



Proceedings of the 17th International Conference
LIBEREC ECONOMIC FORUM

2025



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Servant Leadership: Bibliometric Analysis and Future Agenda

10.15240/tul/009/lef-2025-07

MOTTO: New Horizons in Economics and Business

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Servant Leadership: Bibliometric Analysis and Future Agenda

Abstract

Servant leadership is positioned as a new field of research for leadership scholars. We conducted bibliometric review by using 150 peer-reviewed articles from Web of Science database. The data collection period was from 1990 to 2025 as to provide comprehensive reflection on this topic. We used VoSviewers Software for data analysis. This review generated themes such as servant leadership in hospitality sector, leadership and work engagement, servant leadership as a key driver for innovation, gender, leadership and job outcomes, a review of diversified leadership styles. This review advance our understanding by looking Servant leadership in European perspective as it is an under-explored context. Theoretically, this research contributes to body of knowledge on moral leadership literature. This research provides fresh guidelines on servant leadership for organizations to adopt moral leadership as it is most needed nowadays due to financial scandals and unethical practices.

Key Words: Servant Leadership, Bibliometric Review, Moral Leadership, Future Research Agenda, European Perspective

JEL Classification: M12, M120

Introduction

In the contemporary business landscape, corporate moral responsibility is regarded as an issue for multiple stakeholders within the context of work ([Hess, 2055](#)). At the same time,

In the 21st century, there has been a notable increase in enthusiasm for moral kinds of leadership, including ethical, authentic, and servant leadership (Lemoine et al., 2019). Basically, exploration of servant leadership has progressively shifted from philosophical debate to practice development and preliminary research during the beginning decades of the 21st century, mainly within North American and European contexts. Previously, more leadership practitioners and researchers have been investigate the value of servant leadership in the European context. As, We inhabit a multicultural, different context in which internationalisation has become a fundamental component of corporate survival and Communities from many countries are merging more than at any previous point in civilization (Irving, 2025). This phenomenon is particularly evident across Europe, in which the European Union has encouraged enhanced mutually beneficial economic and cultural interaction within nations that are members (Starren, 2013). As these needs are enhanced cultural awareness among our leaders and creates challenges about the practicality of our leadership paradigms, mostly developed within an Anglo-Saxon structure, in culturally varied economies like those within the EU. Given their primarily knowledge-driven economic growth.

Most importantly, European economies essentially utilise optimising individuals. Listening to the needs of employees is essential for maintaining competitiveness and achieving organizational long-term success (Leary, et al., 2002). Recent research revealed moral leadership is a crucial for organisations to succeed in the long run, and that it is also important for society as a whole (Faluyi & Mboga, 2025). Our main focus is on *servant leadership* one who guides others while also demonstrating qualities such as compassion, sincerity, willingness to embrace others, and responsibility (Van Dierendonck, 2011a). Previous research investigated the current status by adopting a more nuanced perspective on the dynamic characteristics of servant leadership behaviour (Zhang et al., 2025). These studies shows servant leadership is an important for the businesses and society.

However, Huang et al., (2016) classify servant leadership as a style of leadership that focusses on the needs and desires of the people being led, rather than those of the leaders themselves. Sendjaya, (2016) conveys this perspective, asserting that the primary distinction is in the leadership's values. When leading, servant leaders often keep the following priorities in mind (Sendjaya, 2016). Hence, Stone et al., (2004) discussed to fulfil a company's strategic objectives, it is necessary to consciously prioritise its advancement, happiness, and professional growth of its followers. This reflects followers development is possible by engagement of servant leaders at the workplace as to achieve business excellence.

The majority of empirical studies on servant leadership are small-scale and the topic is under-researched (Fröhlich et al., 2025; Schowalter & Volmer, 2023). This new moral leadership style in the nascent phases of understanding its genuine worth for companies and workers (Pass et al., 2020; Pircher Verdorfer, 2019). In a recent developments in leadership feild, Fischer & Sitkin, (2023) and Limoine et al., (2019) be mindful that servant leadership is still "at the early stage of theoretical development" and anticipate a great deal of untapped potential in the area of study. Considering this emerging tendency,

the purpose of this literature review is to promote research in this field and identify potential new avenues for study. Despite extensive systematic reviews on responsible or servant leadership styles from management perspective (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Waldman & Balven, 2014; Sendjaya et al., 2008). At the same time, few meta-analysis discussed servant leadership and moral identity in the service-sector (Gui et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2024). However, some of the reviews highlighted role of servant leadership with organizational level outcomes and wellbeing (Eva et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2024; Jonker & Dube, 2025). Another review explored antecedents and outcomes of servant leadership (Langhof, J. G., & Güldenbergh, 2020). In same manner, few bibliometric reviews explored servant leadership in a general sense (Mustam & Najam, 2020; Kalsoom & Zámečník, 2023). These reviews lacks servant leadership from European perspectives to better understand the Western-oriented servant leadership style.

This review contibrutes to leadership field by several ways. Firstly, our review is providning comprehensive bibliometric review on servant leadership in context of Europe. This advances our understanding on insights from European countries. Secondly, we contributes by exploring themes such as *servant leadership in hospitality sector, leadership and work engagement, servant leadership as key driver for innovation, gender, leadership and job outcomes, a review of diversified leadership styles*.

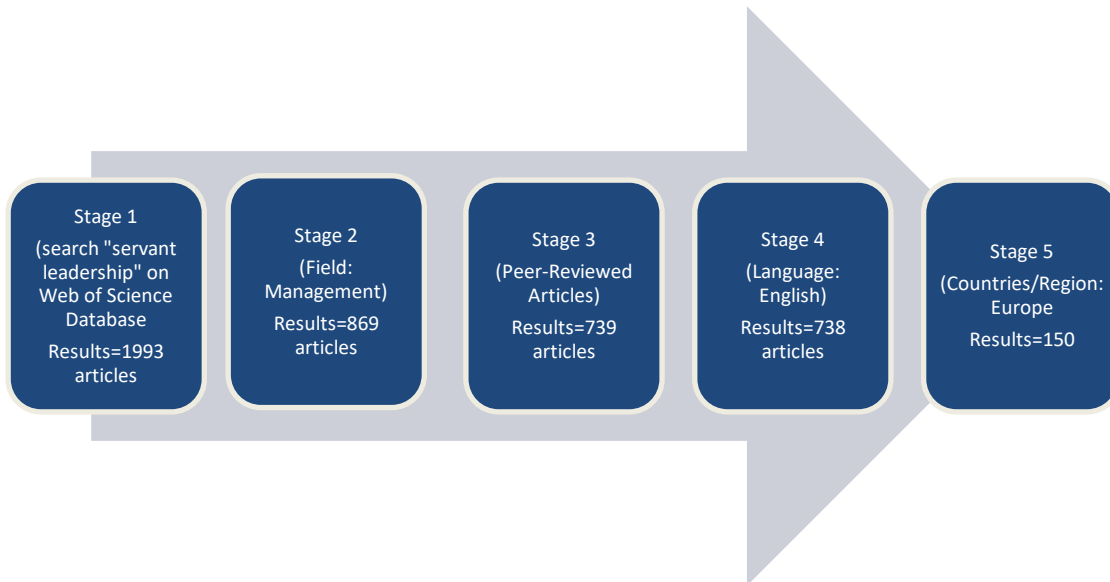
1. Methods of Research

The present research is based on bibliometric review as suggested by Donthu et al., (2021). Notably, this bibliometric analysis serves multiple purposes for academics. It can help them discover patterns in the performance of articles and journals, patterns of collaboration, and research components. Additionally, it can shed light on the intellectual structure of a certain area within the existing literature (Verma & Gustafsson, 2020). Authors run the data for analysis by using VOSviewer software (Wong, 2018). We selected peer-reviewed articles only. Authors mainly focused on articles specifically Management field due to unique charactertics of servant leadership style. We used articles which were only in English language. Finally, authors main focus on specific context such as Europe so they used studies from these European countries: *Netherlands, Spain, Germany, France, Belgium, Poland, Portugal, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, Liechtenstein, Romania, Slovenia, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Slovakia*. Authors searched the keywords such as “Servant leader“, “Servant leadership“. We used on Web of Science database as it is one of the renowned and credible database. The searching period from 1990 to 2025. Authors provided comprehensive picture on this data by using longer period.

In the initial phase, articles were securitised according to their titles and abstracts in order to maintain their relevance. Following the stage's article selection, we carefully read each one while keeping the qualifying requirements in mind. In stage 1, we found 1993 articles by searching on Web of Science database. At second stage, we found 869 articles after applying inclusion criteria of management field. At third stage, we applied articles criteria so we selected only 739 peer-reviewed articles. At fourth stage, we employed

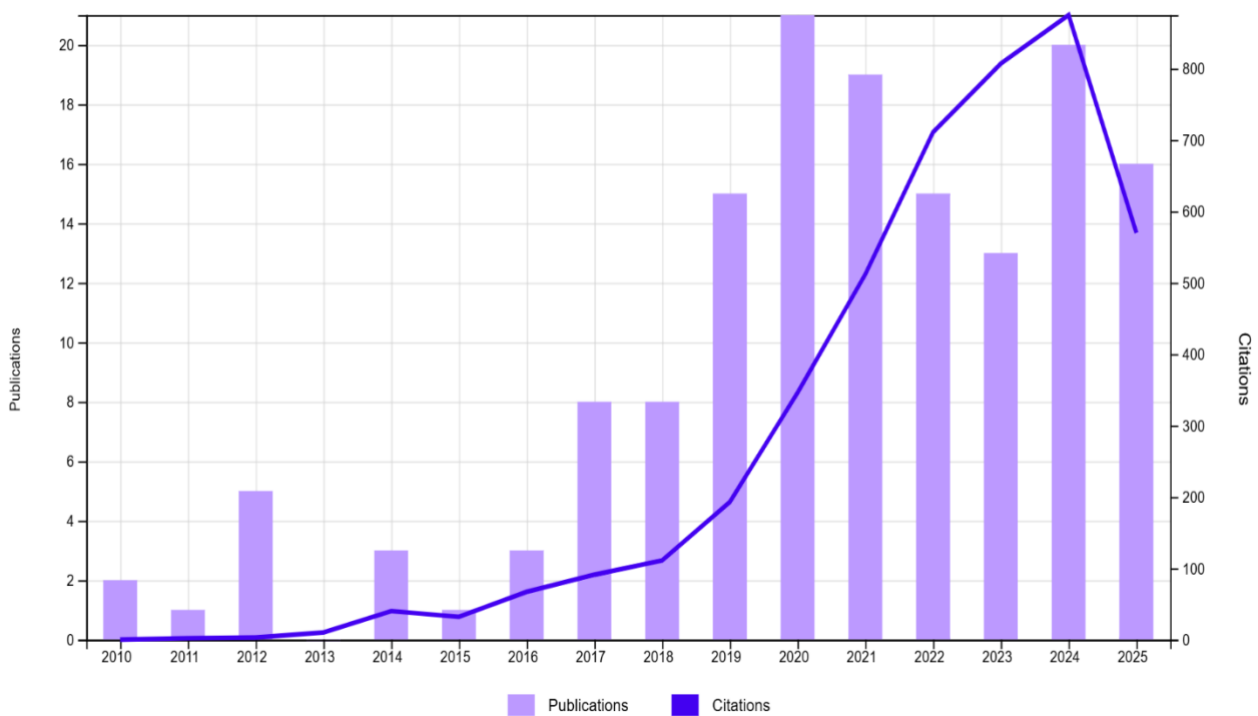
English language as a criterion and we found 738 articles. Final stage, we applied countries/region as Europe so we found 150 articles as our final sample for data analysis.

Fig. 1: Data Collection Process by using Web of Science Database



Source: authors' own, data from (Web of Science Database)

Fig. 2: Time Cited and Publications Over Time



Source: authors' own, data from (Web of Science Database)

The is gradually rise in research on servant leadership domain from 2019 to 2021. Conversely, it has been reduced in the year 2022 to 2023. Notably, the recent years are important for moral leadership as businesses are facing financial scandals and unethical practices at workplace. In this way, servant leadership studies are crucial to contribute to practice, and theory. The trend analysis shows publications and citation from 2010 to 2025 (See Figure 2).

2. Results of the Research

The Table 1 shows journals and publication on servant leadership topic. The Table 1 shows that 15 studies were published in Leadership & Organization Development. Another relevant 8 studies were also published in Leadership Quarterly. The 5 studies were published in Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, Nonprofit Management & Leadership, and Public Management Review respectively. Hence, 4 studies were published in Business Research Quarterly, European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology and German Journal of Human Resource Management. These results are explicitly visible (See Tab. 1)

Tab. 1: Journals & Publications

Journals	Publications
Leadership & Organization Development	15
Leadership Quarterly	8
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	5
Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies	5
Nonprofit Management & Leadership	5
Public Management Review	5
Business Research Quarterly	4
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	4
German Journal of Human Resource Management-zeitschrift fur personalforschung	4
Career Development International	3

Source: authors' own analysis in VoSViewer

Our bibliometric review generated themes in the form of clusters such as themes such as Cluster 1: *servant leadership in hospitality sector*, Cluster 2: *leadership and work engagement*, Cluster 3: *servant leadership as a key driver for innovation*, Cluster 4: *gender, leadership and job outcomes*, Cluster 5: *a review of diversified leadership styles*.

Cluster 1: Servant leadership in hospitality sector

Servant leadership is suitable leadership styles specifically for hospitality sector as this leadership style is serving-oriented where employees' development is crucial (Gui et al., 2021; Bavik, 2020). Organisations in the hotel business rely on fulfilling customer

demands through quick and excellent service (Homburg et al., 2002). Previous research have shown that the mindset of hotel workers is greatly impacted by the servant leadership behaviour of their immediate superiors, who instill a sense of client awareness in them (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Notably, servant leaders cultivate a distinctive organisational culture by aligning leaders and employees in the pursuit of organisational objectives, eschewing the reliance on positional authority. Servant leaders are driven not by self-interest or the quest for power, but by the desire to inspire and enable personnel to thrive in both personal and professional domains (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This reflects servant leadership is important for service-organizations especially hotels and tourism firms.

Cluster 2: Leadership and work engagement

The leadership improves work engagement at the workplace (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020). Leaders deliver an edge in competition to organisations (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Therefore, businesses put money into leadership programs with the hope that its graduates will inspire their teams to greater heights of efficiency (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017). Discussions about employee well-being, and more especially job engagement, are finding more and more space within these advancements, since this is also associated with intriguing business outcomes. In addition to this, Carasco-Saul et al. (2015) developed a model for studying how different types of effective leadership influence employees' dedication to their jobs. On the one hand, they identified potential explanations for transformative leadership; on the other, they distinguished between genuine, charismatic, and ethical leadership.

Cluster 3: Servant leadership as a key driver for innovation

Servant leadership plays a crucial role as the binding force that harnesses the potential of innovation (Van Dierendonck & Rook, 2010b). In a similar fashion, servant leadership enhance employee innovative behaviour (Iqbal et al., 2020). The employee-focused servant leadership paradigm seeks to enhance the intrinsic motivation of people, making it particularly well-suited to comprehending the management of creativity and innovation. We offer a model for servant leadership and creativity in this chapter. It is based on the idea that a servant-leader is someone who mainly encourages their followers to manage their own work. This is also the most important thing for managing creativity in an organisational setting (Van Dierendonck & Rook, 2010b). As a result, scholars have just recently started to look into how servant leadership influences followers' innovative activity (Cai et al., 2018).

Cluster 4: Gender, leadership and job outcomes

Despite the expanding amount of research on the topic of gender in leadership, much of it is still missing key details since the criterion variable of leadership is not well examined (Shen & Joseph, 2021). Additionally, it should come as no surprise that employees value strong ties with their managers. Gender, however, may affect the precise traits that subordinates use to make this assessment, which in turn affects crucial processes and

results that occur later on in the workplace (Collins et al., 2014). Previously, extant study indicates that men and women exhibit divergent responses to certain facets of social connections, which can be classified as either communal or agentic (Koenig et al., 2011). Moreover, gender disparities persist in leadership positions concerning the social dimension (Moskowitz et al., 1994), because female executives are more likely to demonstrate empathy and establish rapport than their male colleagues (Fletcher et al., 2000). These results, taken as a whole, show that leaders of all sexes take on the agentic part of their jobs, but that female leaders also exhibit communal, socially driven behaviours (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). This shows gender has different nature of job outcomes in leadership.

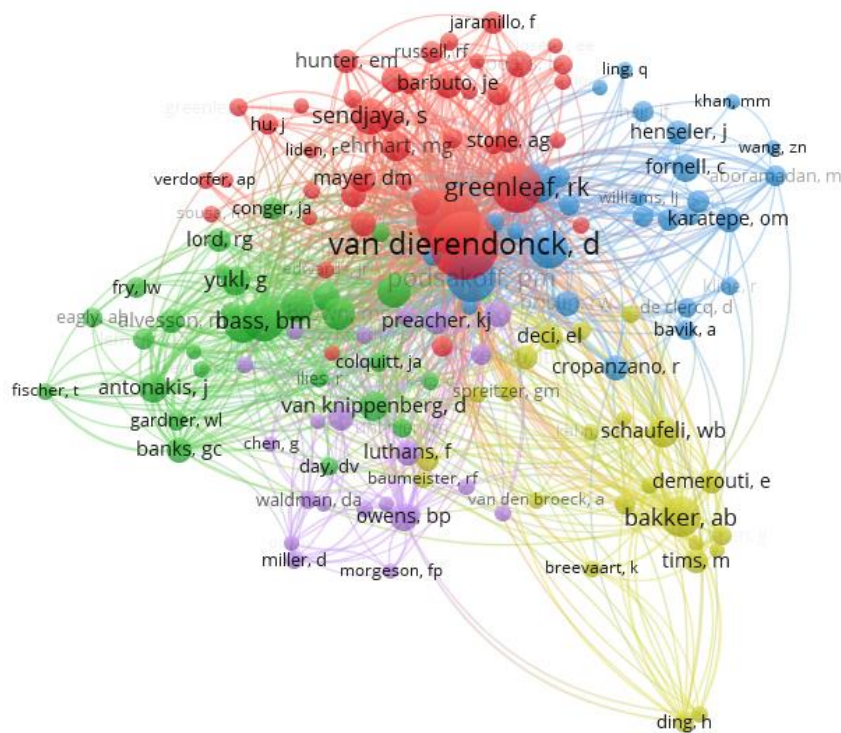
Cluster 5: A review of diversified leadership styles.

Our review found diversified leadership styles considered as important for business and society. Our data revealed authentic, ethical and inclusive leadership increase organizational performance and reputation. Previous study shows pursuit of authentic leadership has skyrocketed in the last decade (Gardner et al., 2011). One way to look at authentic leadership is as a symbol for activities in educational administration that are effective, ethical, and self-reflective. This is leadership that is well-informed, rooted in principles, and expertly carried out (Begley, 2001). In addition to this, an authentic leader is distinguished by: (1) self-awareness, humility, a continuous pursuit of enhancement, consideration for those who are led, and a focus on the well-being of others; (2) the cultivation of trust through the establishment of an ethical and moral framework; and (3) a dedication to organisational success aligned with societal principles (Whitehead, 2009).

From a moral perspective, there is a chance for academics to study how ethical leaders might be more ethical in their work (Brown & Treviño, 2006b). The importance of ethical leadership in organisations has been brought to light by high-profile instances of unethical behaviour on the part of leaders in various fields and contexts (Hartog, 2015). Additionally, prior study indicated a significant and favourable relationship between ethical leadership and workforce performance (Walumbwa et al., 2011). To ensure that their followers are held responsible, ethical leaders lay out the advantages of doing the right thing and the consequences of doing the wrong thing. Then, they employ a balanced punishment system (Brown et al., 2005a).

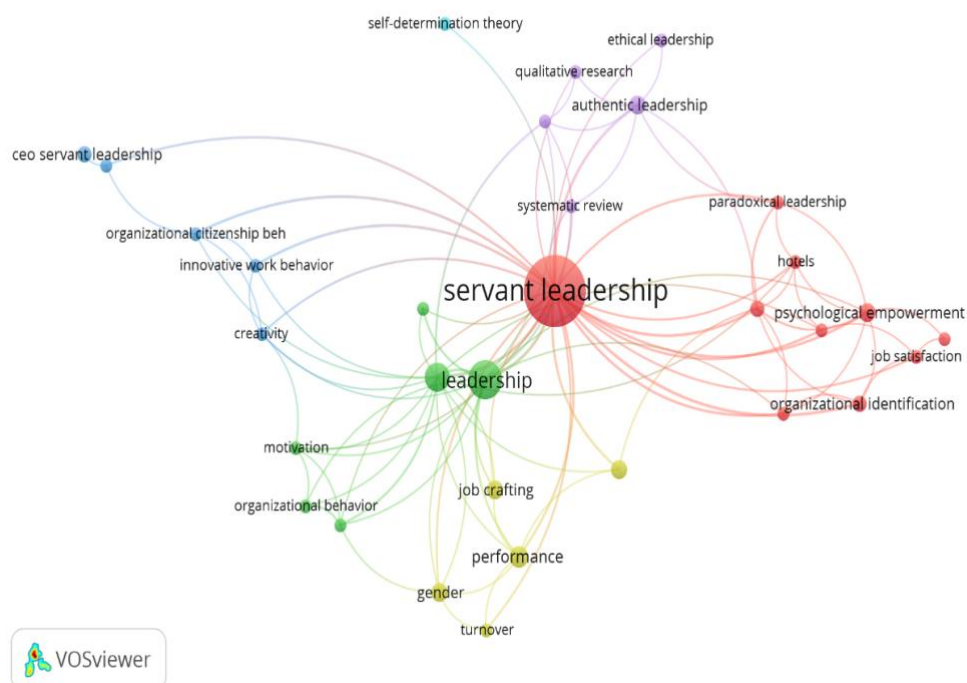
Likewise, inclusive leadership requires that people of diverse identities and backgrounds be able to participate completely and meaningfully in achieving common objectives without compromising their individuality or conforming to societal standards (Ferdman, 2014). The basic premise of inclusive leadership is that everyone has to feel like they belong and that their unique qualities are respected (Shore et al., 2011).

Fig. 3: Co-citations



Source: authors' own, data from (VoSVIEWER)

Fig. 4: Keywords



Source: authors' own, data from (VoSVIEWER)

Tab. 2: Themes on Servant Leadership using VoSViewer

Cluster	Items	Keywords	Co-Occurrence	Topic
Red (Cluster 1)	38	Servant leadership	73	Servant leadership in hotely industry
		Psychological empowerment	5	
		Engagement	4	
		Organizational identification	4	
		Hotels	3	
Green (Cluster 2)	24	Leadership	21	Leadership and work engagement
		Work Engagement	12	
		Motivation	3	
		Organizational Behaviour	3	
		Social Exchange	3	
		Well-being	3	
Blue (Cluster 3)	19	CEO Servant Leadership	4	Servant leader as key driver for innovate work behaviour
		Creativity	3	
		Hospiotality	3	
		Innovative Work Behaviour	3	
		OCB	3	
Yellow (Cluster 4)	37	Performance	7	Role of Leadership, Gender and Job Outcomes
		Gender	5	
		Job Crafting	5	
		Transformational Leadership	5	
		Turnover	3	
Purple (Cluster 5)	32	Authentic Leadership	5	A review of diversified leadership styles
		Ethical Leadership	3	
		Inclusive Leadership	3	
		Qualitative Research	3	
		Systematic Review		

Sample size n=150 peer-reviewed articles

Source: authors' own, data from (VoSVIEWER)

Tab. 3: Top Authors and Citations

Authors	Citations
Van Dierendonck, Dirk	585
Pina e Cunha, Miguel	290
Rego, Armenio	288
Goncalves, Lurdles	285
Owens, Bradley	285
Alkema, Jorrit	283
Boersma, Pieter	283
De Windt, Ninotchka	283
Stam, Daan	283
Ruiz-Palomino, Pablo	247

Source: authors' own

3. Discussion

This review found servant leadership has significant impact on needs of multi-stakeholders. Prior to this. In the European context, the majority of research has been conducted on a variety of leadership styles, including ethical, authentic, responsible, sustainable, and digital leadership. On the other hand, there is a lack of research on servant leadership in the existing literature review. Nonetheless, we discovered that servant leadership is an innovative approach in the research domain, particularly underexplored within the European setting. There is insufficient research on servant leadership in Europe.

Consequently, we identified new opportunities for future researchers regarding this entirely novel leadership style within the European setting. Leadership experts are establishing servant leadership as a new area of research. Our perspectives on appropriate leadership conduct are evolving alongside the times. It is possible that organisations are in need of leadership influenced by the principles of servant leadership theory at this time, given the present desire for more ethical and people-centered management. Notably, it signifies that servant-leaders transcend self-interest.

They are driven by a purpose transcending the need for power, specifically, the imperative to serve (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Our review provides fresh directions for scholars to explore and advance our understanding on servant leadership domain (See Table 4).

Tab. 4: Future Research Agendas

Clusters	Future Research Agendas
Cluster 1: Servant leadership in hospitality sector	What causes the variability of servant leadership behavior in the European hotels ? How servant leadership improves psychological empowerment in hospitality sector of Europe? What is role of engagement in moral leadership in European Firms? How servant leadership enhance organizational identification in European Manufacturing firms?
Cluster 2: Leadership and work engagement	How leadership theory contributes to work engagement? What is role leadership, work engagement on corporate moral responsibility in European companies?
Cluster 3: Servant leadership as a key driver for innovation	Does servant leader increase innovative work behaviour employees? How servant leadership enhance innovation in European start-ups ?
Cluster 4: Gender, leadership and job outcomes	How gender contributes turnover? What is role of gender in organizational setting? How job crafting enhance employee performance?
Cluster 5: A review of diversified leadership styles.	What is role of authentic leadership on CSR implementation? How ethical leadership improves innovative work behaviour? How authentic leadership improves organizational performance?

Source: authors' own

Limitations

This research has few limitations: First, this study conducted a bibliometric review by using web of science database the period from 1990 to 2025. In this manner, the sample size was 150 peer-reviewed articles, which was focused and limited to the European context. However, Future scholars need to explore in the cross culture context with larger sample size. Secondaly, servant leadership is a novel research area that is connected with ethics, virtues, and morality. As, Critics are currently debating whether this is definitely real, and scholars are actively pursuing publication avenues for quantitive research on within developing countries. Additionally, this freh and a newly developed area in the European context and also It significantly impacts expectations of several Organizational stakeholders such as managers, employees, Customers, Suppliers, Government and Society as well. Finally, future researchesrs can explore Responsible and digital leadership.

Conclusion

We conducted bibliometric review on servant leadership. We conducted bibliometric review by using 150 peer-reviewed articles from Web of Science database. The data collection period was from 1990 to 2025 as to provide comprehensive reflection on this topic. We used VoSviewers Software for data analysis. This review contributes to body of knowledge on moral leadership domain as it is under-explored phenomenon. We focused on European countries.

Acknowledgment

The authors are thankful to the Internal Grant Agency of FaME TBU No. IGA/FaME/2025/010. Project Title: "Enterprise Performance and Innovation: The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility, Digitalization, Servant Leadership, and Uncertainty."

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