

THE INFLUENCE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON FOLLOWERS' CREATIVITY WITH CLIMATE FOR CREATIVITY AS MEDIATION

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: As a developing nation, Indonesia persists in its endeavors to boost national growth, including initiatives to support the creative industry through startup companies. This research aims to examine the impact of servant leadership on followers' creativity, with climate for creativity as the mediating factor.

Methods: This research is a quantitative study using primary data obtained through a questionnaire survey from 178 employees working in 73 Indonesian startup companies. The sampling method was purposive sampling. The collected data were then processed and analysed using SEM-PLS.

Results: The results revealed the significance of climate for creativity as a full mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and followers' creativity, meaning that servant leadership has an indirect influence on followers' creativity through climate for creativity. These findings suggest that leaders who adopt servant leadership styles can enhance followers' creativity through climate for creativity.

Conclusion and suggestion: This study found that servant leadership's impact on startup employees' creativity is fully mediated by the perceived climate for creativity. This implies that by fostering a climate supportive of creativity—through flexible work environments, recognition of creativity, and resource provision—servant leaders indirectly enhance employee creativity. Thus, when servant leaders cultivate a climate for creativity, it boosts the creativity of startup employees in their work.

INTRODUCTION

As a developing country, Indonesia is continuously striving to enhance its national growth, with significant efforts directed toward bolstering the creative industry. According to the Opus Creative Economy Outlook 2020, Indonesia's creative economy is projected to contribute up to IDR 1100 trillion to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The

adoption of digital technology across nearly all creative industry sectors has been a key driver of this growth (Badan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2018). The rapid technological advancements have fueled the robust expansion of the digital creative sector, evident in the significant rise in startup companies in Indonesia.

A crucial factor that underpins a company's success is the creativity of its workforce, which drives the continuous generation of innovative ideas. Employee creativity is increasingly recognized as one of the most valuable economic assets a company can possess (Agars et al., 2012). However, despite these achievements, the digital creative industry in Indonesia faces several challenges, including a lack of interest among business owners in pursuing research and development (Badan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2017). A survey conducted by Badan Ekonomi Kreatif (Bekraf) and Masyarakat Industri Kreatif Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi Indonesia (MIKTI) revealed that the primary challenges confronting Indonesian startups are capital constraints (38.82%) and human resources (29.41%), with the latter being a critical source of creative behavior necessary for innovation and adaptability.

As Amabile (1988) highlighted, creativity, characterized by rapid technological progress and dynamic changes that foster a competitive climate, has become increasingly important in today's business environment. Leaders can enhance employee creativity by stimulating intrinsic motivation, providing the necessary resources, and creating conducive working conditions that promote goal achievement and job autonomy (Thao & Kang, 2018; Palupi, 2020). In particular, servant leadership plays a pivotal role as leaders support and empower their subordinates by delegating responsibilities, addressing their needs, and maximizing their potential, thereby increasing their motivation to engage in creative activities (Liden et al., 2015). Additionally, leaders who embrace a servant leadership style are expected to cultivate a climate that fosters creativity within the organization. A supportive climate for creativity is recognized as a key driver of both creativity and innovation (Hassi, 2019).

The significance of fostering a creative climate lies in the belief that organizational resources—including systems, culture, and environment—can create conditions that inspire creativity and encourage employees to exhibit creative behavior (Kim & Yoon, 2015). When an organization offers ample resources, support, and rewards for creative thinking and actions, employees are more likely to display high levels of creativity. In the startup context, leaders must create an environment that nurtures and encourages creativity. This can be achieved by motivating employees to innovate, generating and supporting new ideas, and assisting employees in bringing these ideas to fruition. Building on these insights and observations, this study seeks to explore the influence of servant

leadership on followers' creativity, with the climate for creativity acting as a mediating factor within Indonesian startup companies.

This research is a continuation of [Aboramadan's \(2020\)](#) study, which investigated the effects of servant leadership on follower creativity within the hospitality industry in Palestine. [Aboramadan \(2020\)](#) noted that findings from the hotel sector might not be applicable to other industries and recommended further research to validate the results across different contexts. In response to these limitations, the current study focuses on Indonesian startups to assess the impact of servant leadership within a different context, thereby extending the generalizability of the findings to other sectors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant Leadership

[Greenleaf \(2002\)](#) describes servant leadership as a leadership approach rooted in a genuine desire to serve others, with the intention to serve being the primary motivator before leading. Servant leaders prioritize the needs, aspirations, and interests of others over their own. They support and empower their subordinates by delegating responsibilities, addressing their needs, and maximizing their potential, thereby enhancing followers' motivation to engage in creative endeavors ([Liden et al., 2015](#)). [Spears \(2004\)](#) further differentiates servant leadership from other leadership styles by emphasizing that the desire to serve precedes the desire to lead. Individuals with inherent leadership qualities naturally become leaders, as this role is seen as the most effective way to serve.

Creativity

According to [Suifan et al. \(2018\)](#), creativity involves introducing something new to an organization, which could be unique, unconventional, original, or provide a fresh perspective. This type of creativity contributes novel elements that were previously absent within the organization. Organizations with creative employees are better equipped to address problems innovatively, deliver superior performance, and inspire others to advance the collective well-being of their colleagues and the organization ([Abdallah & Matsui, 2007](#)). [Amabile et al. \(1996\)](#) define employee creativity as the process of generating new ideas for products, services, practices, or procedures that hold potential value for the organization. [Zhou and George \(2001\)](#) add that employee creativity involves producing ideas that bring value to new products, services, manufacturing methods, and administrative processes, thereby fostering organizational renewal, survival, and growth in today's dynamic and competitive environment.

Perceived Climate for Creativity

[Martins and Terblanche \(2003\)](#) describe the climate for creativity as the extent of support and encouragement that an organization provides to its employees to explore

creative and innovative methods. This climate is perceived as a driving force for knowledge development, new processes, procedures, actions, and practices (Vegt et al., 2005). Kim and Yoon (2015) define a climate for creativity by the presence of resources dedicated to innovation, flexibility, and systems of reward and recognition. A creative climate is seen as a key catalyst for fostering creativity and innovation (Hassi, 2019). The significance of a climate for creativity lies in the belief that organizational resources, including systems, culture, and the environment, can create conditions that nurture creativity and encourage employees to demonstrate creative behavior (Kim & Yoon, 2015). A truly creative climate is cultivated when an organization meets three essential criteria: recognizing and rewarding employee creativity, maintaining flexibility and openness to change, and providing the necessary resources for employees to innovate (Kim & Yoon, 2015).

Hypothesis Development

Servant leaders prioritize the interests and needs of their followers over their own (Eva et al., 2019; Huning et al., 2020). This approach fosters an environment of mutual trust and safety (Yoshida et al., 2014). As a result, when followers perceive their leader as genuinely supportive, they are likely to respond positively by exhibiting creative behavior. Various empirical studies have explored the link between servant leadership and its impact on follower creativity (Aboramadan, 2020; Williams et al., 2017; Liden et al., 2014; Yoshida et al., 2014). In the context of a startup, employees are required to continuously innovate by introducing new ideas to keep pace with a rapidly changing business landscape. It is anticipated that servant leadership will encourage such creative behavior among employees, which is essential for generating innovative ideas that can be implemented within the company. Based on previous research and the theoretical framework discussed, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Servant leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity.

Servant leadership is also expected to have a positive impact on the development of a climate for creativity, which, in turn, is likely to enhance follower creativity. This suggests that a climate for creativity may serve as a mediating factor in the relationship between servant leadership and follower creativity. Several studies have empirically examined the mediating role of organizational climate in leadership research. For instance, Aboramadan (2020) identified that climate for creativity mediates the relationship between servant leadership and follower creativity. Similarly, Hosseini et al. (2003) found that the link between organizational resources and innovation was indirectly influenced by climate for innovation.

In the context of a startup, when employees perceive their work environment as flexible, well-resourced, and appreciative of creativity, they are more inclined to engage

in creative behavior. This indicates that a climate for creativity plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between servant leadership and follower creativity. This finding is consistent with previous research, which demonstrated that the climate for creativity significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and creativity (Aboramadan, 2020). Based on theoretical analysis and prior research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived climate for creativity mediates the positive influence of servant leadership on creativity.

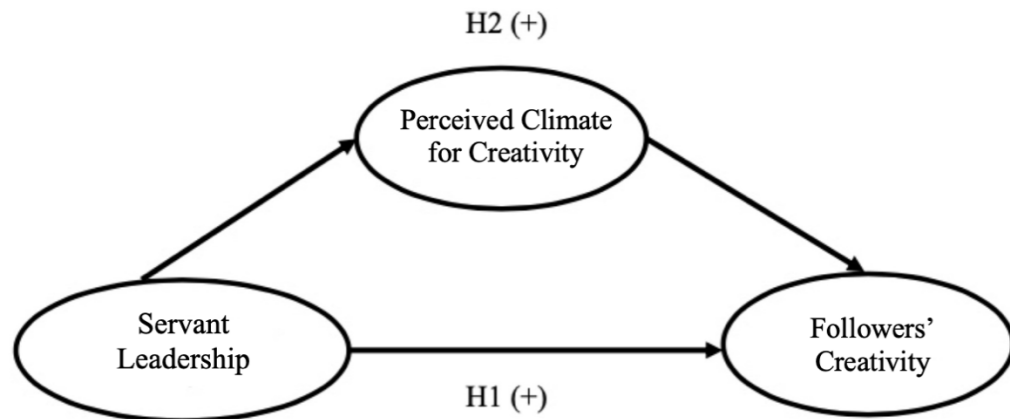


Figure 1. Model Hypothesis
Source: Author Analysis

RESEARCH METHODS

Sample

This study was designed as a cross-sectional research project involving 178 employees from startup companies in Indonesia. In a cross-sectional study, data is collected at a single point in time to capture a snapshot of a particular period (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The study employed purposive sampling, selecting participants who were employees of Indonesian startup companies with a significant tenure and who had been interacting with their direct leaders for at least six months.

Data Collection and Measurement

In this study, the primary data was collected using an online questionnaire. The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out from 10 July 2021 to 23 August 2021 and has successfully collected 185 respondents. There are 178 respondents who can be used for further analysis, while the other 7 respondents were rejected because they did not meet the study's criteria (they were not employees of startup companies in Indonesia).

Table 1. The Measurement

Instruments	Constructs
	Servant Leadership
SL1	<i>My leader would not compromise ethical principles to achieve success</i>
SL2	<i>My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best</i>
SL3	<i>My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own</i>
SL4	<i>My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community</i>
SL5	<i>I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem</i>
SL6	<i>My leader makes my career development a priority</i>
SL7	<i>My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong</i>
	Creativity
FC1	<i>I demonstrate originality in higher work</i>
FC2	<i>I take risks in terms of producing new ideas in doing the job</i>
FC3	<i>I find new uses for existing methods or equipment</i>
FC4	<i>I try out new ideas and approached problems</i>
FC5	<i>I identify opportunities for new products/processes</i>
FC6	<i>I generate novel but operable work-related ideas</i>
FC7	<i>I serve as a good role model for creativity</i>
FC8	<i>I generate ideas revolutionary to our field</i>
	Climate for Creativity
CC1	<i>This company publicly recognizes those who are creative</i>
CC2	<i>The reward system here encourages employees' creative idea development</i>
CC3	<i>Around here, people are allowed to try solving the same problems in different ways</i>
CC4	<i>This company can be described as flexible and continually adaptive to change</i>
CC5	<i>There are adequate resources devoted to innovation in this company</i>

The questionnaire covered seven items related to servant leadership (Liden et al., 2015), eight items pertaining to creativity (Tierney et al., 1999), and five items focusing on the climate for creativity (Kim & Yoon, 2015). Responses were recorded using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated strong disagreement, and 5 indicated strong agreement. The data collected was subsequently analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the SmartPLS version 3.0 software.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the respondents, as summarized in Table 2, indicates that the majority were male (52.8%), aged between 17-25 years (78.1%), employed in the e-commerce sector (35.4%), working in non-technical roles (70.8%), and had been working

with their leaders for 6-11 months (59%). This suggests that the respondents were predominantly young employees gaining new work experiences in startup companies.

Table 2. The Respondents' Profile and Descriptive Statistics

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean Variable		
				SL	FC	CC
Gender	Male	94	52.8	3.95	4.43	4.26
	Female	84	47.2	4.10	4.35	4.31
Age	17-25 Years	139	78.1	4.10	4.37	4.32
	26-30 Years	33	18.5	3.78	4.36	4.12
	>30 Years	6	3.4	4.00	4.83	4.33
Company Sector	<i>E-commerce</i>	63	35.4	4.11	4.41	4.30
	Finance	22	12.4	4.45	4.45	4.45
	Education	11	6.2	3.81	4.27	4.54
	Software Development	34	19.1	3.74	4.47	4.32
	Transportation	24	13.5	3.96	4.33	4.08
	Etc.	24	13.5	3.79	4.25	4.08
Division	Technician	52	29.2	3.90	4.33	4.14
	Non-Technician	126	70.8	4.04	4.41	4.34
Working period with the leader	6-11 Months	105	59.0	4.14	4.41	4.32
	1-2 Years	50	28.1	3.82	4.30	4.16
	>2 Years	23	12.9	3.74	4.48	4.35

Note: SL: Servant Leadership, FC: Followers' Creativity, CC: Climate for Creativity

Source: Primary Data (2021)

Measurement Model

The research involved two key phases in the PLS analysis: the evaluation of measurement models (outer models) and the evaluation of structural models (inner models) for hypothesis testing. Table 3 presents the outcomes of the measurement model evaluation, where all items related to the variables were validated as both reliable and valid after removing indicators that did not meet the required thresholds for factor loadings and AVE. Convergent validity was confirmed if all indicators showed factor loadings above 0.70, though items with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 were retained if the AVE was above 0.50. Reliability was established with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values of ≥ 0.70 , although values between 0.60 and 0.70 were accepted if other validity indicators were robust (Hair et al, 2014).

Table 3. The Convergent Validity Analysis Result

Construct	Total Item	After Deletion	Item	FL	AVE	CA	CR
Servant Leadership	7	3	SL3	0.755	0.560	0.607	0.792
			SL6	0.801			
			SL7	0.685			
Creativity	8	5	FC2	0.722	0.505	0.756	0.836
			FC3	0.688			
			FC4	0.685			
			FC5	0.682			
			FC6	0.773			
			CC1	0.712			
Perceived Climate for Creativity	5	5	CC2	0.760	0.536	0.782	0.852
			CC3	0.791			
			CC4	0.666			
			CC5	0.725			

Note:

SL = Servant Leadership, FC = Followers' Creativity, CC = Perceived Climate for Creativity, CA = Cronbach's Alpha, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, FL = Factor Loadings

Source: Data processed by *SmartPLS 3.0* (2021)

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.. The Discriminant Validity Analysis Result

Construct	1	2	3
1. Perceived Climate for Creativity	0.732		
2. Servant Leadership	0.607***	0.748	
3. Creativity	0.553***	0.425***	0.711

Note: the diagonal line (bold) is the square root of AVE of each construct.

***correlation value between constructs is smaller than the square root of AVE of each construct.

Source: Data processed by *SmartPLS 3.0* (2021)

Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing, as shown in Tables 4 and 5, indicate that Hypothesis 2 (H2) was supported (p-value < 0.05) whereas Hypothesis 1 (H1) was not. H1 posited that servant leadership would have a positive impact on followers' creativity; however, the analysis revealed that the p-value for servant leadership was not significant (p-value > 0.05), leading to the conclusion that servant leadership does not positively influence followers' creativity, resulting in the rejection of H1. Conversely, H2 was validated, demonstrating that the climate for creativity fully mediates the relationship between servant leadership and followers' creativity.

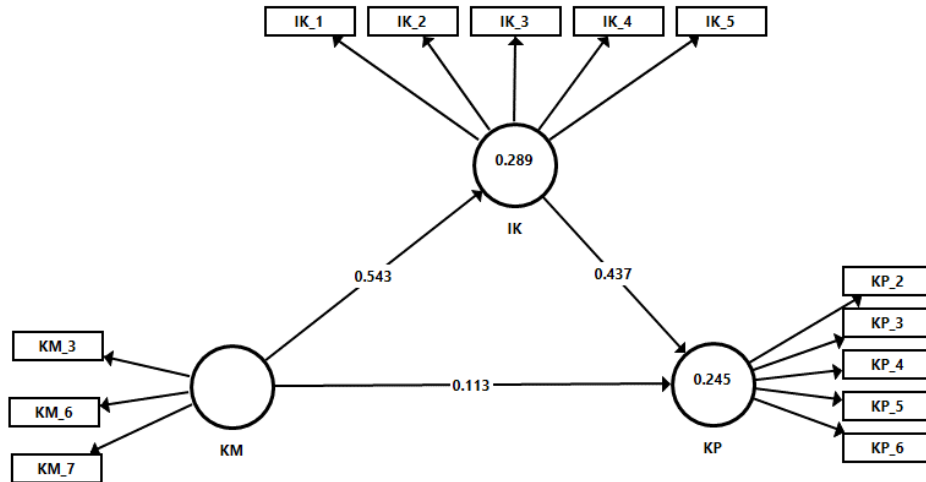


Figure 2. The Path Analysis

Table 5. The Path Analysis Model Results for Hypothesis Testing

Construct	Structural Path (β & p -value)	
	Climate for Creativity	Creativity
Basic Model		
Servant Leadership	0.543***	0.113†
Climate for Creativity		0.437***
R^2 (R -square)	0.289	0.245
Control Variable		
Gender		-0.187*
Age		-0.209**
Sector		0.246*
Division		0.000†
Working period with leader		-0.109†

Note: Estimation significance; *** $p < 0,001$, ** $p < 0,01$, * $p < 0,05$. † $p > 0,1$

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2021)

Table 6. The Mediation Test Results with Bootstrapping

Mediation Path	Estimate (ab)	BC 95% CI		P -Value
		Lower	Upper	
SL -> CC -> FC	0.237***	0.114	0.347	0.000

Note: ab = estimated mediation effect, BC= bias corrected, CI= confidence interval, SL = Servant Leadership, CC = Climate for Creativity, FC = Followers' Creativity, *** $p < 0,001$, ** $p < 0,01$, * $p < 0,05$. † $p > 0,1$

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2021)

DISCUSSION

Following the measurement and structural testing processes, along with hypothesis testing, the discussion will focus on the explanation of each hypothesis in this study.

The positive influence of servant leadership on followers' creativity

Table 2 shows that while the impact of servant leadership on creativity is positive, it is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.113$, $p > 0.1$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.25$) suggests that servant leadership accounts for 25% of the variance in creativity. This finding indicates that although employees may perceive their leader as having a servant leadership style, this perception does not significantly influence creativity in startup companies. However, servant leadership can indirectly affect followers' creativity through the mediating role of the climate for creativity. These results align with previous research by [Aboramadan \(2020\)](#), which highlighted the importance of the climate for creativity as a partial mediator between servant leadership and employee creativity.

The lack of support for Hypothesis 1 can be explained by considering several factors. Servant leadership, as a leadership style, stems from a genuine desire to serve others, with the leader prioritizing the needs and well-being of subordinates ([Greenleaf, 2002](#)). Servant leaders encourage and support their team members by delegating responsibilities, addressing their needs, and putting in full effort to assist them, thereby fostering a motivation to engage in creative activities ([Liden et al., 2015](#)).

However, as [Liden et al. \(2008\)](#) suggest, three factors—context and culture, leader attributes, and follower receptivity—significantly influence the effectiveness of servant leadership. The differences observed in this study compared to previous research may be due to these contextual factors within startup companies. Startups often have a dynamic organizational context, a culture that embraces change, and a flexible structure where CEOs and employees engage in close communication and may perform roles beyond their defined job descriptions. These unique characteristics might influence how servant leadership is perceived and its impact on creativity, resulting in findings that differ from earlier studies, such as [Aboramadan's \(2020\)](#) research into the hospitality sector in Palestine.

The positive influence of servant leadership on creativity with a perceived climate for creativity as a mediator

Table 3 shows that the perceived climate for creativity fully mediates the positive effect of servant leadership on employee creativity in Indonesian startups. Hypothesis testing with bootstrapping confirmed a strong and significant mediation effect ($ab = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.114, 0.347]). The absence of zero within

the confidence interval further supports the significance of the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

The study's findings suggest that servant leadership positively influences creativity through the establishment of a supportive climate for creativity. In other words, for a servant leader to effectively enhance employee creativity, it is essential to foster a work environment that promotes creativity. This conclusion aligns with empirical research by Aboramadan (2020), which also found that the perceived climate for creativity mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee creativity. This may be because startups generally offer a flexible work environment, sufficient resources, and a high level of appreciation for creativity and creative efforts, making employees more likely to engage in creative behavior within such a climate.

These findings are consistent with those of Martins and Terblanche (2003), who identified the climate for creativity as the degree of support and encouragement provided by an organization to foster creative and innovative approaches. Additionally, Kim and Yoon (2015) highlighted that a climate for creativity is characterized by the availability of resources dedicated to innovation, organizational flexibility, and robust reward and recognition systems. Hassi (2019) also emphasized that a creative climate serves as a catalyst for both creativity and innovation, meaning that employees who perceive their work environment as conducive to creativity are more inclined to apply creative thinking in their tasks. Therefore, for servant leaders in startups, cultivating a climate that supports creativity is crucial for enhancing employee creativity.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed the perceived climate for creativity fully mediates the positive influence of servant leadership on the creativity of startup company employees. This shows that servant leadership can have an indirect influence on employee creativity by implementing a climate for creativity in the company. Here, servant leaders can create a flexible work environment, provide recognition and appreciation for employee creativity, and provide resources that support employees to apply creativity to their work. So, when a leader who serves has created a climate for creativity in their startup company, the creativity of the company's employees and the work they produce can increase.

Practical implications suggest that startups should manage their human resources by implementing servant leadership and fostering a creative climate to boost innovation. The research also identifies several limitations, such as the cross-sectional design and the potential bias from self-administered online questionnaires. Future research should use a longitudinal design, supervise the questionnaire filling process, replicate the study in other industries, and consider moderating variables related to individual differences among employees.

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