential consequences of unethical behavior, leading towards a more ethical approach to leadership. Kohlberg (1981), examined whether there is support for progression through stages of moral development, finding that older people reach higher levels of moral development and behave more ethically than younger people. The survey allowed participants to report their exact age.

For gender, we believe this to be relevant as societal norms push men and women to embrace different behaviors and attitudes. Men are generally encouraged to be more assertive and competitive, while women are compassionate, empathetic, and collaborative, which might influence the leadership style they adopt. Previous research has found that leadership styles are gender stereotypic, where women are more interpersonally and democratic oriented, in contrast to men who are autocratic oriented (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Research has also shown that women score higher than men on emotional intelligence, suggesting that women may be more capable than men in controlling their own and others' emotions (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). For the analysis, gender was coded into male (0) and female (1).

Lastly, we believe that span of control is a relevant demographic variable to take into account when looking at ethical and servant leadership. For both leadership styles, there is a great emphasis on developing strong and personal relationships with employees. Therefore, we argue that in smaller teams, the leader can dedicate significantly more time to each follower in developing close relationships. However, it might be harder to keep these close relationships when the number of individuals they oversee increases, which could reduce the positive impact of ethical and servant leadership (Thiel et al., 2018). In smaller teams, the leader can closely watch the follower's behavior and act quickly if ethical issues develop. For bigger teams, it could prove more difficult to keep such close tabs on the followers, which can lead to ethical

problems going unnoticed. Span of control was measured in five intervals, and coded as follows: 0 = 1 – 5, 1 = 6 – 10, 2 = 11 – 20, 3 = 21 – 50, 4 = > 50).

### **3.4.2 Module 1 – Leader**

This module included a personality test and questions about their perception of their subordinate.

#### ***3.4.2.1 Follower Performance***

Follower performance was measured by applying the Williams & Anderson (1991) 7-item scale and Vergauwe et al. (2017) 3-item scale. Statements such as “...Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description”, “...Meets formal performance requirements of the job” and “...Neglects aspects of the job he/she is obligated to perform” are included (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ).

#### ***3.4.2.2 Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)***

To measure organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), we applied Lee & Allen (2002) 8-item scale for individual and 8-item for organizational. The scale for individual OCB included statements such as “Go out the way to make newer employees feel welcome in the work group” and organizational included “Offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organization” (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

### **3.4.3 Module 1 – Follower**

This module contained questions regarding the subordinates' perception of their leader. When measuring leadership, we are using follower ratings, which is beneficial for several

reasons. As followers are the ones directly impacted by the leadership style, their perspectives are essential in evaluating the effectiveness of the leadership style. Follower ratings also provide more objective measurement of leadership than self-evaluations by leaders themselves, which can be subject to their own biases that leads to inflated perceptions of one's own leadership style.

#### ***3.4.3.1 Ethical Leadership***

Ethical leadership was measured by applying Brown et. al. (2005) 10-item scale. This scale consists of statements such as “My leader has the best interests of employees in mind” and “My leader sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics”. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

#### ***3.4.3.2 Servant Leadership***

The 7-item scale provided by Liden et al. (2015) was used to measure the variable of servant leadership. This scale consists of statements such as “I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem” and “My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best”. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$ ).

#### ***3.4.3.3 Job Satisfaction***

Dunham et. al (1977) 2-item scale was applied to measure the variable of work satisfaction. The scale consists of the statements “Generally, I am satisfied with my job” and “Generally, I like working for my organization” (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ).

### 3.5 Data Analysis

For the analysis of the research model, the statistical programming language R was employed. To test our hypothesis regarding the linear relationship between the moral leadership styles – ethical and servant leadership, on the follower outcomes (job satisfaction, job performance and organizational citizenship behavior), we employed multiple linear regression models, while controlling for demographic variables. The mathematical form of the multiple linear regression model was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon$$

In this model, Y represents the dependent variable (job satisfaction, performance or OCB) and  $X_k$  represents either ethical or servant leadership and control variables of age, gender and span of control. The intercept is presented by  $\beta_0$ , while  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$  and  $\beta_k$  are the coefficients that represents the relationship between independent and dependent variable.

To test our hypothesis regarding the curvilinear relationship between the moral leadership styles – ethical and servant leadership, on the follower outcomes (job satisfaction, job performance and organizational citizenship behavior), we employed quadratic regression models, while controlling for demographic variables. The model for the regression was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \beta_3 X_1^2 + \beta_4 X_2^2 + \varepsilon$$

The dependent variable of follower outcome is again represented by Y in the model. This model differs from the previous model as it now includes  $X_1^2$  and  $X_2^2$  which represents the squared terms of ethical and servant leadership and their coefficients  $\beta_3$  and  $\beta_4$ .

For these models, the means, standard deviations, coefficients, and significance will be presented to determine whether the hypothesized relationships are supported. We tested if the squared variable of leadership would explain the variance significantly in the dependent variable beyond the variance explained by the linear term, as this would provide evidence for the curvilinear relationship (Cohen et al., 2002). Furthermore, we have created descriptive

statistics to present the demographic variables of the sectors followers work in, education level, span of control and frequency of interactions.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

The validity and reliability of our study will be discussed in this part, along with the steps that were taken to ensure these qualities in our study. When evaluating the quality of research, validity and reliability are crucial (Saunders et al., 2019).

#### **3.6.1 Validity**

In this study, we developed a survey based on previous literature in the field, including studies on follower performance (Williams & Anderson, 1991), organizational citizenship behavior (Lee & Allen, 2002), ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), servant leadership (Liden et al., 2015) and job satisfaction (Dunham et al., 1977). The survey was designed to cover the relevant aspects of these topics, establishing content validity, according to DeVellis (2016).

With this study, we picked criteria based on previous studies and standards to show criterion related validity, which is defined as an empirical correlation with a criterion or a supposed “gold standard” (DeVellis, 2016).

For construct validity, we sought to establish that our measures behaved as they should behave in relation to established measures of other constructs (DeVellis, 2016). We evaluated each factor’s internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha to demonstrate construct validity. The Cronbach’s alpha values for each component were 0.79 for servant leadership, 0.87 for ethical leadership, 0.73 for job satisfaction, 0.87 for OCB and 0.78 for job performance. These alpha values, all above 0.7, indicate a strong internal consistency in the measurement (Saunders et al., 2019), thus supporting the construct validity of our survey.

### **3.6.2 Reliability**

Reliability refers to an instrument being able to perform in consistent and predictable ways, and unless there has been a genuine change in the variable the instrument is measuring, the score generated by the instrument should not change (DeVellis, 2016).

In order to ensure that our survey is reliable, we employed a number of methods. Firstly, in measuring the different variables, we utilized recognized measures. The use of these reputable measures contributes to the data's credibility and consistency with findings from previous studies.

Secondly, in order to guarantee that respondents would understand the survey questions consistently, we utilized clear and consistent language in the survey questions and translated the given questions to Norwegian in a clear matter. To make sure that the participants fully understood the questions, we also provided context and explanation where it was deemed necessary. This reduced the possibility of our participants understanding the questions differently and providing inconsistent answers.

Thirdly, we employed attention checks to make sure that survey respondents were paying attention and providing reliable answers. These attention checks were questions placed into the survey where the participants were asked to pick a specific answer to see if they were paying attention. As a result of participants failing to respond correctly to these attention checks, we eliminated 8 dyads from our sample.

Lastly, we provided our participants who completed the survey results from their personality test as an incentive to complete the survey. We wanted the personality test review to act as motivation and encouragement to provide honest and accurate responses – leading to a more reliable dataset as the participants take the survey more seriously. The incentive also helps in reducing the non-response bias, which can happen when those who have less interest in the subject being examined are less likely to respond to the survey. By offering the incentive, the

participants who are less likely to participate might become more compelled to do so, resulting in a more representative sample and increased reliability.

## 4.0 Results

In this chapter, we will present the findings of our research, which aimed to replicate and investigate the relationships between ethical leadership and follower outcomes. Furthermore, we wanted to extend this by also including the relationships between servant leadership and follower outcomes. The research question guiding this study was:

*“How do followers’ experiences of ‘too much’ ethical and servant leadership influence their sense of job satisfaction, their performance, and their demonstration of organizational citizenship behavior?”*

### 4.1 Description of Sample

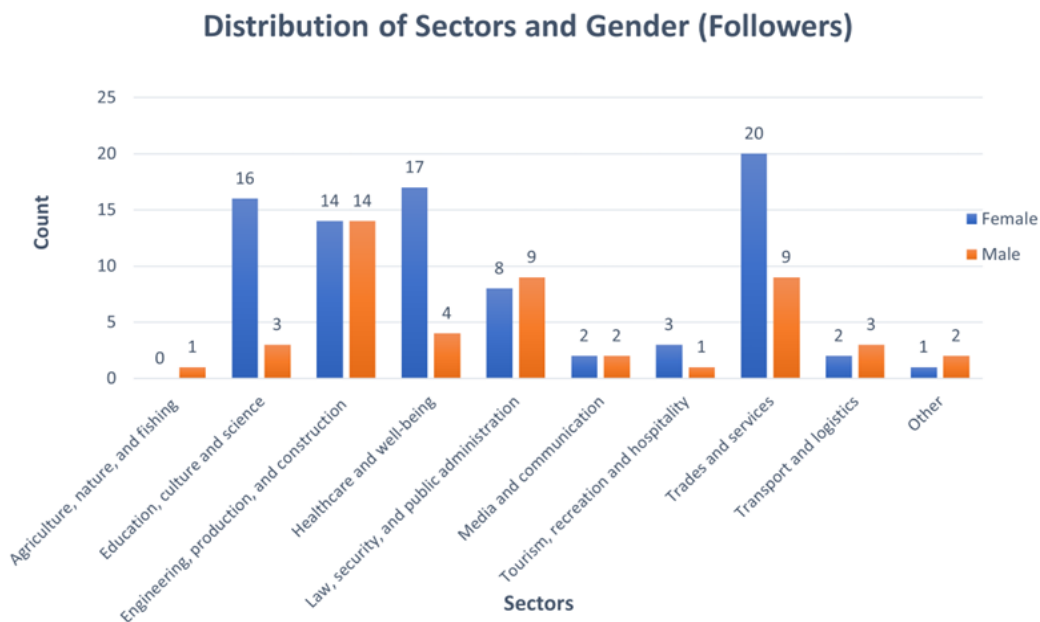
Figure 2 illustrates what sectors followers in this study work in. Only one male respondent works in the *agriculture, nature, and fishing* sector, which is a small sample size and will not be representative of the sector as a whole. The distribution of followers in the sector *education, culture and science* suggests that women may be overrepresented as they are contributing the majority of the sample (16 out of 19 respondents). In the sector *engineering, production, and construction* we have an equal number of respondents (14 female and 14 male), which is a positive sign for gender diversity traditionally male-dominated fields.

*Healthcare and well-being* sector is heavily dominated by females (17 out of 21), which is consistent with the gender imbalance in the healthcare sector. *Law, security, and public administration* is generally equal in distribution as males and females respectively have 9 and 8 respondents. While the sample is smaller in the *media and communication* sector, we see positive signs for gender diversity as there are equal number of males and females.

The smaller sample size repeats itself in the sectors *tourism, recreation and hospitality, transport and logistics, and other* that respectively have four (1 male and 3 female), five (3 male and 2 female) and three (2 male and 1 female) respondents.

The biggest sector in this study is *trades and services*, where the majority of respondents are female (20 out of 29), suggesting that women may be overrepresented in these sectors.

While the distribution of followers in *engineering, production and construction* was balanced, the distribution of leaders is heavily dominated by male leader (24 male and 13 female) – indicating a significant gender gap in leadership positions. However, there are also a lot of women in leadership roles in this industry, which indicates that progress is being made in the direction of gender diversity. In contrast to the follower distribution where females were overrepresented, the distribution of leaders show 16 male leaders 9 female leaders in the *trades and services* sector. Rest of the majority are found in the sectors *education, culture and science, and healthcare and well-being* who respectively have 19 leaders (7 male and 12 female) and 20 leaders (8 male and 12 female), which may suggest greater opportunities for career advancements for women.

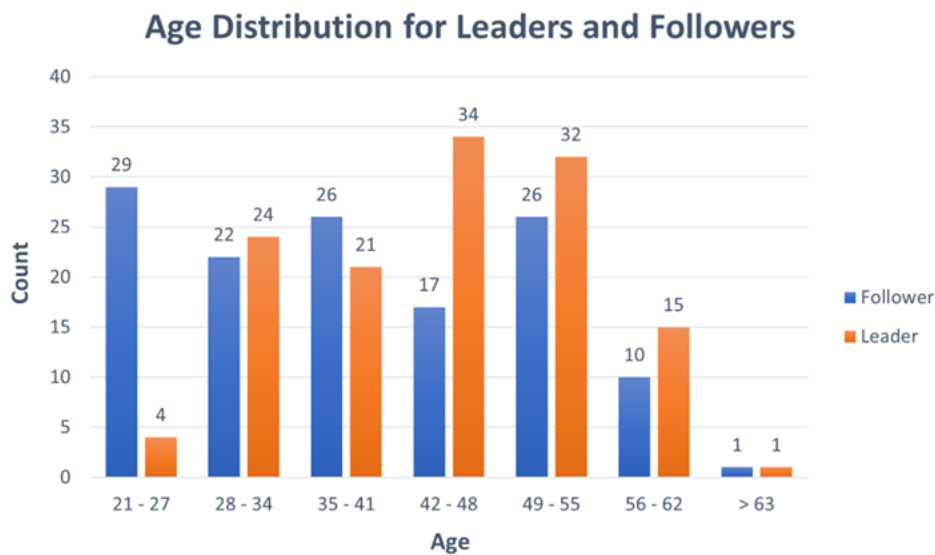


**Figure 2: Distribution of Sectors and Gender**



As for the age distribution, Figure 3 indicates that each age group makes up around 15% to 20% of the entire sample, and the distribution of followers across different age groups is generally stable. 29 of the followers are in the age range of 21 – 28, 22 followers in the age range of 29 – 35, 26 followers in the age range 36 – 42, 17 followers in the age range of 43 – 49 and 26 followers in the age range of 50 – 56. The oldest age group (63+) has a substantial decline in number of followers as there is just one respondent, however this is expected as the age of retirement is 62 in Norway and 65 in Belgium.

On the other hand, there are larger differences in the distribution of leaders among the various age groups. There are 66 leaders in the age range of 43 to 56, or 49.6% of the entire sample of leaders, where 34 of these leaders were between the ages of 43 and 49, and 32 of these between the ages of 50 and 56. For the ages between 21 to 28 there were only 4 leaders, ages between 29 and 35 there were 24 leaders and ages between 36 and 42 there were 21 leaders. The second-oldest group, age 57 to 63, had 15 leaders. The oldest age bracket (63+) contains only 1 leader, the smallest number of leaders.



**Figure 3: Age Distribution for Leaders and Followers**

As for the education level, Figure 4 indicates that both followers and leaders have completed a majority of their higher education, with a greater proportion of leaders (70) than followers (51) having done higher education university, while it is more equal in higher education non-university with 49 followers and 46 leaders. This would suggest that pursuing higher education, particularly at the university level, is crucial for people who want to hold leadership roles.

The findings are intriguing in that 30 followers have finished secondary education, while only 15 leaders have indicated that they have just completed secondary education and none with only primary education. This might be an indication that, especially in today’s extremely competitive job market, having a higher degree of education may be considered as an essential qualification for leadership roles.

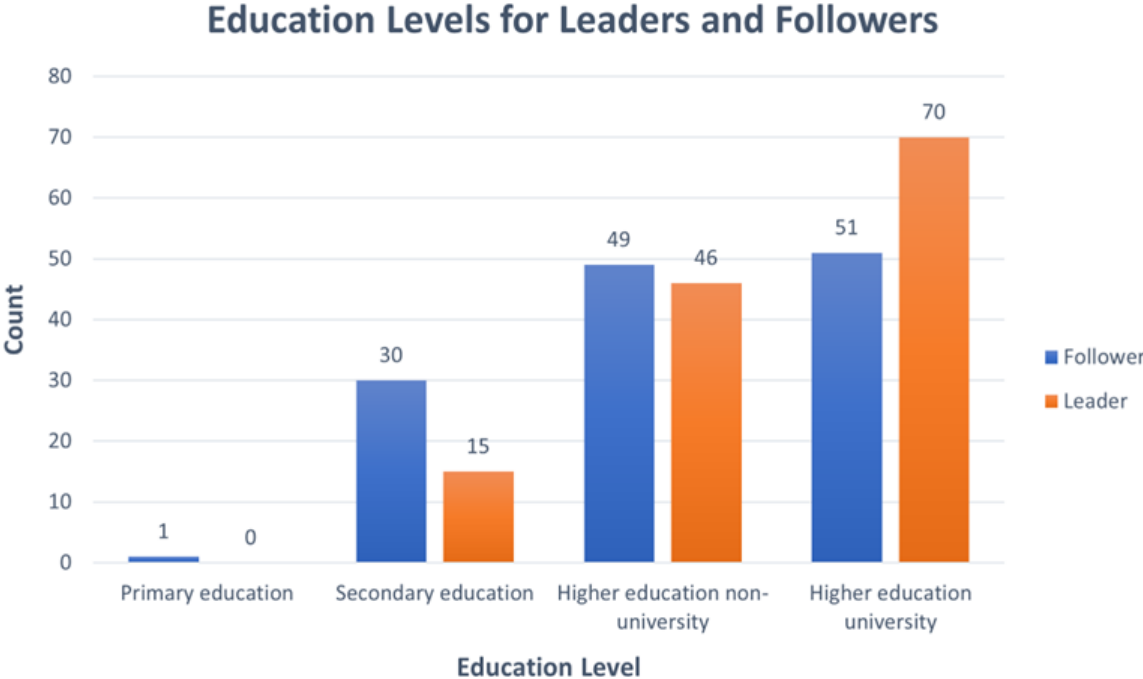
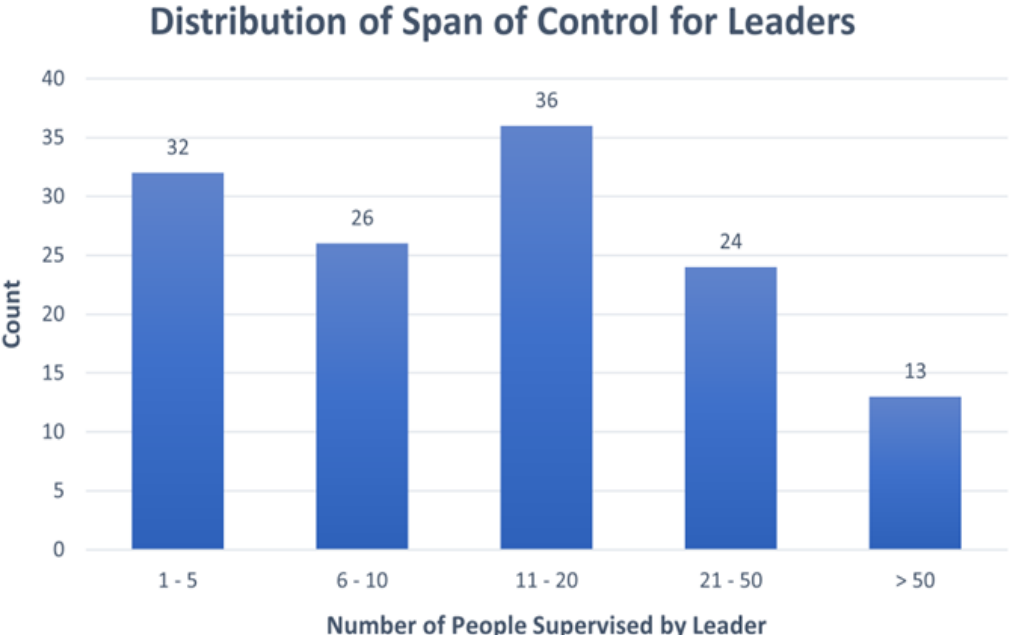


Figure 4: Education Levels for Leaders and Followers

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of span of control for leaders. A wide range of leaders' tasks are evident from the leaders' responses to the number of individuals they are responsible for. The majority of the leaders (36 out of 131) said they oversaw 11 – 20, indicating a greater leader role for larger teams. The second most frequent response, given by 32 out of 131 leaders, is the supervision role of 1 – 5 followers, which points towards a limited leadership position in contrast to what the other ranges might present.

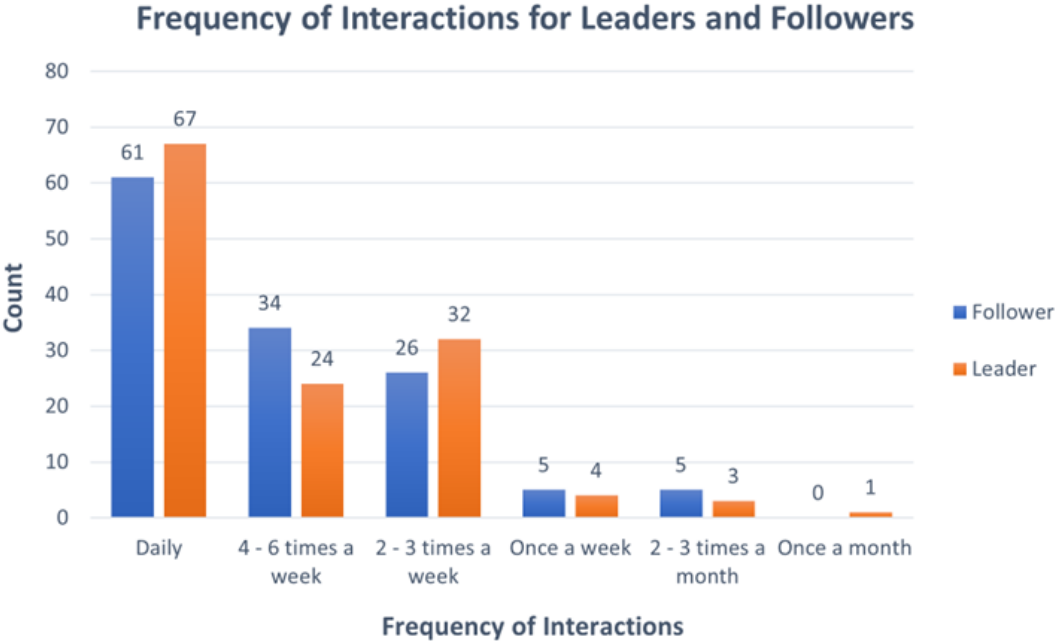
Out of the 131 leaders, 26 said they have 6 – 10 followers they are responsible for. It is important to note that a sizeable proportion of leaders indicated to oversee bigger groups of followers, where 24 leaders indicated they supervised 21 – 50 followers. In particular, 13 leaders said they oversaw more than 50 followers, which points to a significantly more complicated and challenging leadership role.

The range of a leader's supervision responsibilities may have an impact on their ability to effectively perform ethical or servant leadership, therefore, these findings may be particularly important to the study of ethical and servant leadership and follower outcomes.



**Figure 5: Distribution of Span of Control for Leaders**

The results from Figure 6 indicate that the majority of leaders and followers (61 followers and 67 leaders) answered that they interact with each other on a daily basis, suggesting that in the sample population, leaders and followers interact often. The other common responses are that they interact with each other 2 – 3 times a week (26 followers and 32 leaders) or 4 – 6 times a week (34 followers and 24 leaders). Just a small proportion of the sample population indicated that they interact less often, with 5 followers and 4 leaders reporting once a week interaction and 5 followers and 3 leaders reporting 2 – 3 times a month. Out of all our responses, only one leader said they talked to their follower once a month. These results imply that regular communication between leaders and followers is crucial for both parties. The demand for constant communication and feedback, which is essential for effective leadership and follower outcomes, may be shown by the high frequency of daily interactions. Additionally, less frequent interaction between leaders and followers may cause them to feel disconnected from or unsupported in their work, which could harm the results they achieve.



**Figure 6: Frequency of Interactions for Leaders and Followers**

## 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive information and intercorrelations between the variables used is provided in Table 1. The variables OCB, job satisfaction, performance, ethical leadership and servant leadership all employed the same five-point rating scale format, from 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree* (Ringdal, 2018). The mean score of the variables OCB (4.05), job satisfaction (4.35) and ethical leadership (4.13) are quite high, close to the maximum of the scale (5). This suggests that participants, on average, report exhibiting behaviors that support the organization beyond their formal role requirements quite frequently, they are quite satisfied with their jobs and consider their leaders as behaving ethically.

Performance and servant leadership get a mean score of 3.73 and 3.85, respectively. While these scores are quite above average (average = 2.5). This indicates that while participants generally view performance positively and perceive a good level of servant leadership behavior from their leaders, there's more variability or room for improvement compared to the other measures.

Given the positive correlation coefficient between servant leadership and gender is significant, this indicates a statistically significant relationship between these two variables in our sample (0.196\*). Gender is coded as a binary variable, where Male = 0 and Female = 1. A positive correlation coefficient suggests that higher levels of servant leadership are associated with being Female in our sample. However, the correlation is below 0.30, and thus considered weak. In other words, the practical significance may be limited (Cohen, 1988).

We also find a significantly positive correlation between span of control and performance (0.230\*\*). The correlation can be considered weak to moderate, as it is between 0.20 – 0.30 (Cohen, 1988). This indicates that supervisors who are responsible for more subordinates, tend to have higher performance scores in our sample. Span of control also correlates significantly negatively with ethical leadership (-0.199\*), suggesting that as the number of subordinates a

supervisor is responsible for increases, the ethical leadership score tends to decrease. This is in line with the findings of Thiel et al. (2018), whose study suggests that the benefits of ethical leadership are diminished as span of control widens.

There is also a positive and significant relationship between OCB and performance (0.322\*\*). This positive correlation suggests that as OCB increases, performance also tends to increase. In other words, individuals who exhibit more behaviors that support the organization beyond their formal role requirements, tend to perform better.

Furthermore, we find a statistically and positive correlation between ethical leadership and job satisfaction (0.347\*). This suggests that as ethical leadership increases, job satisfaction also tends to increase. Individuals who perceive their leaders as more ethical, tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction in our data. This finding is in line with previous research by Brown et al. (2005). Additionally, we find a statistically and positive correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction (0.330\*). This suggests that as servant leadership increases, job satisfaction also tends to increase. Individuals who perceive their leaders as more focused on serving the needs of the team, tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction in our data. This finding is in line with previous research by Liden et al. (2008). Job satisfaction had relatively high mean rating, of 4.35, in a rating scale of 1 to 5.

Both ethical and servant leadership has a positive correlation with OCB. However, the relationship is not statistically significant. Servant leadership is positively related to performance (very weakly), also not significant. Ethical leadership and performance, on the other hand, is suggested to have a weak, negative correlation. This relationship is neither significant.

**Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations of Variables**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Gender										
2. Age	40.48	11.16	-0.054							
3. Span of Control	1.69	1.29	-0.033	0.149						
4. OCB	4.05	0.47	0.057	0.145	0.110					
5. Job Satisfaction	4.35	0.56	0.010	0.119	-0.163	0.190*				
6. Job Performance	3.73	0.32	0.046	0.118	0.230**	0.322**	0.146			
7. Ethical Leadership	4.13	0.52	0.089	-0.064	-0.199*	0.144	0.347**	-0.057		
8. Servant Leadership	3.85	0.60	0.196*	-0.130	-0.158	0.145	0.330**	0.070	0.704**	

Note: N = 131. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard deviation, *OCB* = Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Age: the actual age of the participant

Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

Span of Control: 1 – 5 = 0, 6 – 10 = 1, 11 – 20 = 2, 21 – 50 = 3, > 50 = 4

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

### 4.3 Multiple Regression Analyses

To test our hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict the follower outcomes OCB, job satisfaction and performance. First with ethical leadership, then with servant leadership. All analyses were conducted using R.

The following tables shows the multiple regression analyses testing our hypotheses for the study. To examine our 12 hypotheses, we first fitted a model including only the control variables as predictors of the outcomes (Model 1). Then, we fitted a second model including the respective leadership styles in Model 2. Finally, we fitted a third model including all the mentioned variables, including the squared leadership style to explore non-linear relationships. The third model also compares the explained variance ( $R^2$ ) and how the model fits compared to Model 2.

#### 4.3.1 Predicting Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Table 2 illustrates the regression models predicting OCB with control variables and ethical leadership. The control variables in the first model indicate positive relationships, however these are not significant.

Hypothesis 1a stated that ethical leadership would be positively related to the followers' organizational citizenship behavior. Model 2, which tested this linear relationship, indicates that while ethical leadership is positively related ( $\beta = 0.34$ ), the relationship is not significant. Therefore, hypothesis 1a is not supported.

Hypothesis 4a stated that there would be a negative curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Model 3, where the squared ethical leadership variable is introduced, indicates the opposite of the hypothesis as there is a positive curvilinear relationship ( $\beta = 0.26$ ). However, the relationship is not significant, and hypothesis 4a is not supported.



As indicated in Table 2, results showed that the curvilinear relationship model (Model 3;  $R^2 = 0.08$ ) explained more variance than the linear relationship only model (Model 2;  $R^2 = 0.06$ ). However, this increase in explained variance was not significant, indicating that there is no significant evidence of a curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

**Table 2: Regression Analyses Predicting OCB with Control Variables and Ethical Leadership**

Parameter	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$
Coefficients ( <i>b</i> )									
Intercept	3.72	21.63***	-0.70	3.04	7.85***		4.84	4.16***	
Gender	0.07	0.77	0.14	0.05	0.61	0.11	0.06	0.68	0.12
Age	0.01	1.53	0.01	0.01	1.60	0.01	0.01	1.72	0.01
Span of Control	0.03	1.05	0.07	0.05	1.41	0.09	0.04	1.36	0.09
Ethical Leadership				0.16	1.97	0.34	-0.81	-1.36	-1.69
Ethical Leadership <sup>2</sup>							0.13	1.64	0.26
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03			0.06			0.08		
F	1.47			2.09			2.23		
$\Delta R^2$ vs. Model 2							0.02		
$\Delta F^2$ vs. Model 2							2.69		

Note. N = 131. OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behavior, “<sup>2</sup>” = squared variable

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

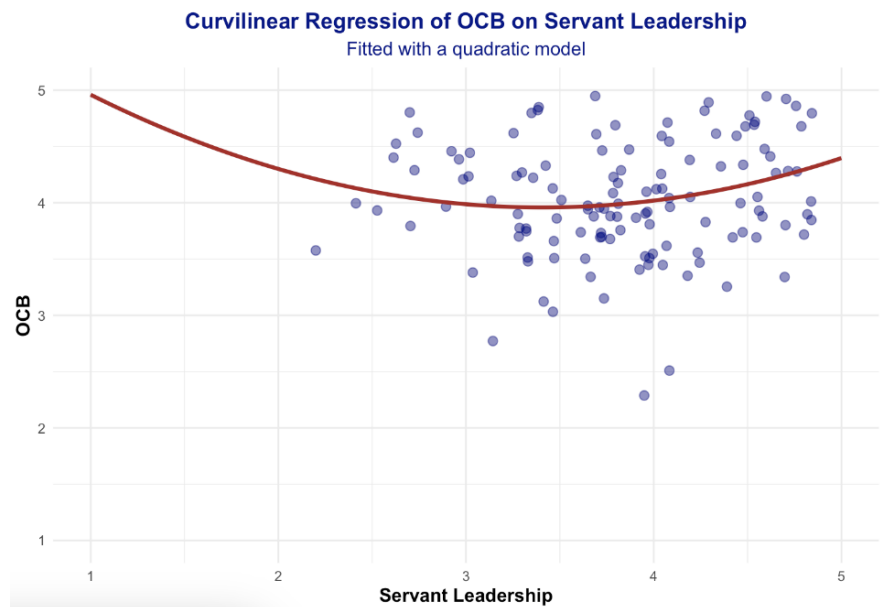
The first model in Table 3 includes only control variables and has the same outcome as mentioned in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1b stated that servant leadership is positively related to OCB. In model 2, servant leadership is added as a predictor along with the control variables. The model indicates that as servant leadership increases, so does OCB ( $\beta = 0.30$ ). However, this finding is not significant, hypothesis 1b was thus not supported.

When the squared servant leadership variable was added to the model, the explained variance (Model 3;  $R^2 = 0.10$ ) increased significantly ( $F = 4.61$ ;  $p = .05$ ), with the increase being in between a small and medium effect size (Cohen, 1988). The model suggests the squared servant leadership variable to be positively significantly related to OCB ( $p = .05$ ). This is contrary to what we stated in hypothesis 5a, where we suggested a negative curvilinear relationship between these variables.

Furthermore, the significant F statistic ( $F = 5.21$ ) suggests that the inclusion of the squared servant leadership term significantly improves the fit of the model to the data. Hypothesis 5a

thus is not supported, as the model suggests an overall positive trend between strong servant leadership and OCB. Comparing the models also suggest that including the squared term for servant leadership significantly improves the prediction of OCB ( $F^2 = 5.21$ ;  $p = .05$ ). This indicates a significant curvilinear relationship between servant leadership and OCB, rather than linear.



**Figure 7: Curvilinear Regression of OCB on Servant Leadership**

**Table 3: Regression Analyses Predicting OCB with Control Variables and Servant Leadership**

Parameter	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$
Coefficients ( <i>b</i> )									
Intercept	3.72	21.63***		3.15	9.41		5.86	4.76***	
Gender	0.07	0.77	0.14	0.03	0.40	0.07	0.03	0.39	0.07
Age	0.01	1.53	0.01	0.01	1.73	0.01	0.01	2.04	0.16
Span of Control	0.03	1.05	0.07	0.04	1.32	0.09	0.04	1.41	0.09
Servant Leadership				0.14	1.97	0.30	-1.37	-2.06*	-2.88
Servant Leadership <sup>2</sup>							0.20	2.28*	0.42
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03			0.06			0.10		
F	1.47			2.10			2.77*		
$\Delta R^2$ vs. Model 2							0.04		
$\Delta F_2$ vs. Model 2							5.21*		

Note. N = 131. OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behavior, “<sup>2</sup>” = squared variable

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

### 4.3.2 Predicting Job Satisfaction

To test the hypotheses related ethical leadership and job satisfaction, we first fitted a model (Model 1) that only included the control variables. For the second model (Model 2), the linear relationship of ethical leadership was introduced, while the last model (Model 3) included the curvilinear relationship with job satisfaction.

Table 4 illustrates the findings. Out of all the introduced control variables in the first model, only span of control shows a significant and negative relationship with ethical leadership ( $\beta = -0.14$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

Hypothesis 2a stated that there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction. Model 2 indicates that ethical leadership significant and positive predictor of job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.64$ ;  $t = 3.98$ ;  $p < .001$ ), thus Hypothesis 2a is supported.

For Hypothesis 4b, we stated that there would be a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) between ethical leadership and job satisfaction. As for this hypothesis, model 3 indicates a positive curvilinear relationship ( $\beta = 0.30$ ). However, this is not significant and therefore, does not provide support for Hypothesis 4b.

While the curvilinear relationship model (Model 3;  $R^2 = 0.18$ ) explained more variance than the linear only model (Model 2;  $R^2 = 0.15$ ), the increase was not significant.

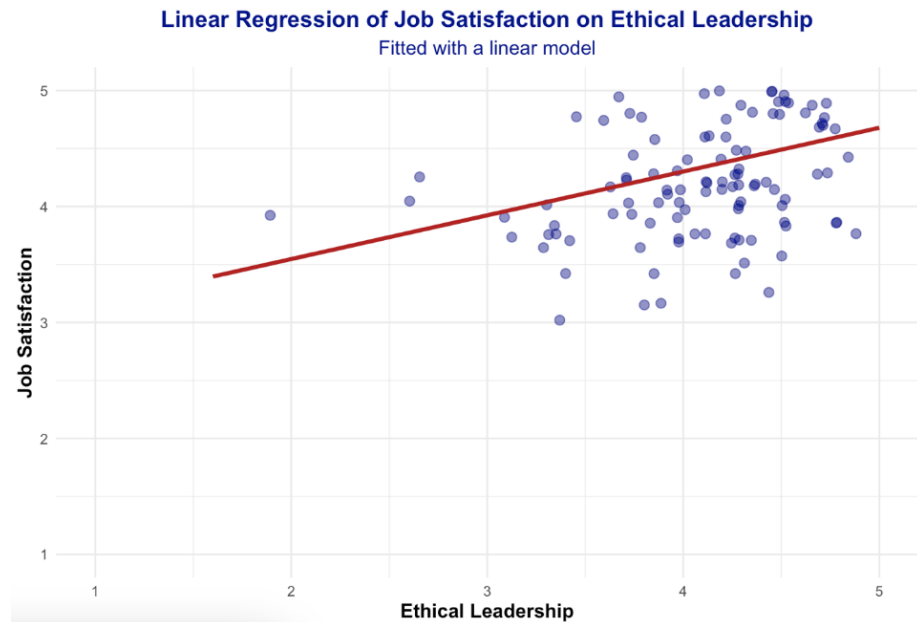


Figure 8: Linear Regression of Job Satisfaction on Ethical Leadership

**Table 4: Regression Analyses Predicting Job Satisfaction with Control Variables and Ethical Leadership**

Parameter	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$
Coefficients ( <i>b</i> )									
Intercept	4.18	20.70***		2.63	6.05***		5.03	3.87***	
Gender	0.01	0.14	0.02	-0.02	-0.18	-0.31	-0.01	-0.11	-0.02
Age	0.01	1.68	0.01	0.01	1.89	0.01	0.01	2.1*	0.02
Span of Control	-0.08	-2.10*	-0.14	-0.05	-1.42	-0.09	-0.05	-1.51	-0.10
Ethical Leadership				0.36	3.98***	0.64	-0.93	-1.39	-1.65
Ethical Leadership <sup>2</sup>							0.17	1.96	0.30
R <sup>2</sup>	0.05			0.15			0.18		
F	2.18			5.73			5.46		
$\Delta R^2$ vs. Model 2							0.03		
$\Delta F^2$ vs. Model 2							3.85		

Note. N = 131. “^2” = squared variable

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

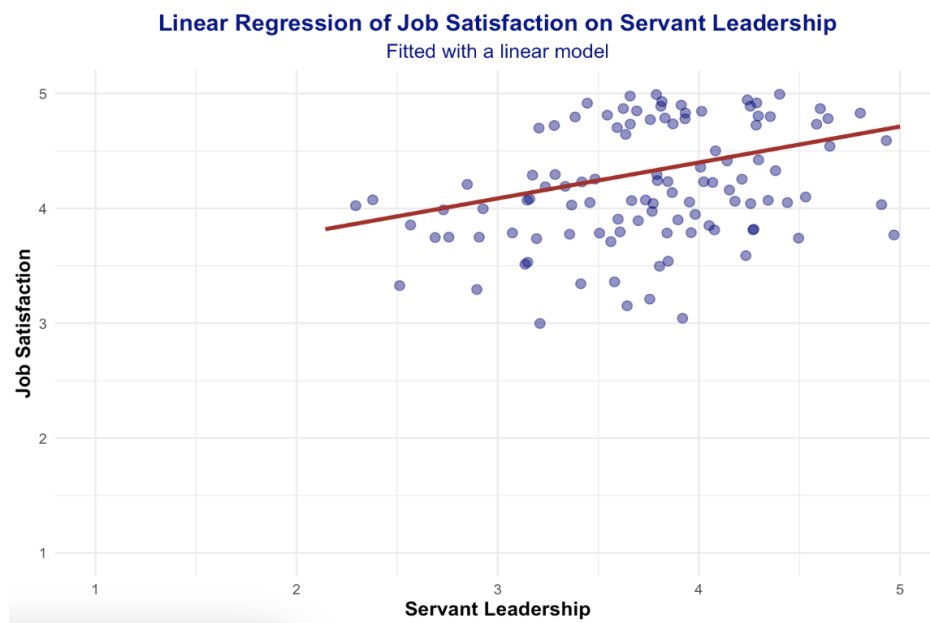
\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 5 illustrates the regression analyses predicting job satisfaction with control variables and servant leadership. The first model includes only control variables and has the same outcome as mentioned in Table 4.

Hypothesis 2b stated that servant leadership is positively related to job satisfaction. Model 2 introduces servant leadership as an additional predictor and improves the model's overall predictive power ( $R^2 = 0.16$ ). The model suggests that both age and servant leadership significantly contribute to job satisfaction. Thus, as Model 2 indicates that job satisfaction increases with servant leadership, this supports hypothesis 2b ( $\beta = 0.57$ ;  $p = .001$ ).

Model 3 makes the model quadratic. The explanation of the new model is only marginally enhanced ( $R^2 = 0.17$ ). Hypothesis 5b states servant leadership to have a negative curvilinear relation with job satisfaction. Servant leadership is no longer significant, neither does servant leadership<sup>2</sup> contribute significantly in predicting job satisfaction. This implies no evidence of a curvilinear relationship between the variables and thus hypothesis 5b is not supported.

Additionally, the  $F^2$  is not significant, suggesting that adding the squared term of servant leadership does not significantly improve the model in predicting job satisfaction. This suggests that Model 2 has a better fit.



**Figure 9: Linear Regression of Job Satisfaction on Servant Leadership**

**Table 5: Regression Analyses Predicting Job Satisfaction with Control Variables and Servant Leadership**

Parameter	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$
Coefficients ( <i>b</i> )									
Intercept	4.18	20.70***		2.87	7.70***		4.87	3.49***	
Gender	0.01	0.14	0.02	-0.60	-0.62	-0.11	-0.06	-0.63	-0.11
Age	0.01	1.68	0.01	0.01	2.20*	0.02	0.01	2.36*	0.02
Span of Control	-0.08	-2.10*	-0.14	-0.06	-1.64	-0.11	-0.06	-1.61	-0.10
Servant Leadership				0.32	4.03***	0.57	-0.80	-1.05	-1.40
Servant Leadership <sup>2</sup>							0.15	1.48	0.26
R <sup>2</sup>	0.05			0.16			0.17		
F	2.18			5.84***			5.16***		
$\Delta$ R2 vs. Model 2							0.01		
$\Delta$ F2 vs. Model 2							2.20		

Note. N = 131. “<sup>2</sup>” = squared variable

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$



### 4.3.3 Predicting Performance

Table 6 illustrates the regression analyses predicting job performance with control variables and ethical leadership. To test the hypotheses related to ethical leadership and performance, we first fitted a model (Model 1) that only included the control variables. For the second model (Model 2), the linear relationship of ethical leadership was introduced, while the last model (Model 3) included the curvilinear relationship with job performance.

The control variables all indicate a positive relationship, however only span of control shows a significant relationship ( $\beta = 0.17$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

As suggested by Hypothesis 3a, there would be a positive relationship between ethical leadership and performance. In Model 2, span of control again has a positive and significant effect ( $\beta = 0.17$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Model 2 also indicates a very small negative relationship between ethical leadership ( $\beta = -0.03$ ), however this is not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a is not supported.

Hypothesis 4c stated that ethical leadership has a negative curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) with performance. The introduction of the squared ethical leadership variable in Model 3 shows that there is a positive curvilinear relationship ( $\beta = 0.20$ ), which implies the opposite of the hypothesis. However, the relationship is not significant, and Hypothesis 4c is not supported. The control variable span of control is again significant ( $\beta = 0.16$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

Table 6 showed that the curvilinear relationship model (Model 3;  $R^2 = 0.08$ ) explained more variance than the linear relationship only model (Model 2;  $R^2 = 0.06$ ). However, this increase in explained variance was not significant, indicating that there is no significant evidence of a curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and job performance.

**Table 6: Regression Analyses Predicting Job Performance with Control Variables and Ethical Leadership**

Parameter	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$
Coefficients ( <i>b</i> )									
Intercept	3.51	30.89***		3.54	13.67***		4.48	5.73***	
Gender	0.04	0.67	0.12	0.04	0.68	0.12	0.04	0.73	0.13
Age	0.00	1.02	0.01	0.00	1.01	0.01	0.00	1.09	0.01
Span of Control	0.05	2.52*	0.17	0.05	2.44*	0.17	0.05	2.39*	0.16
Ethical Leadership				-0.01	-0.16	-0.03	-0.51	-1.28	-1.60
Ethical Leadership <sup>2</sup>							0.07	1.27	0.20
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.06			0.06			0.08		
<i>F</i>	2.87*			2.14			2.04		
$\Delta R^2$ vs. Model 2							0.02		
$\Delta F^2$ vs. Model 2							1.62		

Note. N = 131. “<sup>2</sup>” = squared variable

\*  $p < .05$

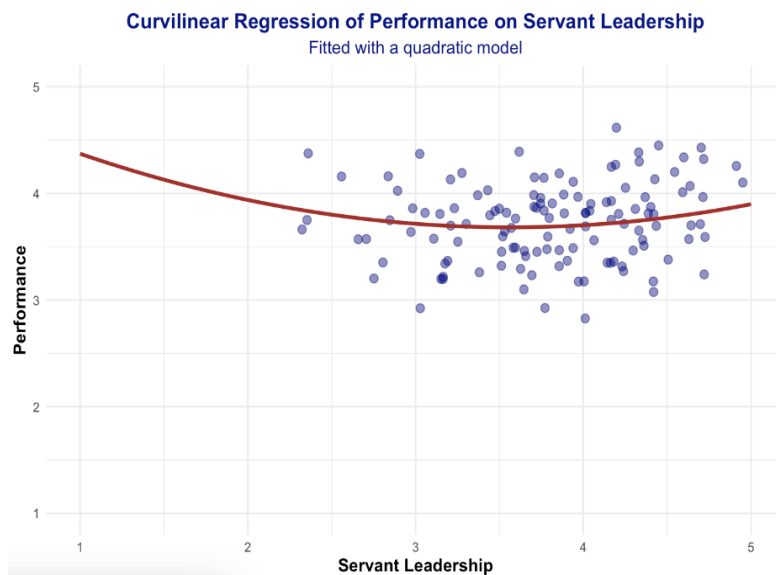
\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 7 illustrates the regression analyses predicting job performance with control variables and servant leadership. The first model includes only control variables and has the same outcome as mentioned in Table 6. Hypothesis 3b stated that servant leadership is positively related to performance. As model 2 introduces servant leadership as an additional predictor, this only marginally improves the model's overall predictive power with 2 % ( $R^2 = 0.08$ ). However, the F-statistic decreases slightly to 2.57 while remaining significant. Span of control is positive and significantly related to performance ( $\beta = 0.18$ ;  $p = .01$ ). The coefficient for servant leadership is not significant. Thus, model 2 indicates that servant leadership does not add much to the prediction of performance. Hypothesis 3b is thus not supported.

Although, we do get a marginal increase in  $R^2$  and the F-statistic when including the squared term for servant leadership. The coefficient for the squared term is now significant, suggesting a significant and positive curvilinear relationship between servant leadership and performance ( $\beta = 0.39$ ;  $p = .05$ ). However, the hypothesis stated this relationship to be curvilinear and negative. Thus, hypothesis 5c is rejected, as the model suggests an overall positive trend between strong servant leadership and performance.

Comparing the models also suggest that including the squared term for servant leadership significantly improves the prediction of performance ( $F^2 = 4.32$ ;  $p = .05$ ). This indicates a significant curvilinear relationship between servant leadership and performance, rather than linear.



**Figure 10: Curvilinear Regression of Performance on Servant Leadership**

**Table 7: Regression Analyses Predicting Job Performance with Control Variables and Servant Leadership**

Parameter	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	Est.	<i>t</i>	$\beta$
Coefficients ( <i>b</i> )									
Intercept	3.51	30.89***		3.26	14.63***		4.91	5.97***	
Gender	0.04	0.67	0.12	0.02	0.42	0.08	0.02	0.42	0.07
Age	0.00	1.02	0.01	0.00	1.44	0.01	0.00	1.42	0.01
Span of Control	0.05	2.52*	0.17	0.06	2.68**	0.18	0.06	2.78**	0.18
Servant Leadership				0.06	0.21	0.19	-0.86	-1.93	-2.69
Servant Leadership <sup>2</sup>							0.12	2.08*	0.39
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.06			0.08			0.11		
<i>F</i>	2.87*			2.57*			2.97*		
$\Delta R^2$ vs. Model 2							0.03		
$\Delta F^2$ vs. Model 2							4.32*		

Note. N = 131. “<sup>2</sup>” = squared variable

\* *p* < .05

\*\* *p* < .01

\*\*\* *p* < .001

## 5.0 Discussion

In this study, we sought to improve the understanding of how branches of moral leadership, specifically, the degree of how ethical and servant the leader is, influence the follower outcomes OCB, job satisfaction and performance. We relied on social learning and social exchange theory, as well as the theoretical foundations underlying ethical and servant leadership in developing our hypotheses. We found both ethical and servant leadership to positively predict job satisfaction. We also found high levels of servant leadership to predict OCB and performance positively. Previous research has generally stated a positive, linear relationship between these variables. Our overall purpose was to replicate these findings in addition to extend the research by exploring whether the relationships could be curvilinear. We will address the hypotheses in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis and will review and examine why some of our hypotheses received support while others did not.

### 5.1 Exploring Hypotheses

Our study found a positive correlation between ethical and servant leadership and job satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis 2a and 2b, which stated that “ethical / servant leadership is positively related to job satisfaction”, was supported by our findings. These findings are consistent with previous research that found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2005), and servant leadership and job satisfaction (Akdol & Arikboga, 2017).

However, hypotheses stating that these leadership styles had a negative curvilinear relationship with job satisfaction, was not supported for either leadership style. The fact that our data supported the linear hypothesis, but not the curvilinear, indicates that the relationship between the leadership styles and job satisfaction in our sample was more linear than curvilinear. We found that as ethical or servant leadership increases, job satisfaction tends to

increase consistently, *without* reaching a peak and then declining. There may not be a point to which too much ethical or servant leadership starts to have a negative impact on job satisfaction. This could be explained by ethical leaders being honest, fair, and with a strong moral compass, seem to foster a work environment where employees feel more content and satisfied. The social learning theory can also provide a theoretical foundation for this relationship. Within an organization, ethical leaders, who demonstrate fairness, integrity, and honesty, can serve as powerful role models for their employees. By observing their leaders' ethical behaviors, employees learn the value and importance of these behaviors and are more likely to replicate them. Employees may observe ethical leaders being rewarded for their behavior, and learn to associate these positive outcomes with ethical behavior, which can lead to an increase in job satisfaction as employees feel proud to be part of an organization that upholds ethical standards and treats its members fairly and with respect (Bandura, 1977).

Similarly, servant leaders, who prioritize the needs of their team and encourage their personal and professional growth, appear to have a positive impact on job satisfaction. In an organizational context, when employees observe the altruistic and supportive behaviors of servant leaders, they may experience an increased sense of job satisfaction due to feeling valued and supported. They may also be more likely to model these behaviors, contributing to a positive work environment that further enhances job satisfaction (Bandura, 1977).

The consistency of our findings with prior research lends further credibility to the significant influence of these leadership styles on job satisfaction. Notably, our results emphasize the potential benefits of promoting ethical and servant leadership within organizations. These leadership styles may not only boost job satisfaction, but also lead to other positive organizational outcomes such as increased productivity, lower turnover rates, and improved overall morale. Job satisfaction was only measured in two items (Dunham et al., 1977), probably reducing response style bias from participants (Suárez et al., 2018).

Hypothesis 2b stated that servant leadership is positively related to OCB. While previous studies reported a positive relationship between these two variables (Malingumu et al., 2016),

the present study did not find a significant, linear relationship between servant leadership and OCB. However, a positive relationship between the squared term of servant leadership and OCB suggests that at lower levels of servant leadership, increases in servant leadership do not have a substantial effect on OCB. However, as the level of servant leadership continues to rise, its impact on OCB becomes progressively stronger. This means the more servant leadership, the more OCB, but this relationship becomes more pronounced at higher levels of servant leadership. A small increase in servant leadership when it is already at a high level may lead to a substantial increase in OCB. Although hypothesis 5a, which stated a negative curvilinear relationship between these variables, thus was rejected, this exploration is still valuable for organizations, suggesting that they may need to foster high levels of servant leadership to see significant improvements in OCB.

This is also what we found in hypothesis 5c, which stated that servant leadership has a negative curvilinear effect on performance. In contrary to previous studies (Liden et al., 2013), the linear relationship between servant leadership and performance came out non-significant in our study. However, our findings indicate that the squared term of servant leadership is positively related to performance, which implies a U-shaped relationship, rather than an inverted U-shaped curve. This means that lower levels of servant leadership may not significantly boost performance. However, as the level of servant leadership continues to rise, its impact on performance becomes significantly stronger. Our study thus, suggests, the more servant leadership, the better subordinates perform – but only at high levels of servant leadership.

These findings on outcomes from high levels of servant leadership can be explained by social exchange theory. Employees are likely to reciprocate the benefits they receive from servant leaders, who are focusing on employee growth, meeting employees' needs, prioritizing the welfare of team over their self-interest (Greenleaf, 1977). Instead of reciprocating in the same form as the benefits received, employees may reciprocate by demonstrating behaviors that benefit the organization, even if they go beyond their formal job requirements, by helping colleagues with their tasks, volunteering for extra work, or promoting the organization in a

positive way outside of work. Social exchange theory also constituted the theoretical framework in previous studies, in explaining the curvilinear effect between servant leadership and work-family conflict (Xie et al., 2021).

Some of our findings, though, challenged our theoretical expectations. Social learning theory has in previous studies been proposed as theoretical basis in understanding ethical leadership, while predicting outcomes such as OCB and performance (Brown et al., 2005; Stouten et al., 2013). This study did not find support for these predictions. Neither was there a significant curvilinear relation between these variables, though Stouten et al. (2013) reported a curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. However, this does not mean that ethical leadership is unimportant. It is possible that ethical leadership influences other aspects of organizational behavior, or that its impact on, for example, OCB, is mediated or moderated by other variables. Future research could explore these possibilities. Furthermore, while social learning theory is useful, another theoretical framework may provide different theoretical explanations.

Despite the fact that the lack of evidence conflicts with the presented theoretical framework, several other factors could also explain the result. For instance, specific characteristics of the sample used in this study could be one possible explanation. Our participants were primarily from the trades and services sector. Individuals working in this sector may have different perceptions and expectations of ethical and servant leadership, compared to the samples used in other studies. Another explanation could be that other variables that are not accounted for in our study, may moderate or mediate the relationships between the leadership styles, and follower outcomes.

Furthermore, the survey results may have been influenced by external variables and individual circumstances. Our research may be subject to context effects as the survey was cross-sectional (Jacobsen, 2015). For instance, subordinates' OCB and performance was evaluated by the leader in the questionnaire. This evaluation could be recency biased if the subordinate recently



made a mistake or had a significant achievement, that could overly influence the evaluation. Lastly, the majority of this thesis' theoretical underpinnings come from research conducted in North America and East Asia. The material might not be applicable or even true to European employees due to cultural variations in behavior across countries (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, if we looked at other cultures or nations, our conclusions might differ. Why some of our hypotheses lacked support may be understood by a closer investigation of Norway's cultural features in comparison to other nations (Hofstede et al., 2005).

## 5.2 Strengths and Limitations

Although our work has added some new knowledge to the field of leadership, there are some limitations to our study. As a result, the findings must be interpreted with caution. First and foremost, limitations stem from the study being cross-sectional, which come with certain disadvantages. The inability to determine the causal links between environmental and personal elements is a central detriment. Measuring similar constructs at a single point in time leads to temporal ambiguity.

Potential effects of measurement errors must be considered when an interaction study with multiple regression is designed (Jaccard et al., 1990). The most frequent cause of measurement mistakes is *common method bias*, which may have an impact on our results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To avoid this, it is suggested that non-significant interactions can be eliminated from the model in order to reduce multicollinearity and allow for the best interpretation of the significant interactions (Dawson, 2014). However, after doing so, the outcomes did not significantly change, and the non-significant interactions were kept in the final regression. Furthermore, the measurements used in the questionnaire may have been lost in translation as they were translated from English to Norwegian (Temple & Young, 2004). Nevertheless, precaution was exercised by using back-translation and outside consulting to ensure accurate translations and minimize misunderstandings (Cavusgil & Das, 1997).

The Likert scale can also lead to several issues. A response style bias could result from just allowing one type of response, motivating the participants to produce streamlined answers (Suárez et al., 2018). Standardized answer choices also encourage participants to provide short responses, like selecting “Agree” in response to all questions with the same nature (Podsakoff, 2003; Ringdal, 2018). Moreover, some of the participants reported the questionnaire of being too long and time consuming, which may have resulted in the respondents skimming through questions. Nevertheless, in an attempt to increase internal validity, we included control items throughout the survey to make sure participants were paying attention. We also used reverse-coded items to avoid a streamlining of answers. Since the Likert scale was used for both the independent and dependent variables, this decreases the methodological separation of the measurements. However, since responses are influenced by a similar context, potential biases could be produced (Podsakoff et al., 2003). While it is not obtainable to rigorously review every single response, we randomly and occasionally examined answers to investigate whether they contained recurring patterns.

Additional control variables could have been incorporated into our model to enhance internal validity and prevent spurious correlations (Tufté, 2018). For example, recent research by Nguyen et al. (2021) implies that corporate social responsibility plays an important role in the connection between ethical leadership and enhanced firm performance. Corporate social responsibility is positively impacted by ethical leadership, which enhances corporate reputation and performance (Nguyen et al., 2021). Same goes for servant leadership, as research has found servant leadership to be a good predictor of corporate social responsibility (Zieba & Lee-Chuvala, 2020). Thus, whether the organization engages in corporate social responsibility activities could have been significant in understanding how the organization’s position mediates or moderates the relationship. However, control variables should only be used when they suitably emphasize the theoretical framework, as doing so has significant implications for the findings of the study (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016).

As the study design was cross-sectional, the research may be subject to context effects

(Jacobsen, 2015). The survey results may have been influenced by external variables and individual circumstances. For instance, subordinates' performance was evaluated by the leader in the questionnaire. This evaluation could be recency biased if the subordinate recently made a mistake or had a significant achievement, that could overly influence the evaluation. A longitudinal survey could have avoided this, as this study design provides the advantage of providing more accurate data and the ability to detect changes in the individual's responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Malhotra & Dash, 2016). However, as the time horizon for this study is limited, the limitations in time presented a challenge in conducting such a design. Therefore, the choice of a cross-sectional design seemed more appropriate in the given time horizon. Furthermore, personal bias may allow personal feelings about leaders or subordinates influence the evaluation, rather than basing their rating purely on professional performance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, we sought to avoid this by asking the leader to choose the subordinate who had worked in the organization the longest as dyad.

Furthermore, disturbing elements may have had an effect on the responses and response rate, as we had no control over the participant's environment throughout the survey (Jacobsen, 2015). Moreover, despite the survey's anonymity, a participant's demand for social desirability may have influenced their responses because people tend to present themselves favorably regardless of their genuine opinions on a given subject. As a result, a response set bias may arise, obscuring the true link between the variables in order for employees to appear culturally suitable (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Nevertheless, we sought to avoid this by reassuring the respondents their answers would remain anonymous and asking them to be as honest as possible.

Lastly, the majority of this thesis' theoretical underpinnings come from research conducted in North America and East Asia. The material might not be applicable to European employees due to cultural variations in behavior across countries (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, if we looked at other cultures or nations, our conclusions might differ. Why some of our hypotheses lacked support may be understood by a closer investigation of Norway's cultural features in

comparison to other nations (Hofstede et al., 2005).

Our initial goal was to gather data from the 500 biggest companies in Norway. We did, however, notice a low response rate throughout the procedure. Therefore, we went on with the snowball method in order to recruit participants. We acknowledge that this limits our ability to completely generalize our results.

### **5.3 Theoretical Implications**

Previous research has often assumed a positive linear relationship between the examined leadership styles and follower outcomes (Elche et al., 2020; Ghasemy & Frömbling, 2022; Qing et al., 2019) . However, the findings in this study challenge this theory as these relationships might not be as straightforward as we thought. The lack of significant relationships between ethical and servant leadership and followers' OCB and performance suggests that the effect of these leadership philosophies depend on other variables. This requires a greater understanding of the leadership styles to reevaluate how these leadership styles relate with follower outcomes in our theoretical frameworks.

Limited studies, like Stouten et al. (2013), suggest an inverted U-shape relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Although we are not the first to discuss the idea of curvilinear relationships between ethical and servant leadership and follower outcomes, we do bring a fascinating viewpoint. While our hypothesized negative curvilinear relationships were not supported, we found support for positive curvilinear relationships between servant leadership and both organizational citizenship behavior and performance. These findings suggests that non-linear relationships may exist in the dynamics between servant leadership and follower outcomes that theoretical frameworks should be taken into consideration.

Our research also contributes to a deeper understanding of social learning and social exchange theories in the context of leadership. With the positive and significant relationships, we found between both ethical and servant leadership and job satisfaction, we can frame these theories the following way: followers who perceive their leaders as ethical or servant-oriented might feel an obligation to reciprocate with positive attitudes, aligning with social exchange theory, or they might be inspired to adopt the positive behaviors of their leaders, as suggested by social learning theory.

#### **5.4 Practical Implications**

In this study, the significant positive relationship between ethical leadership, servant leadership, and job satisfaction lies at the heart of our results. This emphasizes the importance of organizations including these leadership styles at the forefront of their leadership development initiatives. A satisfied workforce is critical for every firm as it is correlated with reduced turnover rates (Griffeth et al., 2000; Rubenstein et al., 2017). Employee turnover is costly, and keeping employees satisfied does not only secure stability, but also saves resources which can be used in hiring and educating new employees (Ton & Huckman, 2008). Additionally, a satisfied and motivated workforce is more likely to be dedicated and productive, aiding in improving the performance and results of the organization (Harter et al., 2002). As a result, organizations' leadership development programs should place strong emphasis on developing ethical and servant leadership approaches. Providing training and resources to improve leaders' understanding of these leadership styles, as well as foster an environment that encourages such behavior to other. Resulting in a healthy work environment, in which employees feel respected, appreciated, and fulfilled. Ultimately, contributing to a healthier and more productive organization overall.

Our study revealed a positive curvilinear (U-shaped curve) relationship between servant leadership and job performance, indicating that extreme low or high levels of servant leadership provide the optimal job performance while moderate levels do not. At the lowest

levels of servant leadership, the focus on organizational goals, decision-making and performance requirements establishes the sense of clarity and autonomy among the followers, increasing performance. On the other hand, high levels of servant leadership, which puts the needs of the followers as priority, fosters a motivating environment characterized by high levels of engagement – also resulting in good performance. The knowledge of the consequences of the relationship between servant leadership and job performance can help organizations in developing their leadership training programs. In order to successfully adapt their leadership styles to the unique demands and context of their teams, leaders should be taught to recognize the curvilinear relationship.

The study also revealed a positive curvilinear (U-shaped curve) relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), indicating that both very low and very high levels of servant leadership can improve OCB. At the lowest levels of servant leadership, the emphasis on working independently and being self-reliant may lead the employees to go beyond their assigned responsibilities, thus boosting OCB. High levels of servant leadership, on the other hand, prioritizes the needs of the followers, which can create a supportive work environment in which the followers feel appreciated and valued. As a result of this, employees may be more likely to reciprocate the positive behaviors of the leader, resulting in greater levels of OCB.

## **5.5 Research Opportunities and Future Directions**

Several non-significant relationships between the leadership style and follower outcome were found in this study. A potential explanation for these results could be the impact of underlying variables. Therefore, future research into the role of moderating or mediating variables could be beneficial. There is the possibility that the specific leadership style interacts with individual characteristics such as personality traits and values to influence the follower outcomes. Recent studies have also implied the significant role corporate social responsibility has with ethical and servant leadership (Nguyen et al., 2021; Zieba & Lee-Chuvala, 2020). Conducting further

research into the impact of moderating variables, could contribute to a greater understanding of how the leadership styles operate.

Given our time restrictions, a longitudinal study was unfeasible. Therefore, we suggest that it may be useful to conduct a longitudinal study to follow the interactions between leadership style and follower outcomes over time. By conducting such a study, it would be possible to determine if the benefits from ethical and servant leadership on follower outcomes are evident over a longer time frame, providing a more detailed understanding of the interactions between these interactions.

Future research could dissect the concepts of ethical and servant leadership to pinpoint the traits that drive the observed relationships. For instance, is it the emphasis placed on personal development or inherent selflessness and desire to serve others of servant leadership that has the greatest impact on job satisfaction? Such study could help with a more precise understanding of the leadership style, which offers more specific recommendations for leadership training and development.

Lastly, in our study we examined the relationship between ethical and servant leadership and positive follower outcomes in organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and performance. To gain a more balanced understanding of the impact these leadership styles have, future research can examine the relationship with negative outcomes such as counterproductive work behavior.

In conclusion, the suggested directions of studying moderating and mediating variables, longitudinal study, breaking down the ideas of leadership styles and negative follower outcomes are meant to expand our understanding of the relationship between ethical and servant leadership and follower outcomes. In exploring these suggestions, we hope to expand the results from our study and gain a greater understanding of these dynamics.

## 6.0 Conclusion

With this thesis, we aimed to explore the dynamics between ethical and servant leadership and its effects on follower outcomes, such as organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and performance. We aimed to replicate the previous findings and contribute to this field of research in studying the curvilinear relationships that may exist between these variables.

In line with our expectations, we found that both ethical and servant leadership positively predicts job satisfaction. Organizations can draw from these findings by placing a greater emphasis on developing a stronger understanding of these approaches, providing training and resources, and create an environment that encourages ethical- and servant-oriented behavior, in order to develop a motivated work environment that reduces the likeliness for turnover.

With the curvilinear relationship between ethical and servant leadership and follower outcomes, we expected a negative relationship (inverted U-curve). Surprisingly and contradicting to our expectations, our research found that servant leadership has a positive curvilinear relationship with both organizational citizenship behavior and performance, suggesting that both low and high levels of servant leadership can lead to positive follower outcomes. This insight can guide organizations in developing leadership programs and training and further understand the complex effects of servant leadership on followers' job performance.



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