

## Servant Leadership and its Effect on Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Ethiopian Federal Public Service Organizations

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### Abstract

*The aim of this study was to examine the effect of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. An explanatory research design and quantitative approach were employed. In the Ethiopian public service organization context, data were collected using a standard questionnaire from 321 respondents. The present study employed social exchange theory to explain the effect of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. To test hypotheses, the study employed structural equation modeling using AMOS software version 26. The findings of the study established that servant leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior. This study is the first empirical study in an Ethiopian cultural context.*

**Key words:** *Servant leadership, Organizational citizenship behavior, public service organizations, Ethiopia.*

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### 1. Introduction

Leadership is the key to making organizations productive and successful. Success or failure in the process of achieving set goals and objectives is largely determined by the type of leadership approach applied and the leader's behaviors (Sudarsana Rao et al., 2017). In relation to this, Khuwaja et al. (2020) stated that to transform public service organizations, it is important that leaders adopt appropriate leadership styles like servant leadership. Similarly, Eva et al. (2019) contend that servant leadership fits well in public service organizations and may play a more prominent role in improving organizational effectiveness. These days, servant leadership has become a focus for a great number of scholars and practitioners (Brohi et al., 2018). Studies conducted by Ja'afaru (2014) noted that, beyond other types of leadership, servant leadership in public service organizations has strong linkages with employee organizational citizenship behavior because servant leaders focus on the needs of their followers and recognize their responsibility to them. Servant leadership characteristics such as stewardship, creating value for the community, and altruistic calling portray that leaders act selflessly and thus create a sense of citizenship behavior among employees (Eva et al., 2019).

Employees can contribute to the functioning of their organization through organizational citizenship behavior (Koster, 2014). Within the public sector, Ingrams (2020) asserts that organizational citizenship behavior has special importance due to the relevance of generalized citizenship in government-citizen relationships and

the goals of public administration reforms to achieve greater organizational responsiveness to citizens. Organizational citizenship behavior has the potential to address government challenges, public demands and enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Obedgiu et al., 2020). When engaging in organizational citizenship behavior, civil servants seek ways of enhancing organizational performance by contributing to a better organizational culture and providing better government services (Obedgiu et al., 2020). Thus, organizational citizenship behavior practices benefit public sectors that want to produce extraordinary results (Yildiz, 2016). However, de Geus et al. (2020) pointed out that there has been limited empirical and theoretical exploration regarding organizational citizenship behavior in the public service organizations. Previous scholars have provided inconsistent support for servant leadership's effect on organizational citizenship behavior. For instance, Mahembe & Engelbrecht (2014) and Elche et al. (2020) have revealed significant relationships between the constructs, while others have found non-significant links (e.g., Harwiki, 2013; Strajhar et al., 2016). This inconsistent finding clearly shows that there is a clear need for further research. In line with this reasoning, this study examined the effect of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behavior which is a first in the Ethiopian federal public service organization cultural context.

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Servant Leadership**

The idea of servant leadership has religious roots (Mark 10:43) and was exemplified by Jesus to his Disciples by stating that "Whoever wants to be great must be a servant" (Maciariello, 2003). The servant leadership concept was initiated and introduced into contemporary social organizations by American Management and leadership scholar Greenleaf in the 1970s. When he came up with the idea of servant leadership as an alternative leadership paradigm, Greenleaf argued that it was a "better leadership approach that puts serving others, including followers, customers, and the community, as the number one priority. According to Greenleaf (1970), a servant leader is one who puts the needs of others above their own. This starts with the instinctive desire to put others' needs before one's own.

Servant leadership is characterized by providing direction, empowering and developing people, and demonstrating humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This is consistent with the six elements of a servant-led organization outlined by Laub (1999): respecting people, developing people, creating community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership. Hence, servant leadership fosters organizational fairness, trust, citizenship behavior, and collaboration (Parris and Peachey, 2013).

### **2.2. Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Organ (1988) first introduced the idea of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which he described as "individual behavior that is discretionary and not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system." This type of behavior refers to additional tasks people do at work that benefit the organization, even though they are not in the job description and are difficult to enforce (Profili et al., 2016). The theoretical roots of organizational citizenship behaviors can be traced back to Barnard (1938), who proposed the concept of "willingness to cooperate" to refer to a willingness to commit oneself to an organization to reach organizational goals (Kayaalp et al., 2021). In relation to this, Katz (1964) insisted that for an organization to function effectively and survive, it needed employees with cooperation behaviors that exceeded the worker's formal duty description. Williams & Anderson (1991) organize organizational citizenship behavior into categories on the basis of the direction of the behavior. Specifically, organizational citizenship behaviors directed toward the help of other individuals are named OCBI, while organizational citizenship behaviors directed toward the benefit of the organization are known as OCBO.

A review of the literature shows organizational citizenship behaviors positively influence the success of an organization by improving productivity, effective use of resources, improved teamwork, an improved work environment, employee retention, performance stability, and the ability to adapt to environmental change (de Geus et al., 2020). Organizational citizenship behavior has been associated with improving public service, removing bureaucratic obstacles, and improving team performance (Beeri et al., 2013). Different research has shown that there are relationships between organizational citizenship behaviors in the public sector and general citizenship behaviors in areas such as participation in civic life or loyalty and trust shown toward social and political institutions (Cohen, 2016).

### 2.3. Hypothesis Development

#### Servant Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

According to social exchange theory's reciprocity principle, when subordinates are satisfied with their leader, they want to give something back in return (Ehrhart, 2004). When servant leaders express strong concern for the needs of their followers and treat followers fairly, this may arouse organizational citizenship behavior from the employees in return (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). Different empirical studies support the idea that servant leadership has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Elche et al., 2020; Gnankob et al., 2022; Mathur & Negi, 2014). In light of the above theory and empirical evidence, the researcher suggests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis: Servant leadership has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

### 2.4. Conceptual Framework

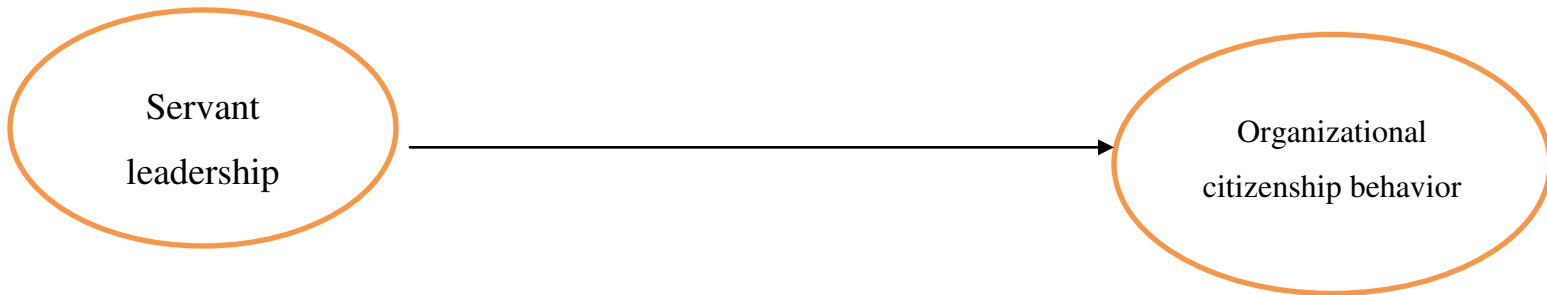


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Ehrhart (2004).

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Setting and Sample Procedures

The study was conducted on federal public service organizations. The headquarters of every federal public service organization are located in Addis Abeba, the Ethiopian capital. In the Ethiopian context, public service organizations are structured at the federal, regional, and local levels (Tensay & Singh, 2020). According to Tensay and Singh (2020), federal public service organizations have a macro-level impact on the social, economic, and political activities of the country. This argument led to the present study's emphasis on federal public service organizations.

A multi-stage random sampling procedure was employed, considering the nature of sectors as strata. First, the federal public service organizations were classified into three sectors (strata), and then two organizations were randomly selected from each category. The sample organizations were chosen at random using this procedure: The researcher initially numbered all organizations in each category on a piece of paper, then

mixed these slips and picked one slip at a time. This study took 30% of the total organizations, showing a fair representation of the population as suggested by Duressa & Debela(2014).In the second phase, simple random sampling techniques are employed to select the respondents.

The sample size was calculated using the formula developed by Mugenda (2003) at a 95% confidence level, as shown in the following equation.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (N * e^2)}$$

Where; N= population size;

n= desired sample size

e= tolerance at desired level of confidence

$$n = \frac{2523}{1 + (2523 * (0.05)^2)} = \frac{2523}{7.3075} = 345$$

The sample units are frontline employees. Based on the above formula, the sample size of the study was 345. However, Israel (1992) suggested that researchers could add a 30% sample size to minimize the non-response rate. Therefore, the study used 449 samples. Moreover, regarding the structural equation model, sample size determination is critical because it is a large sample size statistical technique(Collier, 2020). According to Collier, a large sample size is necessary to improve the statistical power and trustworthiness of the results.

### 3.2. Measurements of variables

Servant leadership was measured by a 14-item servant leadership scale developed by Ehrhart (2004).Van Dierendonck & Nuijten(2011)described this scale as a one-dimensional model of servant leadership. Moreover, this scale has been used because of its wide acceptability in contemporary leadership research (Liden et al., 2014). It is also employed by recent researchers in public service organizations (E.g.,Gnankob et al., 2022; Shim & Park, 2019). Organizational citizenship behavior was measured by 16 items developed by Lee & Allen (2002). Regarding this, Hameed Al-ali et al.(2019)discussed that organizational citizenship behavior is best represented as a uni-dimensional measure. This scale has been employed by recent researchers in public service organizations (E.g.,Khattak & O'Connor, 2021; Khattak et al., 2022; Bottomley et al., 2016).

## 4. Data analysis and results

The statistical tools employed for this study were Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) plus AMOS software Version 26. AMOS is the most user-friendly of all the SEM software programs(Collier, 2020).

### 4.1. Characteristics of respondents

The demographic profile data (n=321) result indicated that the majority of the respondents are male, married, hold bachelor's degrees, and are experienced. Specifically, Table 1 revealed that, of the 321 respondents, 53.6% are male employees. The highest numbers of respondents' ages were within the ranges of 31–40 years (38.3%). The next was within 41–50 years (29.3%). The third of them were within the 21–30 year age group (24%), and the rest of them were within the 51–60 year age group (8.4%). In terms of educational level, over half of them (54.8%) acquired a first-degree certificate. Those who obtained master's degree status were 35.2%, and diplomas made up 10%. The highest number of employees regarding experience was between 6–10 years (28.7%), while the least were those who worked within 1–5 years (2.2%). Generally, the study can conclude that respondents are representative of the population in terms of gender, age, education, and experience.

**Table 1: Demographic Information**

Variable	Option	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	172	53.6
	Female	149	46.4
	Total	321	100
Age	21 - 30 years	77	24.0
	31-40 years	94	38.3
	41 - 50 years	99	29.3
	51 - 60 years	27	8.4
	Total	321	100
Marriage	Single	71	22.1
	Married	233	72.6
	Divorced	17	5.3
	Total	321	100
Educational Level-	Diploma	32	10.0
	Degree	176	54.8
	Master	113	35.2
	PhD	0	0
	Total	321	100
Tenure of organization	1-5 year	7	2.2
	6-10 year	92	28.7
	11-15 year	75	23.4
	16-20 year	78	24.3
	Above 21year	69	21.5
	Total	321	100

*Source:* field data (2023)

**4.2. Descriptive and Correlational analysis**

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. This table reveals that the correlations between the research variables were in the expected direction. Servant leadership (SL) was positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) ( $r=0.75, p<0.01$ ).

**Table-2: Descriptive and Correlation table**

Study Variables	Mean	SD	OCB	SL
OCB	2.80	0.78	1	
SL	2.80	0.78	.754**	1

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Note:** OCB= organizational citizenship behavior, SL= servant leadership.

**4.3. Preliminary analysis**

Before running directly into confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) operations, the study made a preliminary analysis of the accuracy of the data. It is widely documented that data preparation and screening are critical issues in structural equation model (SEM) (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, this study examined the missing data. There were 5missing values in the variable screening. More precisely, SL-10, SL-13 andOCB-5have one

missing value each. OCB-3 has two missing values. At the end, all missing values were treated by employing the imputation (series mean) method.

The study employed Mahalanobis distance to identify the potential outliers. A good rule of thumb is that if the  $p_1$  and  $p_2$  values are less than 0.001, these are cases denoted as outliers (Collier, 2020). Therefore, seven (7) observations were less than 0.001, so they are removed from the dataset. Regarding the normality test, the present study calculated the skewness and kurtosis, and it was found that the values are within the normal range, indicating that there is no problem with the normality of the data. Lastly, the issue of multicollinearity was examined using the VIF and tolerance test, and it was found that there is no multicollinearity concern. Generally, the current study discovered that data preparation and screening were properly analyzed and the variables are eligible to enter into SEM analysis.

To address the common method bias, this study used Harman's one-factor test. Harman's one-factor test can be performed with confirmatory factor analysis, where all indicators are purposely loaded on one factor to determine model fit and are considered to have no common bias if the model is unfit (Collier, 2020). Accordingly, all indicators are loaded into one latent variable (i.e., Servant leadership in this case), and the result revealed that there is no common method bias in the model (CMIN/DF=8.094, CFI=0.755, TLI=0.737, NFI=0.730, GFI=0.413, RMSEA= 0.149).

#### 4.4. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The current study hypothesized a two-factor measurement model (servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior) aimed at validating the appropriate fitness of the proposed model. In relation to the factor measurement model, van Dierendonck (2011) argued that servant leadership is considered the first-order factor. Similarly, Walumbwa et al. (2010) argued that organizational citizenship behavior should be considered the first-order factor.

In SEM analysis, the measurement model is the first stage to be analyzed with the objective of testing the construct validity (convergent and discriminant validity) of the study variables (Hair et al., 2010). To assess convergent validity, factor loading, average variance extraction, and composite reliability were considered (Hair et al., 2010). The acclaimed values for factor loading are supposed to be greater than 0.70, for AVE at least 0.5, and for CR greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, the CFA result of each construct is presented in Table 3, which displays that the factor loading of each indicator is beyond the threshold. Moreover, the AVE of each variable was above 0.5, and that of CR was greater than 0.7. The second objective of the measurement model is to test discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is the degree to which a variable is strictly different from others (Hair et al., 2010). To verify the discriminant validity, an overall CFA was conducted by combining the three constructs together (presented in Figure 2). The CFA result shows that the overall measurement model was properly fit with the sample data (CMIN/df= 2.888, CFI = 0.954, TLI = 0.947, SRMR = 0.0338 and RMSEA = 0.0283), which is consistent with the fit indices of Hair et al. (2010). Model fit improvement was conducted in the study. The first improvement was that five items (i.e., SL-1, SL-5, SL-6, OCBI-3, and OCBO-3) from the indicators of servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior were removed due to low factor loadings (< 0.70). According to Hair et al. (2010), factor loadings greater than 0.70 are better at explaining unobserved constructs in the study. The second improvement was that modification indices were checked and error terms were correlated.

**Table3: Loadings, Reliability, and Convergent Validity Results**

Construct	Items	Factor loading	AVE	CR
	OCB08	.888		
	OCB07	.897		
	OCB06	.901		
	OCB05	.897		
	OCB04	.873		
	OCB02	.897		
	OCB01	.886		
	OCBI8	.913		
OCB	OCBI7	.906	0.982	0.798
	OCBI6	.870		
	OCBI5	.923		
	OCBI4	.890		
	OCBI2	.865		
	OCBI1	.909		
	SL14	.854		
	SL13	.843		
SL	SL12	.829	0.967	0.726
	SL11	.865		
	SL10	.815		
	SL9	.807		
	SL8	.847		
	SL7	.861		
	SL4	.842		
	SL3	.870		
	SL2	.854		

Note: OCB= organizational citizenship behavior, SL= servant leadership

In the overall measurement model, discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE for the construct is greater than its correlation with other constructs in the study (Fornell&Larcker, 1981). Therefore, in the present study, discriminant validity was established. The results of discriminant validity are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Discriminant validity result**

	OCB	SL
OCB	0.894	
SL	0.767	0.851

Note: OCB= organizational citizenship behavior, SL= servant leadership. Source: AMOS Result (2023)

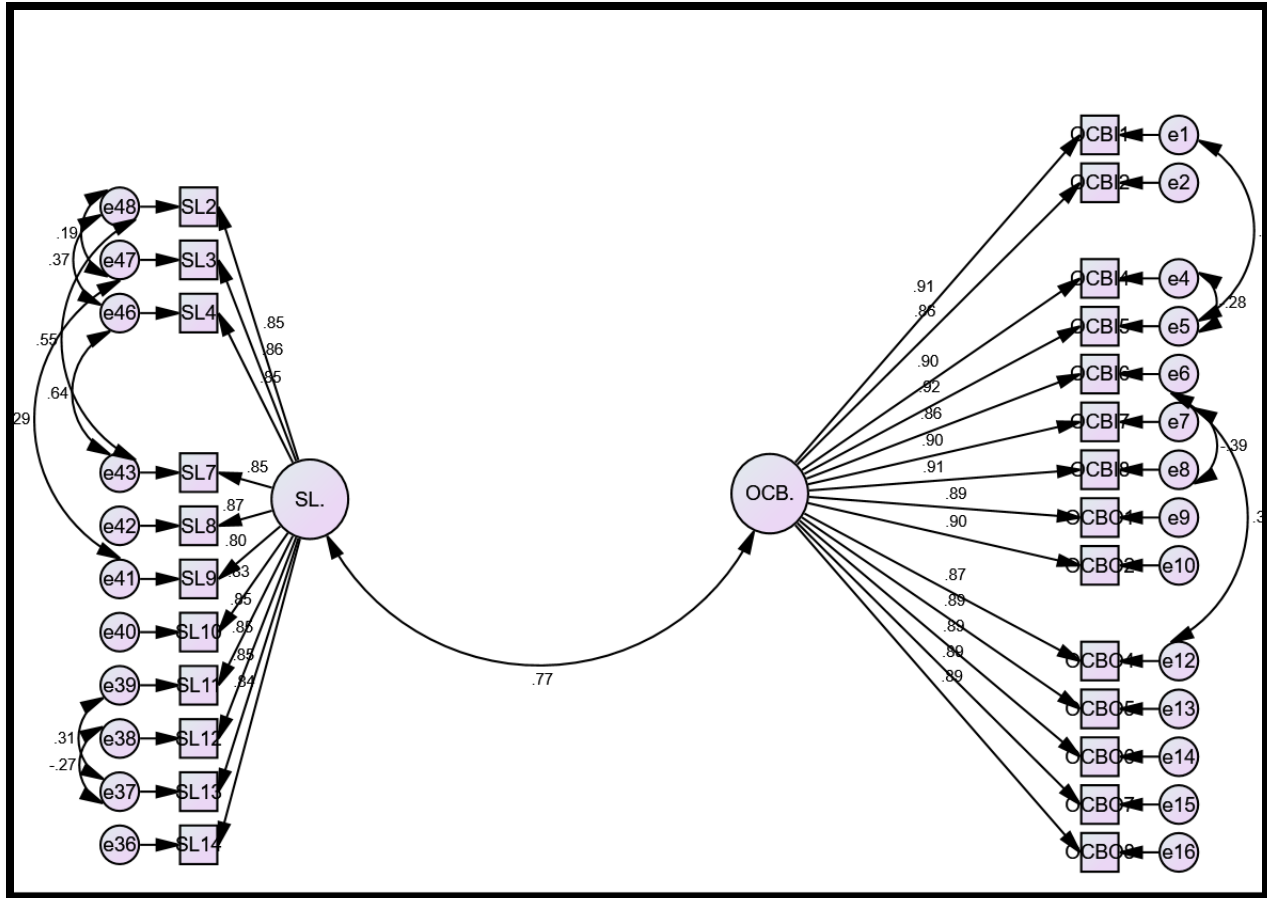


Figure-2: Measurement Model

#### 4.5. Structural model

The second stage of SEM analysis is evaluating the structural model (Hair et al., 2010). Prior to testing the Hypothesis, first the structural model fitness with the theory was validated based on the fit measurement indices. The resulting model provided a good fit for the data: CMIN/df = 2.888, CFI = 0.954, TLI = 0.947, SRMR = 0.0338 and RMSEA = 0.0283. Figure 3 shows the path from servant leadership to organizational citizenship behavior was found statistically significant. Moreover, servant leadership account for 77% of the variance in organizational citizenship behavior indicating that servant leadership is critical relevant factor in enhancing organizational citizenship behavior.

Figure 3: Structural model. Note: OCB= organizational citizenship behavior, SL= servant leadership. Source: AMOS Result (2023)

#### 4.6. Hypothesis Testing

To test the Hypothesis of the study, the study employed SEM. As it is displayed in Table 5, the SEM analysis result demonstrated that servant leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior ( $\beta = 0.674$ ,  $t = 8.955$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting the Hypothesis.



**Table5: The causal effect of Servant leadership on Organizational citizenship behavior**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
OCB	<---	SL	.674	.075	8.955	.000

Note: OCB= organizational citizenship behavior, SL= servant leadership. **Source:** AMOS Result (2023)

#### 4.7. Discussion

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of servant leadership on subordinate’s organizational citizenship behavior. The result shows that servant leadership has significant effect on the subordinate’s organizational citizenship behavior in the federal public service organizations in Ethiopia. This study supports the findings of previous research (Elche et al., 2020; Khattak and O’Connor, 2020; Abid et al., 2015; Mahembe and Engelbrecht, 2014; Gnankob et al., 2022), indicating that servant leader generally positively accepted by their subordinates, which ultimately transforms into higher organizational citizenship behavior. The findings in this study are not surprising because, the proponents of social exchange theory concurred that subordinates will reciprocate behaviors that their bosses exhibit within organizations. Servant leaders are highly concerned about the well-being and development of their followers. In the public sector, level of organizational citizenship behavior has many implications beyond the performance level of the organization and its employees. Low levels of organizational citizenship behavior in public sectors damage its ability to provide better service to citizens, there by undermining its creativity, innovative practices, and ultimately the democratic system (Gadot, 2007). Overall the result shows that there was a significant and positive influence of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. Servant leaders who show concern for the ultimate good of their subordinates will obtain citizenship behavior from the subordinates as feedback (Gnankob et al., 2022). The study concisely noted that, when these leaders within the organizations promote the good of the employees and lead by example, subordinates will exhibit organizational citizenship behavior.

#### 5. Conclusion

Based on the significance of the public service organization to national performance, an intentional effort was made in this study to show empirical evidence of how servant leadership could positively impact the subordinate’s organizational citizenship behavior. The results of the correlation between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior revealed strong relationships. This implies that servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior are many attributes in common and an increase in the performance of one of them may add to the increment of another. The study also revealed that servant leadership has statistically positive significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior. From this result, one may infer that as leaders in federal public service organizations apply servant leadership in their day-to-day leadership practices, it helps to improve officer’s organizational citizenship behavior. By focusing on servant leaders, Ethiopia’s federal public service organizations can make improvements in important outcomes that benefit both the organization and the individual. The contribution of such practices is vital to improving organizational effectiveness.

#### 6. Implications

##### 6.1. Theoretical implications

The present study has theoretical implications for the researchers. Previous studies have shown the links between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, however, no study so far has been done in Ethiopian federal public service organizations cultural context. This is the first study conducted and it

found servant leadership has significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior. The study also contributed to the literature by employing social exchange theory to explain the effect of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. Therefore, it may help enhance the body of knowledge or literature with regard to the practices and interactions between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in public service organizations in different contexts.

## 6.2. Practical Implications

Practically, since the work is done in Ethiopia by federal public service organizations to further improve their performance, all public service organizations should promote servant leadership in their organizations. This will improve subordinates organizational citizenship behavior, and ultimately improve organizational effectiveness.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

Despite all the contributions and implications made by the research highlighted above, it also has some limitations. The first is the generalizability of the results; although the researcher tried to capture the maximum number of federal public service organizations operating in Ethiopia, only six were selected. Therefore, in the future, this research can be conducted at all federal public service organizations. Second, this research can be conducted in the future by private organizations as well. Third, the study used cross-sectional research methods to examine the actions of selected variables; hence, researchers could have carried out longitudinal research and come to different conclusions. Fourth, the current researcher collected data for the predictors and criterion variables from one source. The use of only self-reported measures is vulnerable to the social desirability effect and the influence of common method variance, which may inflate the responses of the participants. A supervisor-rated organizational citizenship behavior in future exploration of these variables may reflect a picture of relationship patterns with more precision. Therefore, future researchers should collect data from different sources.

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