

The Influence of Servant Leadership on Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Hiding: The Mediating Role of Trust in Leader

Aseem Majid Rizvi, Dr. Anjum Bano Kazimi

1. Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Education, Iqra University
aseem.m.rizvi@gmail.com
2. Professor, Department of Education, Iqra University
anjumkazimi@gmail.com

Abstract

Based on social exchange theory, this study explores servant leadership's impact on two employee behaviors: Knowledge hiding and Knowledge sharing and examines the psychological mechanism between servant leadership and these two behaviors as trust in leader. A multi-item scale, validated with teaching staff of private sector schools (N = 312), was used to collect data. The measurement model showed reliability and had convergent and discriminant validity and hypotheses were tested using Hayes' PROCESS macro. Results indicate that servant leadership decreases knowledge hiding and increases both knowledge sharing and trust in leader, which in turn decreases knowledge hiding and increases knowledge sharing. All seven hypothesized relationships were confirmed with both the servant leadership–trust in the leader link and the trust in leader–knowledge sharing/hiding links being significant. The findings extend servant leadership and knowledge-management scholarship by giving further depth to the understanding of how trust contributes to minimizing knowledge hiding and fostering knowledge sharing in the context of servant leadership and providing practical guidance for building a knowledge sharing culture in education institutions.

Key Words: A servant's leadership style, knowledge hiding, knowledge sharing, trust in leader, social exchange theory, and Pakistan are the keywords.

1. Introduction

It is well accepted that knowledge is the most strategically important resource in knowledge-intensive organisations, and schools are perhaps a prime example; where the quality of teaching, the volume of collaboration, and overall performance relies on the ease with which ideas and knowledge can flow between and within hub of teachers. Institutions dedicate huge resources to attracting and keeping smart academics, but that investment doesn't mean anything if that academic doesn't share what they knew with other academics, guide mentors they meet on the job, or bring knowledge to the institution's mission. However, knowledge does not always get shared; employees often withhold or hide what they know when it is requested by a fellow employee, which is referred to as knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2019). Having knowledge in common is fundamental to collaboration, innovation and organisational learning, but hiding knowledge is the opposite of that, so researchers have pored over the literature to determine what factors lead people to act in one way or the other. This concern is especially significant in resource-poor education environments in which institutions may not have the available funds to invest in a complex knowledge-management system, and they must instead depend on the inter-personal dynamics to decide whether valuable knowledge is shared easily among individuals, departments, or locked in individuals' heads.

Leadership style is one of the strongest predictors for employees' knowledge-related behavior because it impacts on the social and motivational climate of knowledge exchange. Servant leadership is directly related to knowledge sharing and the prevention of knowledge hiding because it focuses on supporting the development, well-being and empowerment of followers (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008), which in turn facilitates the development of high quality, trust-based relationships, known to sustain knowledge sharing (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Studies conducted previously have investigated the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge sharing (Davis, 2000; Remy & Arzi, 2008; Davis & Wiers, 2010), as well as the potential of servant leadership for knowledge hiding (Luu, 2017; Shafi et al., 2020; Srimulyani et al., 2023; Wang, 2025; Anwaar & Jingwei, 2022; BAŞ & Ekinici, 2024; Zada et al., 2022). There are still two gaps: First, although knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding are constructs of a behaviour but conceptually and empirically are distinct from the same underlying leadership style, few studies have explored these two behaviours in tandem within the same model. Secondly, the mechanism by which servant leadership leads to these outcomes is worthy of further study, specifically, social exchange theory emphasizes trust in the leader as a key pathway; and this mediator has not been as widely studied as others in educational research on servant leadership and knowledge behaviors.

This study aims to fill both of these voids by creating and testing a mediation model, where (a) servant leadership impacts directly on knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing, and (b) trust

in leader acts as a mediator between these two variables. The model is analysed in Pakistan's collectivistic, high power distance culture, and for teachers of private schools, where the role of trust between the leader and the followers in Pakistan is very significant in determining discretionary workplace behaviour. Thus, the study raises two research questions: What is the role of servant leadership on relationship with knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing of employees? What is the role of trust in leader between knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing of employees?

The contribution of this research to the literature is in several ways. From a conceptual perspective, it builds on the theory of social exchange in the context of school education in a developing, collectivist country and combines the notions of servant leadership, trust and knowledge management within a single mediation framework. In the empirical analysis, the data from 312 teachers was analysed using confirmatory factor analysis and Hayes' PROCESS macro, which shows direct and mediated relationships between these constructs. In practical terms, the study affords practical recommendations for education leaders to create a culture of knowledge sharing within the institution through behaviors that promote servant leadership, characterized by trust.

This study is especially relevant to the context of Pakistani education sector. Pakistani private schools are situated in a larger national culture characterized by high power distance, high collectivist orientation and close emotional linkage with authority figures and strong informal knowledge transmission between teachers and students within the departments and less formal transmission in the country. Meanwhile, there are practical challenges that have their roots in limited resources, high teaching loads, and mounting pressures to increase learning output in classrooms, all of which make it even more important to know what works and doesn't in getting knowledge flowing among teachers. The study of servant leadership's impact on knowledge behaviors in this context thus has theoretical value because it would test the social exchange dynamics in a new cultural context, as well as practical value because of the sector's importance in fulfilling national commitments towards education.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical background of Social Exchange Theory.

For this research study, the theoretical framework is based on social exchange theory (SET) that views social relationships as the result of multiple exchanges of tangible and intangible resources based on trust and reciprocity (Blau, 1964). Social exchanges are not only economic exchanges, but also exchanges that have unspecified obligations attached to them: the exchange of something of value is felt as an obligation to return something of equal value, and repeated exchanges of this type lead to the establishment of high-quality exchanges in which there is a sense of mutual trust and loyalty (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The essence of social exchange, then, is that there is no definite timetable or valuation for reciprocity, which makes it possible for the exchange to be more than a transaction, and more like a lasting relationship built on trust.

In leader–follower relationships, followers' perception of other-oriented behavior and care from their leader is associated with their increased trust in the leader and their discretionary behaviors that serve the other and the organization, such as not withholding knowledge and sharing it with their leader. Knowledge is also a game of give and take, and the quantity that is shared is a social exchange decision, in that employees give what is in line with what they get. The two research questions and seven hypotheses in this research paper are thus theoretically interconnected, as servant leadership, trust in leader and knowledge behaviors are related to each other.

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1970, 1977) presented servant leadership as a philosophy, in which serving followers takes precedence and the leader's interests are secondary to the growth, autonomy, and well-being of followers. In his original formulation, the servant leader is someone who starts with a desire to serve, and then makes a deliberated choice to lead; the conventional see–leadership paradigm is a leader who starts out with a desire to lead, and then chooses to serve. These were followed by the identification of ten characteristics of servant leadership by Spears (2010): listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to followers' growth, and community building, as well as multidimensional measurement models of servant behaviors that were later developed in empirical studies (Liden et al., 2008, 2014), which include the following: emotional healing, conceptual skills, empowering and developing followers, prioritizing followers' needs, ethical behavior, and value creation for the community. Van Dierendonck's (2011) review further confirms the servant leadership model differs from transactional and transformational with the leader's willingness to sacrifice on behalf of followers.

The literature on servant leadership consistently correlates servant leadership with positive follower outcomes such as trust, engagement, organizational citizenship and decreased counterproductive behavior across a variety of industries and cultures (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership has a strong emphasis on relational, motivational influence, which is not dependent on formal systems of reward or punishment, and knowledge sharing and hiding are both hard to monitor and hard to control through formal systems. In education context, servant leadership is found to be related to knowledge hiding reduction (Anwaar & Jingwei, 2022; BAŞ & Ekinci, 2024) and to increase the knowledge sharing and citizenship behavior among teachers (Shafi et al., 2020). The study of servant leadership is particularly appropriate in educational institutions, where the work is collegial and knowledge based, department heads and principals have less coercive power over teachers than do managers in a more hierarchical commercial setting, and the willingness to share knowledge is more often based on relationships than on contractual obligations. Servant leadership is also conceptually unique from some of the other positive leadership styles that have been studied and are commonly found in the organizational behavior literature. Transformational leadership is about communicating a vision, motivating followers through thought provoking ideas to become beyond themselves to serve others and the group's best interests as a whole, but not

necessarily about serving followers' best interests over the leaders, as servant leadership does. Ethical leadership focuses on normatively appropriate behavior and the adoption of rewards and disciplines to encourage ethical behavior, and it is relatively silent in terms of end goals in terms of follower growth and empowerment. By contrast, Servant leadership is unique in its emphasis on an ethical basis and its clear focus on the development of followers as its primary concern, making it a particularly likely antecedent of relationally sensitive behaviours like knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing, in which followers' willingness to engage in cooperative behaviours is highly dependent on their perception of the leader's underlying motives.

Knowledge Hiding & Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge hiding refers to when an employee purposefully hides or suppresses information that has been asked for by another organizational member (Connelly et al., 2019; Peng, 2013). It is conceptually different from the lack of sharing knowledge, as it is an active hiding of that knowledge even when requested and it has been consistently associated with lower levels of trust, poor team relationships, and a loss of creativity and performance at the team and person level (Bernatović et al. 2022). Theories of why knowledge is hidden usually revolve around two key ideas: (1) that employees worry about losing their competitive edge if they give up their knowledge, and/or (2) that they doubt the motivations of the person asking for the knowledge, or feel the company or leader is not conducive to a relational leadership climate. Knowledge hiding in a school context could involve a teacher refusing to share best practices, research information, or grant writing methods with a colleague, which would impact the overall quality of teaching and research within the school.

In contrast, knowledge sharing is the voluntary transfer of task-relevant information, know-how, and feedback to other members of the organization to help them produce new ideas or policies and procedures, or resolve problems (Davenport, 1998), and has been called the building block of organizational learning, innovation, and competitive advantage (Hsu et al., 2007). As knowledge sharing is inherently challenging and involves a certain risk of losing out a knowledge-based advantage for the sharer, it is broadly accepted that knowledge sharing is a discretionary, extra-role behavior that employees should only engage in when it is in the best interest of the relationship and the sharer. While knowledge hiding and sharing are sometimes considered as two poles of the continuum of the same phenomenon, some scholars argue that they are different behaviours that originate from different psychological processes: hiding involves mainly self-protection and distrust, while sharing involves mainly reciprocity, prosocial concern, and identification with the organization, and that an employee's context may simultaneously facilitate sharing behaviors and inhibit hiding behaviors, or the other way round. This distinction makes it very likely that knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing are two distinct outcomes rather than mirror images and can be modeled as separate, non-mirror-image outcome variables in the same theoretical model, as done in the present study, and is consistent with more recent empirical studies of the servant leadership literature, which investigated the two behaviours as two separate, but conceptually related, dependent variables (Zada et al., 2022).

The organizational implications of these two behaviours are significant and well known. On an individual level, knowledge hiding undermines the trust of the hidden party, and can lead to them distrusting and retaliating against the knowledge hider, creating a spiral of distrust across the team or department (Bernatović et al., 2022). Collectively, knowledge hiding lowers problem-solving abilities, undermines innovation and innovation capability, and stifles absorptive capacity, while knowledge sharing has the opposite effect by enhancing absorptive capacity, improving the quality of the decision-making process, and boosting organizational resilience. In the educational context, these relationships manifest directly in the quality of teaching, curriculum development and research productivity: a school where teachers freely share their pedagogical strategies, research leads and administrative knowledge is likely to be more productive than a similar place in which teachers do not share the same knowledge.

Trust in Leader

The trust in the leader is defined as the readiness on the part of the follower to voluntarily place themselves in a position of dependency because they believe the leader will behave in an ethical, competent and benevolent manner (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Trust is one of the major currencies of social exchange relationships: followers are less likely to engage in desirable acts if they do not trust the leader, and those acts that are costly and discretionary for the followers are more likely to benefit followers and the organization when it comes from the trustful leader, as well as contributing to the reciprocation of a leader's support (Abbas & Tariq, 2023). Trust serves as a lubricant that facilitates fulfillment of the vague, unspecific expectations of social exchange relationships over time without the necessity of contract or monitoring; in the absence of trust, social exchange members typically resort to more calculating, self-protective modes, such as withholding effort, information, and knowledge.

The consistent demonstration of the attitudes of empathy, stewardship and the follower-first approach are theorized to be particularly effective in fostering this type of trust, since followers' behaviour suggests benevolent intentions and mitigates their risk of being exploited by the leader. As opposed to leadership styles that are predominantly transactional in nature and based on the exchange of material goods for compliance, servant leadership communicates benevolence through low-cost, everyday leadership behaviours such as active listening, humility, and willingness to serve rather than command, and it is this perception of benevolent attitude that most strongly fosters deep interpersonal trust (Ahmad et al., 2021). After gaining trust, employees will be more willing to take the interpersonal risk of sharing their knowledge because there is the potential for knowledge to be shared for the benefit of another potential employee, and are less likely to engage in the self-protective, distrustful behaviour of knowledge hiding. Based on the literature review of the related models for servant leadership—employee knowledge hiding and employee knowledge sharing, the theory of trust in leader was proposed as the proximal mechanism through which servant leadership influences employees' knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing behaviors.

In academic settings, where there is no formal tracking of day-to-day teaching and collegial interaction, and where department heads are likely to oversee faculty who have more expertise than the leader in a particular field, trust in leader could have a special importance. In such low monitoring environments with information asymmetry, trust acts as a substitute for formal control in regulating cooperative behaviour, and fosters faculty members' willingness to be generous in granting the benefit of the doubt, in expending discretionary effort on departmental projects, and in sharing privileged knowledge without fear of it being misappropriated or unacknowledged. Finally, this is because in the educational institute setting there are no strong formal incentive for knowledge sharing, which makes it a theoretically appropriate (and perhaps conservative) test of the proposed trust-mediated model: any observed effects can be more plausibly explained by the relational mechanisms, especially if they operate in the absence of strong formal incentives.

3. Hypotheses Development

Direct Effects of Servant Leadership

Followers of servant leaders are less likely to view knowledge as a source of personal power to be guarded and are lesser likely to hide knowledge from colleagues as knowledge is not seen as an asset to be guarded, as servant leaders focus on followers' growth and well-being and explicitly discourage self-serving, competitive behavior (Zada et al., 2022). Often, the knowledge hiding phenomenon is a consequence of a defensive and self-protective attitude, where employees feel that sharing knowledge will reduce their own relative status or make them fall victims to the organization. Servant leaders can actively prevent this attitude by modelling being “serving first”, by reducing the focus on hierarchy and competition, and by making it clear that the needs of the followers, and not the servant's own advancement, are the primary focus of the organization. Meanwhile, through empowering followers, encouraging voice and modeling ethical and cooperative behavior, servant leaders establish a climate where sharing expertise is normatively expected and socially rewarded (Wang, 2025; Wang et al., 2021). These leaders are more likely to set a good example for followers when they explicitly encourage knowledge sharing, for example by sharing their personal experiences and insight with their followers. It is, therefore, hypothesized:

H1: Servant leadership positively influences knowledge hiding.

H2: Servant leadership positively influences knowledge sharing.

Abbas and Tariq (2023) and Ahmad et al. (2021) theorize followers to have increased trust in servant leaders that have consistently shown benevolence, integrity and behaviors that put the follower first. As followers see a leader behave repeatedly over a time of various situations, they begin to trust that the leader's behavior is consistently motivated by a concern for others, rather than a strategy for self-serving. It is, therefore, hypothesized:

H3: Servant leadership positively influences trust in the leader.

The impacts of trust in the Leader.

Relying on social exchange logic, followers who have confidence in their leaders are more likely to share information openly, and are less likely to behave in a guarded self-protective manner of knowledge hiding. Trust makes followers feel less vulnerable to exploitation, negative evaluation or to losing their competitive advantage if they share valuable knowledge with their followers, and makes followers feel more confident that the leader and organization will acknowledge and reward cooperative, transparent behavior over time. We therefore hypothesize:

H4: Trust in the leader positively influences knowledge hiding.

H5: Trust in the leader positively influences knowledge sharing.

Mediating Role of Trust in Leader

The above arguments can be combined into a theory that servant leadership indirectly affects knowledge sharing as well by influencing followers to share knowledge through trust, and directly through the reduction of knowledge hiding. In other words, servant leadership's other-oriented behaviors are manifested in followers' knowledge behaviors through trust in leader, which follows the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). We therefore hypothesize:

H6: Trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding.

H7: Trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge sharing.

Conceptual Framework

The hypothesized mediation model is shown in Figure 1. The independent variable is servant leadership, which has direct relationships with knowledge hiding (H1) and knowledge sharing (H2) and an additional relationship with trust in leader (H3) that predicts knowledge hiding (H4) and knowledge sharing (H5). The servant leadership–knowledge sharing (H7) relationship, and the servant leadership–knowledge hiding (H6) relationship are mediated by trust in leader.

Figure 1. The hypothesized conceptual model of servant leadership, trust in leader, knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing.

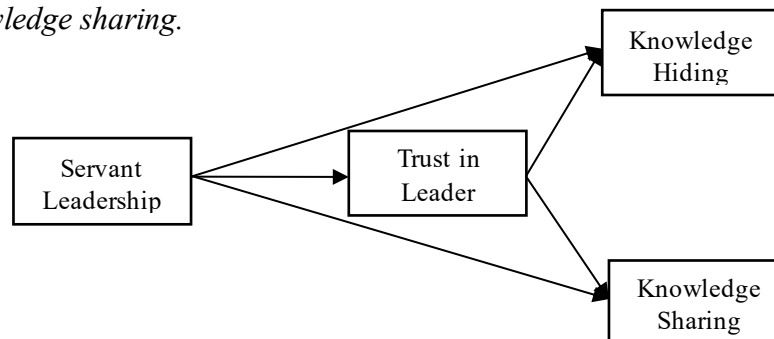


Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

4. Methodology

A quantitative cross sectional survey design was used in this study to test the hypothesized mediation model. This was done in a deductive, hypothesis-testing manner, following the typical organizational behavior research methodology that uses structural equation modeling and conditional process analysis to test the conceptual model and hypotheses that were generated based on social exchange theory and previous empirical studies.

The data were gathered by using a structured questionnaire from the teaching staff of the private and public sector schools of Pakistan. The teachers were apprised about the scope and the aim the study. Before taking part in the study, participants were told of the academic nature of the study, that participation was discretionary, that their responses would be anonymous and strictly confidential. The number of questionnaires distributed on a non-probability sampling by convenience was 490 and the returned questionnaires were 349, giving a response rate of about 71%. The total returned questionnaires were 402, but 37 were ruled out due to incomplete items and outliers, and 312 questionnaires were used for hypothesis testing. As indicated in Table 1, the sample was made up of a large proportion of women (91.0%) and young people (36.2%) below the age of 30; almost half of the respondents (47.4%) had reached the level of master's degree, and all the respondents were in a teaching position within their institution.

Table 1 Demographics Details of the Participants

Variables	Classes	Frequency	Percent
Age (in years)	<30	113	36.2
	30-35	63	20.2
	35-40	68	21.8
	>40	68	21.8
Gender	Male	28	9.0
	Female	284	91.0
Education	Certification	89	28.5
	Bachelor	73	23.4
	Master	148	47.4
	PhD	2	.6
Professional Degree	B. Ed (14 years)	115	36.9
	B. Ed (16 years)	76	24.4
	M. Ed	36	11.5
	Others	85	27.2
Position	Teachers	312	100

Measures

All constructs were measured by previously validated multi-item scales based on the published literature in organizational behavior, and all items were rated on a 5 point Likert scale

ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with higher scores representing a higher standing for the construct being measured. The use of previously validated scales (not the development of new scales) was intended to maximize the construct validity and to provide direct comparisons of the present findings with previous empirical research which used the same instruments.

The 7-item short form measure of Servant Leadership adapted from Liden et al. (2015) included attitudes of putting others needs before self, assisting subordinates in learning and growing, and being ethical. Trust in leader was assessed using a 6-item scale adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990) which assessed followers' feelings of trust in the leader's fairness, competence, and reliability. The 3-item scale used to measure knowledge hiding behavior was adapted from Peng (2013) to include evasive and rationalized concealment of requested knowledge, and the 5-item scale to measure knowledge sharing behavior was adapted from Davenport (1998) and used by Hsu et al. (2007) to measure the voluntary provision of expertise, experience, and know-how to colleagues. The age, gender, level of education, professional degree and position of the respondents were documented as demographic variables and statistically controlled for in all regressions and conditional process analyses conducted to preclude alternative demographic arguments for the observed relationships.

5. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in two phases. Firstly, confirmation factor analysis (CFA) was used to see the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the measurement model in accordance with the thresholds recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2010). It is an important step in the survey-based organizational research as it validates that every latent construct is measured with the intended measure(s) and is empirically separable from other constructs in the model, prior to testing of the structural relationships between constructs. To check for common method bias, the Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1967) and inter-construct correlations were examined as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). In order to check for multicollinearity among the predictor variables, variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were calculated and were found to be below the threshold of 10. Variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were calculated for the predictors, and were below the threshold of 10, indicating that there is not a high degree of multicollinearity among the predictor variables. Second, a satisfactory measurement model was obtained, so both direct and mediation effects were tested with path analysis in AMOS and Hayes's (2012) PROCESS macro for SPSS by using 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to assess the significance of the mediation effects. To avoid the assumption that the sampling distribution of the indirect effect is normally distributed, which typically makes bootstrapped confidence intervals a more accurate and powerful test of mediation, bootstrapping was preferred over the traditional Sobel test.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Common Method Bias: Common method bias (CMB) was assessed according to the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003) as all the variables were measured on a self-report basis. A single unrotated factor explained 33.44% of the total variance, which is well below the 50% critical value (Harman, 1967), and so CMB was not considered to be a serious issue. Also, as shown in Table 4, no inter-construct correlation was greater than the conservative cut-off of .90, further evidence that common method bias did not significantly compromise results. Combined, these two complementary checks argue for substantive associations among servant leadership, trust in leader, knowledge hiding, and knowledge sharing rather than for common rater effects or shared measurement method.

Multicollinearity

The variance inflation factor (VIF) for all the predictors in the regression models was between 1.24 and 1.54, which is much lower than the cutoff value of 3, suggesting that the results of the regression models were not likely to be influenced by multicollinearity. The tolerance values, which are the inverse of the VIFs, also did not exceed acceptable limits, thus reinforcing that the predictor variables that were retained in the model were not as highly correlated with each other as could have jeopardized the stability and/or interpretability of the path coefficients estimated.

Table 2 Collinearity Statistics

Model	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		
SL	.708	1.413
TL	.743	1.345
KS	.651	1.535
Outcome: KH		

Note: SL=Servant Leadership, PM=Prosocial Motivation, KH=Knowledge Hiding, KS=Knowledge Sharing, TL=Trust in Leader, LLCI=Lower Limit Confidence Interval, and ULCI=Upper Limit Confidence Interval

Model Reliability and Validity.

All item-level convergent validity standardized factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of .60 as presented in Table 3, reflecting good convergent validity for all items. The reliability was satisfactory (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010) with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .84 to .93, the composite reliability (CR) values ranging from .86 to .93 and the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranging from .53 to .72, all of which exceeded the recommended thresholds of .70, .70 and .50, respectively. To support the discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE for each construct was compared with the correlation between each construct and all other constructs in the model, with the square root of the AVE for each construct

larger than its correlation with all other constructs in the model (shown in parentheses along the diagonal of Table 4). The measurement model also showed good fit to the data: $\chi^2/df = 1.58$, RMSEA = .043, CFI = .964, and SRMR = .041, all of which fall within the recommended thresholds, suggesting that the four factor structure (servant leadership, trust in servant leader, knowledge hiding, and knowledge sharing) is acceptable and appropriate for the data and that it is suitable for moving to structural path estimation.

Prior to formal path analysis, Zero order correlations for the pattern of hypothesized relationships were consistent and provided initial support to the hypotheses of the study (Table 4). Trust in leader ($r = .367$, $p < .01$) and knowledge sharing ($r = .510$, $p < .01$) were all positively correlated with servant leadership, and knowledge hiding ($r = -.311$, $p < .01$) was negatively correlated. Trust in leader was also negatively related to knowledge hiding ($r = -.306$, $p < .01$) and positively related to knowledge sharing ($r = .424$, $p < .01$). Neither of the demographic control variables showed a strong or consistent pattern of correlation with the substantive variables of this study, and thus the relationships observed were not the result of the respondents' age, gender, level of education or job category.

Table 3 *Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model*

Construct	Items	Loadings (range)	α	CR	AVE
Servant Leadership	7	.63–.84	.904	.906	.581
Trust in Leader	6	.62–.85	.872	.875	.543
Knowledge Hiding	3	.81–.87	.867	.871	.692
Knowledge Sharing	5	.61–.82	.840	.857	.529

Table 4 *Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Discriminant Validity*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	
1. Servant Leadership	3.92	.89	(.762)			
2. Trust in Leader	3.93	.87	.367**	(.737)		
3. Knowledge Hiding	2.07	.91	-.311**	-.306**	(.832)	
4. Knowledge Sharing	3.99	.82	.510**	.424**	-.417**	(.727)

Note. $N = 312$. ** $p < .01$. Values on the diagonal in parentheses are the square roots of AVE. Correlations with the demographic control variables (age, gender, education, professional degree, position) are omitted from this table for brevity but were included as covariates in all regression models

6. Hypothesis Testing

Direct & Indirect Effects

The findings of the path model that was modeled in AMOS is presented in Table 5, where the measurement model was converted into a path model, controlling for the respondents' demographic characteristics, in order to test the hypothesized direct relationship between servant leadership, trust in leader, knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing. This was confirmed by the significant and negative prediction of knowledge hiding by servant leadership ($\beta = -.236$, $SE = .058$, $CR = -4.054$, $p < .001$) which supported H1. The results showed that servant leadership was significantly and positively correlated with knowledge sharing ($\beta = .379$, $SE = .046$, $CR = 8.167$, $p < .001$) supporting H2. To support H3, servant leadership also was found to be significantly and positively related to trust in leader ($\beta = .361$, $SE = .052$, $CR = 6.957$, $p < .001$). In turn, trust in leader significantly and negatively predicted knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.233$, $SE = .059$, $CR = -3.925$, $p < .001$), supporting H4, and significantly and positively predicted knowledge sharing ($\beta = .258$, $SE = .047$, $CR = 5.460$, $p < .001$), supporting H5. As a whole, the five direct paths show that servant leadership and trust in leader are both strong, independent predictors of employees' knowledge behaviors, with effect sizes for the knowledge sharing consistently larger than that of the knowledge hiding across both predictors.

Table 5 *Direct and Indirect Effects*

Path	β / Effect	SE	CR	p / LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effects					
SL $\rightarrow$ KH	-.236	.058	- 4.054	< .001	—
SL $\rightarrow$ KS	.379	.046	8.167	< .001	—
SL $\rightarrow$ TL	.361	.052	6.957	< .001	—
TL $\rightarrow$ KH	-.233	.059	- 3.925	< .001	—
TL $\rightarrow$ KS	.258	.047	5.460	< .001	—
Indirect Effects					
SL $\rightarrow$ TL $\rightarrow$ KH	-.081	.027	—	-.128	-.039
SL $\rightarrow$ TL $\rightarrow$ KS	.100	.029	—	.057	.152

Note. $N = 312$. *SL* = Servant Leadership, *TL* = Trust in Leader, *KH* = Knowledge Hiding, *KS* = Knowledge Sharing. Indirect effect columns show effect, boot SE, and 95% bootstrap LLCI/ULCI.

Mediation of Trust in Leader

This was followed by bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals (5,000 bootstraps) which confirmed that trust in leader significantly mediated both relationships. Additionally, the indirect effect of servant leadership on knowledge hiding via trust in leader was negative and significant (effect = $-.081$, boot SE = $.027$, 95% CI [$-.128$, $-.039$]) and therefore supported H6. The indirect effect of servant leadership on knowledge sharing through trust in leader was positive and significant (effect = $.100$, boot SE = $.029$, 95% CI [$.057$; $.152$]), supporting H7. The results show that the direct relationships between servant leadership and employees' knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing were still statistically significant after controlling for trust in leader (see Table 5), suggesting that the relationship between servant leadership and the employees' knowledge behaviors is partially mediated by trust in leader. Substantively, it is found that servant leadership can reduce the problem of knowledge hiding and increase the possibility of knowledge sharing, both through the process of building followers' trust in their leader, and through other mechanisms that are not encompassed by trust. In general, the data confirmed all seven hypothesized relationships, thus supporting the proposed mediation model.

7. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and the knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing practices of school teachers and the mediating variables, which are 'trust in leader' and 'trust in leader in knowledge sharing process. Overall, the results are consistent and supportive of all seven hypotheses, and offer some interesting findings. First, servant leadership had significant direct effects on both the outcome behaviors: knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing, which supports and expands the previous research on servant leadership in other cultural and organizational settings (Anwaar & Jingwei, 2022; BAŞ & Ekinici, 2024; Shafi et al., 2020; Zada et al., 2022) within the higher education sector of Pakistan. This is in line with the conceptualization of servant leadership as leaders aiming to serve followers' interests first, which leads followers to perceive less need to have to protect knowledge defensively and allows for open sharing of knowledge to be legitimised and reinforced.

Second, trust in leader became a significant and substantively important mediating variable, accounting for a substantial amount of the covariance of servant leadership with both outcomes. This finding supports the social exchange explanation of the impact of servant leadership behaviors on followers (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) in that, when servant leaders behave toward others, followers respond with trust and then with discretionary knowledge behaviors. The mediating role of trust is consistent with and extends the knowledge-behavior domain as previous studies have shown that trust is a key determinant of the translation of positive leadership styles to desirable follower outcomes (Abbas & Tariq, 2023).

When stated hypothesis by hypothesis, the pattern of results provides a good narrative. The support for H1 and H2 implies that servant leadership has a direct effect on knowledge sharing and hiding that is different in part, as the magnitude of the direct effect on knowledge sharing ($\beta = .379$) is slightly larger than the direct effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.236$). This is a nuance that would be lost in the analysis when the two constructs are treated as a single bipolar measure. The support for H3 suggests that servant leadership is a key antecedent of followers' trust in their leader, in keeping with theorising that followers read servant leadership behaviours as indicative of benevolent and trustworthy intent. The two items of H4 and H5 were supported, which means that trust in leader is not just a downstream effect of servant leadership, but it is an active predictor of knowledge outcomes in addition to a proxy for servant leadership. Finally, partial mediation, rather than full, was found for both pathways, as the direct paths from servant leadership to both outcomes were still strong after accounting for trust in leader, suggesting that servant leadership may be related to other factors beyond trust that were not modeled in the present study but are worthy of further exploration in future inquiry.

These results suggest that servant leadership is a behavioural cue that inhibits the hiding of knowledge to oneself and promotes sharing of knowledge with others, and is also a relational cue that increases trust and thus further promotes these behaviours. The dual pathway—direct and trust-mediated—may help account for the fact that servant leadership has been found to be one of the more consistent organizations-behavior predictors: its influence is not dependent upon a single pathway but rather multiple pathways, working in tandem. Although the specific mediating variable studied has differed, the pattern of results reported here is also similar to that of adjacent contexts, such as in the healthcare sector, prior research has found that servant leadership reduces knowledge hoarding through mediated mechanisms (Zada et al., 2022); and in Indonesian public organizations, knowledge sharing was linked to organizational culture and citizenship behaviors (Srimulyani et al., 2023), which implies that the trust-based mechanism we found here could be applicable across quite different occupational and cultural contexts. In comparison to the direct effects, however, the size of the mediated effects observed in the present study (indirect effects of $-.081$ and $.100$) was modest, suggesting that trust in the leader is a valid and statistically significant psychological mechanism, yet is just one of likely multiple psychological mechanisms which link servant leadership to employees' knowledge behaviors.

Theoretical Implications

This study has several theoretical contributions which are as follows: First of all, it adds to the social exchange theory by providing empirical evidence for the reciprocity logic that has been the foundation of social exchange-based accounts of the nature of leadership effectiveness (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which is that a leader's style is transformed into contrasting knowledge behaviors.

Second, this study addresses the call in the literature to avoid conceptualizing knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing as mirror images and to consider their potentially different nomological

networks (Connelly et al., 2019). This distinction is supported by the finding that the direct effect of servant leadership was slightly more pronounced for knowledge sharing than for knowledge hiding, implying that future theorizing needs to theorize on distinct (not symmetric) causal pathways for the two behaviors. Third, the study broadens the literature on servant leadership largely from the Western and East Asian contexts to the education context of Pakistan, a collectivistic and high power-distance culture where trust in authority might have special meaning and thus, further enriching the cross-cultural generalizability of servant leadership theory (Eva et al., 2019). Fourth, the use of trust in leader as an incomplete mediator suggests that other relational or motivational processes such as psychological safety or leader–member exchange quality may also be at work to convey the impact of servant leadership, providing a clear path forward for future research.

Practical Implications

The findings provide practical recommendations to the school administration and Human Resources practitioners. Servant leadership behaviors were found to be meaningful in reducing knowledge hiding and increasing knowledge sharing, and therefore schools and other education institutions should focus on servant leadership training programs, including active listening, empathy, empowerment, stewardship, and follower-first decision making, for their department heads, deans, and academic leaders. Such training might be integrated with a continuous development or leadership succession initiative to make sure that new academic leaders have hands-on leadership skills, including regular one-on-one mentoring conversations, transparent and participatory decision making, and advocacy for teacher development instead of just leadership philosophy.

The relationship between knowledge outcomes and trust in leader was a major link in the chain; therefore, leaders will need to be consistent, transparent and integrity in their everyday interactions with faculty, for such positive behaviors as servant leadership will only have their positive impact on knowledge outcomes if they first result in trust in the leader. Leadership development could thus include regular anonymous climate assessments that focus specifically on teachers trust in those around them, so that leadership issues can be identified and addressed early before they become visible as an uptick in knowledge hiding or less collaboration. The decision to integrate servant leadership into the curriculum must not be based solely on trust-building, as there was also a significant direct effect of servant leadership on knowledge behaviors beyond the influence of trust alone. Therefore, educational institutions should do more than just establish trust-building measures; they should also encourage other complementary structural interventions, such as creating formal knowledge-sharing platforms, cross-departmental teaching circles, or knowledge-sharing reward systems that promote and incentivize collaborative knowledge sharing, to reinforce the changes in knowledge behaviors that are initiated by servant leadership.

The findings hint at the potential for investing in building leadership capacity to benefit not just individual institutions but the education sector as a whole in terms of the teaching it produces.

National education institutions have the opportunity to embed servant leadership in their accreditation standards, leadership certification programs, and/or requirements for departmental leadership and principals to create institutional trust building practices that this study identifies as consequential, through curriculum, research productivity, and student outcomes.

Strengths of the Study

The study has its strengths as well as its weaknesses, and these strengths should be kept in mind. The two-stage analytical procedure (quality of measurement in the first stage and structural path modeling in the second) is in accordance with best practices in organizational studies, and helps avoid a risk of artifactual structural results due to poor measurement. Bootstrapped bias-corrected confidence intervals offer a sounder and growing alternative to the simple use of normal-theory significance tests when assessing indirect effects, and with the typical sampling distribution of such effects being asymmetric, they offer an increasingly attractive approach to the task. The explicit modeling of multiple demographic covariates further bolsters confidence that the observed effects are not due to the hypothesized psychological processes but to confounding demographic characteristics of the sample, while the systematic assessment of common method bias and multicollinearity adds to the credibility of the reported effects.

Directions for future research and limitations.

The results of this study should be viewed with caution, however, because of certain limitations that suggest fruitful future research. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for strong causal inferences; although the hypothesized causal relationships are theoretically supported, alternative causal relationships (such as highly trusting employees seeing their leaders as more servant-leaders) cannot be excluded as the pattern of results is consistent with the hypothesized causal relationships. The proposed mediation model could be tested in a more rigorous way using longitudinal designs in which servant leadership, trust, and knowledge behaviors are measured at multiple points or with experimental and quasi-experimental designs that would directly manipulate servant leadership behaviors.

Second, the results may have limited generalizability to more gender balanced samples or other educational sectors because the sample was obtained using non-probability purposive sampling methods, and the sample was overwhelmingly female (91%). Future studies should use probability sampling methods and intentionally aim for more gender balanced samples, by gender and institution type, to further increase external validity. Likewise, as all the institutions involved were schools, the results are not necessarily applicable to higher education pedestals or to non-educational knowledge-intensive industries (e.g., healthcare, information technology, and professional services), in which the environment in which leaders and followers must operate and the knowledge-hiding stakes may vary.

Third, all variables were assessed at a single time using self-reports, which may introduce common method variance even though Harman's single factor test and the inter-construct

correlation analysis indicated that there was no common method variance; future research should enhance the construct validity and causal validity by employing multiple assessors for knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing, or by adopting multitimes and multisources designs that allow subordinates to rate servant leadership while peers or supervisors rate the knowledge behaviours. Finally, as the hypothesized relationships were only partially mediated, further studies could add other mediators, including psychological safety, leader–member exchange quality, or organizational identification, and even other moderators, including organizational knowledge-sharing culture, job autonomy, employees' prosocial motivation, or team psychological climate, to further explore the boundary conditions and mechanisms of servant leadership influence. Lastly, given that the data were gathered from only private school teachers in Pakistan, additional efforts are required to ensure reproduction of the present results in other knowledge-intensive settings, organizational levels and national cultures, especially those with lower PDI.

8. Conclusion

The results from this study confirm that servant leadership has a significant influence on knowledge behaviors of university teachers, which includes knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing, direct and indirect, via trust in servant leadership. The study extends the social exchange theory into an unexplored cultural and organizational context by simultaneously theorizing and testing two theoretically distinct knowledge behaviors together with servant leadership and trust in the leader, and provides educational leaders with concrete and evidence-based advice for establishing a knowledge sharing, trust-rich academic organizational culture.

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