

5-10-2024

# Servant Leadership Impact on Generation Z Employees' Workplace Engagement

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Maria Helena Morrison

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

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by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2023

MA, Nova Southeastern University, 2002

BS, Nova Southeastern University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2024

## Abstract

Workplace engagement with the Gen Z cohort born between 1995 and 2012 continues to be a challenge globally and within the United States. The specific research problem addressed through this study was that it remained unknown whether the servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders impacted Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. These seven servant leadership characteristics include: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically. Greenleaf's servant leadership theory, Blau's social exchange theory, and Khan's employee engagement theory grounded this study's theoretical framework. Data from this quantitative correlational study were collected from 166 Gen Z individuals employed full-time for at least one year and were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and multiple regression techniques. Results from the correlation and multiple regression models were significant. The key results indicated a positive correlation between servant leadership and Gen Z workplace engagement. Using multiple regression techniques, when each of the seven dimensions was tested while controlling all others; however, only emotional healing, conceptual skills, and helping subordinates grow and succeed were significant. The findings suggested servant leadership characteristics are critical to Gen Z workplace engagement. The implications for positive social change are that relationships between servant leaders and followers cultivated through social exchange may result in a higher level of commitment to leaders, positively impacting organizational performance and extending to families and communities.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Raymond and Maureen Thompson, who dedicated their lives to my growth and development into an individual who would positively contribute to the world. To my husband Omar, a model servant leader whom I emulate. To my daughter Hannah-Marie, whom I hope will become a servant leader as she grows and matures to become the best version of herself. Most importantly, to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the ultimate servant leader, and the one I hope to be most like in this world.

## Acknowledgments

With a grateful heart, I give special thanks to the people who have been instrumental in my journey to complete my Ph.D. First, I would like to thank God for giving me the desire, strength, perseverance, and health to pursue this ambitious goal. I have learned that nothing is impossible with God. The motivation and inspiration for this dissertation topic was inspired by the amazing example of Jesus Christ as the ultimate servant leader. Based on my leadership experience, I was convinced I was on the right path in choosing my dissertation topic.

Second, I would like to thank my husband, who gave me a printed quotation by James Hudson Taylor when I commenced this program of study. It read, “There are three stages to every great work of God: First it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done.” Below the quotation were the words, “Congratulations, Maria H. Morrison, Ph.D.” My wonderful husband and best friend, I could not have done it without you. You have always allowed me to pursue my dreams, even at your expense. Thank you for believing in me.

To my faculty members, Dr. Tom Butkiewicz, my phenomenal Dissertation Committee Chair. I could not have done this without your support and expertise. You are not only talented but also a patient and kind Chair. Your support, encouragement, and motivation have been invaluable. To my other Committee Members, Dr. Nikunja Swain and Dr. William Shriner, thank you for your assistance. You have provided insight and feedback that has aided my growth and development toward becoming a scholar-practitioner.

Thanks to my amazing and supportive family and friends for your understanding, financial support, and encouragement. To my daughter, who inspires me every day to be the best version of myself for her to emulate. I love you all so much. This accomplishment is for our family.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Workplace engagement is a major organizational challenge for leaders globally and in the United States. Workplace engagement with the Gen Z cohort born between 1995 and 2012 continues to be a challenge within the United States. Studies conducted by Gallup indicated that more than half of the members of Generation Z (Gen Z or Internet Generation [iGen]) are highly stressed and report a low work engagement of approximately 34% (Pendell, 2021). The literature indicated that engaged employees contribute more to an organization's success. Thus, leadership is an antecedent of employee engagement, based on a leader's influence on how employees perceive their work (Book et al., 2019; Christian et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Servant leaders use a holistic approach to serving others and ensure that their top requirements are addressed by identifying and focusing on those greatest needs (Greenleaf, 1977). There were seven dimensions of servant leadership proposed, which include the following: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically (Liden et al., 2015). These seven dimensions have arisen as an attractive approach to leadership in response to the increased need for employee engagement, innovation, and sharing among co-workers, as well as societal demands for better levels of ethical behavior in firms because it fosters honesty and focuses on helping others (Liden et al., 2015). The preceding data suggest that employees may respond positively to their leaders and the organization through the social exchange mechanism between leaders and followers.

Much of the research on Gen Z has focused on understanding their characteristics and preferences and, to a lesser extent, the leadership approach that best reaches them. Whereas empirical research has been conducted on the value of servant leadership to improve the engagement of millennials (Bao et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2021; Ozturk et al., 2021), there has been little research on the Gen Z cohort. Yet Gen Z symbolizes the most significant generational change that will impact human resources, management style, and organizational leadership due to the intergenerational challenges. In addition, by 2030, most entry-level jobs in the United States will be filled by Gen Z (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014; Singh, 2014). One way modern organizations combat employee turnover is by developing managers with the understanding that their leadership and conduct will significantly impact employees and organizational outcomes in the future (Yukl et al., 2019). By examining the impact of servant leadership characteristics on the work engagement of the Gen Z cohort, this study has addressed a gap in the research literature. In addition, organizations, communities, and cultures may all benefit from servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). The study's findings may also affect positive social change by improving organizational cultures, relationships, and community impact.

Chapter 1 begins with a background of the literature on servant leadership, workplace engagement, and the Gen Z cohort. I then outline the study's problem, purpose statements, and significance. In this section, I also describe the nature of the study, which will address the rationale for the research design and methodology and the definitions pertinent to the study. I also outline the research questions, hypotheses, and theoretical framework guiding the study. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the assumptions,



scope, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study's impact on advancing knowledge in servant leadership and Gen Z work engagement.

### **Background of the Study**

The global workforce faces many challenges. One of those is the challenge of leadership and the intergenerational conflicts in organizations. Eldridge and Stevens (2017) argued that a conversation on generational differences in the workplace is essential. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) supported Eldridge and Stevens's view regarding the importance of dialogue on generational challenges. Gabrielova and Buchko explained that a multigenerational cohort of employees created an intergenerational conflict. This intergenerational conflict has exasperated the need for appropriate leadership styles that transcend the needs of previous generations. Numerous studies were conducted on leadership and multigenerational workforce to determine which leadership styles seem most suitable for millennials (Bhayana et al., 2021; Črešnar & Nedelko, 2020; Farhan, 2021).

Gen Z, or iGen, is now the largest generation in the history of America, with approximately 2 billion born between 1995 and 2012 (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). Gen Zs are digitally competent, egotistical, or self-centered (Twenge, 2017). Twenge (2017) indicated that growing up in more luxury than previous generations, staying at home more, and having less exposure to working as teens make them inclined to be less committed. These factors also make Gen Z more susceptible to being less committed to an organization (Lev, 2021). These challenges have contributed to low job retention rates, an organizational challenge leaders must address.

Gen Z employees have the highest rate of diagnosed depression, are highly stressed, are not interested in committing to a workplace, and are moderately engaged at work, a costly issue of employee work engagement across the United States and a growing challenge for organizational leaders. Individuals born between 1995 and 2012 show signs of depression and anxiety compared to previous generations, which may affect their engagement at work (Maloni et al., 2019; Pendell, 2021). Compared to previous generations, Gen Zs are also the most depressed, easy to quit their jobs, and entrepreneurial (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Magano et al., 2020). Generation Zs want opportunities for professional development and constant feedback in the workplace (Lev, 2021). At the core of this challenge is the need for employee engagement to achieve greater organizational effectiveness. Gallup's 2022 workplace engagement report indicated that 32% of American workers were engaged in their jobs, a reduction of 4% from 2020 (Harter, 2022). Harter (2022) indicated higher engagement levels for organizations prioritizing culture and well-being. Lack of engagement in the global workforce is a challenge resulting in an annual loss of businesses of more than \$7.8 trillion globally annually (Pendell, 2022). Gen-Z is among the least researched generations in the workplace, yet they are problematic for leaders and human resources practitioners (Bencsik et al., 2021). One of the significant challenges is the organization's ability to keep Gen Z engaged. Gen Zs will more likely be more committed, innovative, collaborative, and productive when engaged, resulting in greater profitability for organizations (Lee et al., 2021). As Gen Zs have the propensity to be disengaged and the cost to organizations is significant, Gen Zs' engagement is a priority for organizations.

Organizations where employees are engaged tend to report better performance results when compared to those with lower levels of employee engagement.

Organizations with an engaged workforce deliver up to 18% higher performance than those with mostly disengaged employees (Gandhi & Robison, 2021). Employee engagement has become a significant concern and high priority for human resources practitioners and organizational leaders, to the extent that the consultancy industry in employee engagement has been created to support this endeavor in organizations (Bailey, 2022). More researchers must study Gen Z's large population to ensure organizations can tap into their creativity so they can contribute to organizational success.

There is a shortage of literature on the leadership style that Gen Z employees prefer. Organizational leaders may better recruit, train, and develop appropriate competencies when they understand leadership preferences. Lee et al. (2021) indicated a lack of empirical studies on the preferred leadership style to engage Gen Z employees. Previous studies have shown the connection between leadership and employee engagement using different population samples and industries (Prasetyaningtyas et al., 2022; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Researchers have explored and examined leadership's impact on employee engagement, focusing on transformational and transactional leadership (Chin et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021). Different leadership approaches, such as servant leadership, should be the focus of future research regarding the engagement of Gen Zs.

There is insufficient empirical research to capture the type of leadership necessary to foster greater levels of engagement in the Gen Z cohort. The servant leadership approach, with its other-centeredness, may assist Gen Z employees in dealing with

depression and stress and help them become more engaged by prioritizing their needs and development. Bao et al. (2018) examined the effect of servant leadership on followers' work engagement, testing two mediating factors: the social exchange mechanism using leader-member exchange (LMX) and the social learning mechanism. Bao et al. found that servant leadership fosters work engagement in followers mediated through a social exchange mechanism rather than social learning. Similarly, Book et al. (2019) analyzed the relationship between leadership satisfaction and critical outcomes such as employee engagement, loyalty, and intention to stay. They found that employee engagement, loyalty, and intention to stay are all influenced by leadership satisfaction. Kiker et al. (2019) also investigated the direct effects of servant leadership on organizationally significant outcomes. Kiker et al. found that servant leadership is favorably related to positive work outcomes such as work performance, organizational citizenship behavior, job happiness, organizational commitment, and follower trust. The initial research findings suggested that organizations must identify the leadership styles and approaches that best suit Gen Z employees to get the maximum contribution.

Though several researchers have confirmed the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement, the research on the Gen Z cohort is limited, critical, and urgent. The current study may contribute to filling a gap in the literature by measuring the impact of servant leadership characteristics on Gen Z work engagement. The findings may extend the body of literature to help academics and human resources practitioners further understand the leadership attributes that affect Gen Z's engagement at work. When organizational leaders are more aware and understand the Gen Z cohort,

they can strategize to improve leadership skills to engage this cohort. This study is timely and may provide greater insight for leaders.

### **Problem Statement**

The situation that prompted searching the literature is that more than any other generation, Gen Z (born between 1995 and 2012) has the least work experience entering the workforce, the highest rate of diagnosed depression, rates of high stress, prefers to work as entrepreneurs, is not interested in committing to a workplace, and may be described as being moderately engaged at work (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Lev, 2021; Magano et al., 2020; Schroth, 2019). A U.S. Gallup survey indicated that 2020 saw a reduction in the already low level of employee engagement from 36% to 34%, exacerbated by the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Pendell, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many people under 40 years old as they experienced higher stress levels and anger than older workers, resulting in lower well-being and engagement (Pendell, 2021). Muduli and McLean (2020) posited that some of this stress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted Gen Z's engagement and the organization's performance.

On average, highly engaged teams are 14% to 18% more productive than disengaged teams, while the turnover rate of low-engagement teams might be anywhere from 18% to 43% higher than the turnover rate of high-engagement teams (Gandhi & Robison, 2021). Businesses in the United States lost an estimated \$300 million annually due to employee productivity deficits (Bialowolski et al., 2020). The social problem is Gen Z's substandard workplace engagement because they are highly stressed, not

committed to a single organization, and easily quit work, which signals leadership style issues that negatively impact organizational performance (Jayathilake et al., 2021).

Researchers have found a direct link between different leadership styles and employee engagement and that leaders provide a competitive advantage for organizational success (Ireland & Hitt, 2005; Jia et al., 2022; Rahmadani & Schaufeli, 2022). These findings indicate a severe challenge for organizations, which leadership must urgently address.

The specific research problem that was addressed through this study was that it was not known whether the servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders impact Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. These seven servant leadership characteristics include the following: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically. Although researchers have investigated this issue, the topic has not been explored in this way. Very little literature exists on the preferred leadership style to engage Gen Z employees in the United States; thus, much more needs to be understood (Lee et al., 2021). Organizational leaders should prioritize understanding and developing leadership characteristics that foster greater workplace engagement in this Gen Z cohort.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. The predictor variables were the servant leadership characteristics of emotional healing, creating value for the

community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. The dependent or outcome variable was workplace engagement. The target population members were Gen Z employed full-time across various industries in Florida. The study's findings may positively impact social change as servant leaders are found to be morally and socially responsible and may influence followers toward a collective effort to improve organizational performance and communities. The nurturing nature of servant leaders may foster positive relationships within the organization, which may extend to families and society. The findings may also impact managerial practice by advancing the value of servant leadership to organizations and the importance of recruiting managers with prosocial behavior or characteristics. The findings may also emphasize the need to invest in training and development of servant leadership characteristics to build a culture that may foster positive employee and organizational outcomes.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What is the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

$H_01$ : There is no statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>11</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): To what extent do the servant leadership dimensions of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

*H*<sub>021</sub>: Emotional healing does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>121</sub>: Emotional healing does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>022</sub>: Creating value for the community does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>122</sub>: Creating value for the community does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>023</sub>: Conceptual skills do not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>123</sub>: Conceptual skills do predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>024</sub>: Empowering does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.



*H<sub>124</sub>*: Empowering does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>025</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>125</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>026</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>126</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>027</sub>*: Behaving ethically does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>127</sub>*: Behaving ethically does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Theories help explain how the variables of servant leadership and work engagement relate. The theoretical framework that supported this study comprised three theories: Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership theory, Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, and Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory. Greenleaf's servant leadership theory became popular with other researchers who postulated that leaders see themselves first as servants and prioritize the development and needs of their followers; from this, a reciprocal relationship develops (Liden et al., 2008, 2015; Spears, 1995; van

Dierendonck, 2011). Liden et al. (2015) suggested that servant leadership arose as an attractive alternative approach to leadership in response to the rising need for improved workplace engagement, innovation, and employee sharing. Liden et al. (2015) also added that other-centric focus, promoting good ethics and integrity, and helping others become their best selves were paramount to the nature of servant leaders. Liden et al. developed a scale for assessing global servant leadership using a seven-item measure with the following characteristics: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically. These dimensions of servant leadership were examined in this study.

Proponents of the social exchange theory indicate that when one individual in a relationship has benefited, they may feel obligated to reciprocate that action through an exchange. Blau (1964) was the primary proponent who indicated that social exchange requires reciprocity, so both sides usually find the connection satisfying. Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their employees above their own, facilitating employees' growth and development and creating an environment for their success. These employees often perceive the need to reciprocate the actions of their leaders from which they have benefited, which may result in improved engagement at work in which both the leader and organization benefit. Understanding how servant leadership and social exchange theories work together to explain the anticipated response from employees regarding work engagement theory has been critical to this study.

Kahn (1990) created the employee engagement theory. Khan generalized that employee behavior could be observed and assessed to evaluate the degree of their involvement in the workplace. Work engagement may be influenced by three psychological conditions including: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) accessibility. Khan postulated that leaders could determine the engagement and disengagement of employees by evaluating workplace behavior.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of the study was quantitative. A quantitative study using a nonexperimental correlational research design was deemed most appropriate to address the research questions. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. A qualitative research design was not selected since it does not measure relationships between variables. Barnham (2015) formulated that when researchers investigate to understand a phenomenon more deeply, they use a qualitative methodology to explore the why question. While a mixed methods study may be applicable and useful, it may not be feasible due to the need to conduct a qualitative and a quantitative strand, which is time-consuming. The correlational research method is appropriate for deductive reasoning from numerical data collection and analysis to enhance decision-making (Burkholder et al., 2020). A quantitative research design was best suited to support the research problem and questions and determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the independent and the dependent variables and the extent of that relationship.

A quantitative design was appropriate for this study to investigate the relationship or association between the servant leadership dimensions as the predictor variable and the outcome variable of employee workplace engagement. The study did not modify or manipulate any of the variables involved but rather accurately identified the degree of relationship between measurable variables (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2016; Burkholder et al., 2020). A correlational research design was appropriate to examine the extent to which, if at all, seven servant leadership dimensions of (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically exhibited by organizational leaders impact Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

This proposed study was not conducted to determine the cause and effect. An experimental or quasi-experimental design determining cause and effect was not appropriate (Burkholder et al., 2020). Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2019) determined that a correlation design and regression analysis were optimal for measuring the relationship between variables' existence, association, and strength. The theoretical framework includes the theories of servant leadership and social exchange and how these relate to the theory of engagement. This framework was suitable for examining the variables, using quantitative surveys to collect data to help determine the relationship between the variables.

For the planned research design, I collected data using surveys sent to Gen Z full-time employees in different organizations and industries across Florida who met the inclusion criteria. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who signed the

consent form indicating they met the inclusion criteria. To maintain anonymity, the surveys sent to each participant had a unique link to ensure no duplications, and no names or employers were required. The data collection tools for the proposed study comprised two unchanged survey instruments to ensure validity and reliability. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) consisted of nine statements about work engagement for participants to rate their engagement at work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7) measures servant leadership and consists of seven statements for participants to rate the impact of the servant leader (Liden et al., 2015). Their receptive developers, Schaufeli et al. (2006) and Liden et al. (2015) confirmed the validity and reliability of both scales.

### **Definitions**

*Employee workplace engagement:* Employees who are psychologically available to commit to and contribute to meaningful work toward accomplishing organizational goals. The environment that facilitates this engagement is characterized by meaningfulness, safety, and accessibility (Kahn, 1990).

*Generation Z:* Gen Z, or iGen, has recently entered the workforce. The Gen Z cohort was born between 1995 and 2012, is influenced by and driven by the digital age, and represents 32% of the world population (Lev, 2021).

*Servant leadership:* The style of leadership by which the leaders focus on the employees by influencing them through their service and prioritizing their needs above their own (Greenleaf, 2002).

*Social exchange theory*: Certain social behaviors or responses are generated from the exchange in a relationship. This theory relates to the relationship between leaders and followers. The benefits followers derive from their leaders may result in their commitment to the leader. Through social exchange, the leader and organization benefit from greater performance outcomes from followers (Blau, 1964).

### **Assumptions**

An assumption in a research study is outside the researcher's control but must still be considered. These assumptions may or may not be true and are not necessarily tested for correctness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Simon & Goes, 2013; Tudor-Locke et al., 2014). Two assumptions in the study were that participants would respond truthfully and without bias. The instructions in the research instrument reiterated the need for honesty in responses. An attention checker question was included in the demographics section of the survey. This question related to being in their current job position, working full-time for at least 1 year. Simon (2011) indicated that data from self-reported data collection surveys or interviews might be biased based on participants' exaggeration, misinformation, or even selective memory. Data collection heavily depended on access to the population sample and other resources.

These assumptions were necessary for two reasons. First, the participants must be within the generation group to provide an honest reflection of the data collected. Second, participants working full-time in an organization may best answer the research question regarding the characteristics of their leader or supervisor that significantly impact their performance. A participant who works part-time or not at all or has not worked close to

completing this survey may not accurately recall or communicate the responses to the questions. Being absent from the work environment for some time may affect one's ability to reflect information accurately.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Gen Z's entrance into the workforce in the last few years has exasperated a challenge for leaders because they differ from previous generations. Each generation presents unique qualities that challenge leadership effectiveness. Gen Zs are digitally inclined and creative, and they are also spoiled and exhibit a high level of depression (Lev, 2021; Pendell, 2021). They quickly quit their job, are individually focused, prefer to be entrepreneurs, will have a hard time committing to an organization, and are not very engaged at work (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Lev, 2021). These characteristics make managing Gen Zs challenging for individuals within organizational leadership. The leadership style required for Gen Zs differs because of their difference when compared to previous generations. It is, therefore, critical for organizational leadership teams to identify those characteristics and attributes that will create the preferred work environment for Gen Zs.

The scope of this study included examining the impact of servant leadership characteristics on Gen Z work engagement, using employees across the state of Florida in the United States. Previous studies have examined and identified the positive relationship between servant leadership and employee work engagement (De Clercq et al., 2014; Zeeshan et al., 2021) and confirmed the positive effects of servant leadership on employee engagement. However, none have examined the individual dimensions of

servant leadership in Gen Z workplace engagement. In contrast to transformational and transactional leadership styles, servant leadership positions the leader on the same level as the employees and prioritizes their focus on subordinates and ethical behavior (Jaramillo et al., 2015). The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. Comparing the leadership style preferences of Gen Z was outside the scope of this study.

The study's delimitations were determined to execute the study effectively. The delimitation of the study refers to those factors or characteristics that determine the scope and define the boundaries concerning the specific objectives, research questions, variables, and theoretical perspectives (Simon, 2011). The criteria of the sample population, geographic location, and the type of organizations or skills of the participants influenced the delimitations of this study. The delimitation included non-managerial participants who were born between 1995 and 2012 in the Gen Z cohort. Individuals under 18 were considered a vulnerable category of participants since they could not readily consent to participate in the study (Laydner et al., 2017). Demographic factors, including age, gender, and race, also played an important role in descriptive statistical analysis, as any significant demographic factor would be included as covariates in the multiple regression model.

Only Gen Zs living and working in the Florida region of the United States were eligible to participate. Gen Zs working full-time for at least 1 year participated in the study, whereas Gen Zs working part-time were excluded. I chose this group of



participants to help organizations better understand what type of servant leadership characteristics, if any, influence their engagement at work. To have included Gen Zs who have never worked or worked only part-time may have produced impaired results. The findings from the study may likely be generalizable because the participants, though within a specific cohort of Gen Z, were not restricted to particular jobs or industries, which may increase the generalization of results. In addition, a 1 year, full-time work experience would expand eligibility for inclusion compared to 2 years or more full-time employment requirement.

### **Limitations**

The researcher's decisions during a study always lead to research constraints, resulting in potential weaknesses referred to as limitations (Aguinis & Edwards, 2014; Simon & Goes, 2013). This study's limitation refers to factors limiting the research and potential weaknesses out of my control. These included the time required to complete the study, biases, sampling strategy, and self-reporting instruments. The first limitation was the time it would take to execute the data collection and analysis, as other researchers may be able to complete a similar study with the Gen Z cohort. Efforts included a planned and well-executed approach with a timeline to keep focused and on track to completion. Timeliness was essential since few studies have measured these variables with the Gen Z population, and the examination is important to organizational leaders and human resources practitioners. To mitigate this risk, I used a pool of participants accessed through the SurveyMonkey crowd-sourcing platform. This reduced the data collection

timeframe to a minimum of 8 hours, and once collected, data were analyzed within 2 weeks.

The second limitation of this study was the potential for self-selection bias in the sample, which may reduce the representation of the sample population. The possibility of self-selection bias arises when participants participate in the study, thus selecting themselves based on determined interests and agreeing to participate (Schaurer & Weiß, 2020). The risk of some self-selection bias is inescapable given that participation in the study must be voluntary following ethical research guidelines (Ertmann et al., 2020). The participants are non-managerial and would appear to restrict the generalization of results to Gen Zs, who may be in leadership positions. Participants were from different industries, and the ability to generalize findings across sectors in the United States made this feasible. The third limitation was a potential bias in self-reporting instruments such as surveys. While an excellent tool for collecting opinion-based data, these instruments run the risk of participants embellishing their responses and creating a condition for social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010). To mitigate the limitation of using a self-reporting instrument, I reinforced the importance of truthfully responding to the surveys and the value of this to the validity of the research findings, especially in light of participants' anonymous responses.

### **Significance of the Study**

Disengaged employees are a challenge for many organizations due to the associated cost. Disengaged employees cost organizations in the United States approximately \$350B annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The issue of employee

engagement is critical to all organizations. Prentice (2022) concluded that supportive leadership fosters higher employee engagement through a social exchange between leaders and followers. This study may extend the literature on the impact of servant leadership on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. The findings may also indicate the specific dimensions of servant leadership that may be most effective among the Gen Z cohort, making an original contribution to the literature. The findings may support organizational leaders in determining the leadership style and characteristics necessary for organizational leadership to effectively lead the Gen Z cohort and help them become more engaged at work.

Improving leadership attitudes and behavior may bring about positive social change as employees become more engaged through improved communication, building relationships, and fostering an environment that reduces stress and improves employees' well-being. Waddell and Patterson (2018) indicated that Gen Z seeks to live purpose-filled lives to pursue the greater good, even as they seek to achieve greatness. Waddell and Patterson argued that if organizational leaders and those in academia seek to lead as servants and inspire servant leadership among this generation, they may develop servant leaders who will have a significant societal impact. The work and scholarship of individuals who have written on the attitudes and behavior of servant leadership and the Gen Z cohort have inspired this study. The findings may advance the literature on servant leadership and Gen Z and the tremendous impact this type of leadership can have on their organizations, communities, and society.

### **Significance to Theory**

The findings from this study could make an original contribution to the research literature on the seven dimensions of servant leadership and their impact on employee work engagement, related specifically to the Gen Z cohort. This study's significance to theory includes that it may extend the literature as these specific variables may not have been tested on this cohort using a quantitative methodology (Lee et al., 2021).

Researchers may undertake future studies to examine specific leadership theories and their association with job satisfaction, motivation, or performance experienced by Gen Z employees (Zehetner et al., 2020). Advancing the literature with new research findings on the impact of servant leadership on Gen Z work engagement may advance the theory of its effect on another generation, providing additional insight within the research literature.

### **Significance to Practice**

The study's findings could impact organizational leaders, managers, and human resources practitioners, as they would be more aware of the characteristics of leadership that best engender workplace engagement of Gen Z employees. The significance of practice may advance the importance of recruiting emotionally intelligent individuals, combined with servant leadership training, to build a servant leadership-type organizational culture (Eva et al., 2019). Gen Zs might profoundly affect the workplace across all sectors and organizational levels (Zehetner et al., 2020). The study's findings may also help organizational leaders strategically plan for and invest the resources needed to develop servant leadership skills and behavior to manage and lead Gen Zs

effectively. Servant leadership may positively impact the organizational culture, fostering greater employee engagement among Gen Zs. Additionally, leaders may use the findings from the research to help identify the leadership skills and characteristics that are most effective with the Gen Z cohort and develop strategies to improve the leadership competencies of current and future leaders.

### **Significance to Social Change**

This study may have implications for positive social change. Servant leadership involves advancing the welfare of organizations, communities, and societies (Greenleaf, 1970). This impact may influence advancing three of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Global Goals, including the following: (a) Goal 10, reducing inequalities; (b) Goal 11, sustainable cities and communities; and (c) Goal 13, climate action (United Nations, n.d.). Researchers found that servant leaders prioritize their employees' needs and interests and are more moral and socially responsible (Parris & Peachey, 2013; van Dierendonck, 2011). Future organizational leaders may be more community-focused, seeking to impact social change via servant leadership. A servant leadership culture should engender a positive, nurturing organizational climate concerned with the well-being of employees. The relationships between servant leaders and followers cultivated through social exchange may result in commitment to leaders and organizational goals, positively impacting organizational performance and extending to families and communities.

## Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 included an overview of the research topic of servant leadership and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement. The situation that prompted this study is that many Gen Z employees are not engaged. Gen Zs have the least work experience entering the workforce, the highest rate of diagnosed depression, are highly stressed, prefer to work as entrepreneurs, are not interested in committing to a workplace, and are moderately engaged at work (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Lev, 2021; Magano et al., 2020). The specific research problem addressed through this study is that it is not known whether the servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders impact Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. These seven servant leadership characteristics include the following: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically.

I discussed how the existing literature supported the relationship between leadership and work engagement and identified the gap in the literature to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics and Gen Z's workplace engagement. This gap led to the specific research problem, which led to the purpose of the study: to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. This chapter provided an overview of the research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, nature of the study, and implications to the research literature, practice, and positive social change. Chapter 2 is an extensive literature review of the

components of the research framework, including servant leadership, social exchange theory, Gen Z, and work engagement. Other key components include organizational performance, stress, employee turnover, and the COVID-19 pandemic relating to the Gen Z cohort of employees.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between the servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. This research is vital to organizational leadership because Gen Z is the largest generation in the history of America and will occupy most entry-level jobs in the United States by 2030 (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Gen Zs are the most depressed, easily quit their jobs, and are entrepreneurial (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Magano et al., 2020). The specific research problem that was addressed through this study was that it remained unknown whether the servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders impact Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. These seven servant leadership characteristics include the following: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically.

Individuals in leadership roles must provide guidance, advise, persuade, and motivate others. Leadership varies from management or authority in that leadership is often associated with a positive meaning. Some leaders operate in a manner that produces negative influence. Good leaders are frequently respected for influencing others, fulfilling goals, and effecting positive change (Comstock, 2021). Organizational leaders must possess the skills necessary to lead effectively and help create a positive environment for employees to foster higher levels of engagement at work. Leaders possess different



leadership styles, and human resources practitioners need to ascertain which style best fosters the engagement of Gen Z employees.

Leadership style affects the extent to which employees are engaged at work. Ismail et al. (2021) suggested that leadership style is usually linked to and affects employee engagement. Leadership is the most critical driver of an organization's employee engagement culture, as it helps maintain employee trust and maximize organizational productivity (Ismail et al., 2021). A 2020 Gallup study showed that Gen Zs showed lower levels of engagement and were characterized by higher levels of stress and anger when compared to older workers. The issue of work engagement serves as a warning sign for both international and global leaders and global employers (Pendell, 2021). The connection between leadership style and employee workplace engagement is critical for organizational leaders to understand and employ strategies to improve compatibility for greater organizational performance and success. Servant leadership is an important style to consider because of its unique characteristics that prioritize the needs of employees and its positive effect on employee work engagement.

There is growing interest in servant leadership as a suitable approach to improve employee workplace engagement. Researchers have shown servant leadership to be a suitable approach to increasing employee engagement (Bao et al., 2018; Ozturk et al., 2021). Eva et al. (2019) reviewed 100 of these studies for their systematic review of servant leadership literature. Ozturk et al. (2021) discovered that servant leaders positively impacted employees' work engagement. In addition, Bao et al. (2018) examined the effect of servant leadership on followers' work engagement using two

mediating factors: the social exchange mechanism and the social learning mechanism.

Bao et al. found that servant leadership fosters work engagement in followers mediated through the social exchange mechanism. Social exchange occurs because servant leaders prioritize the needs of employees and the organizations.

Zhou et al. (2022) examined the influence of servant leadership on employee work engagement with trust in the leader as a moderating role, which was also confirmed and explained by social exchange theory. Bao et al. (2018) and Zhou et al., who did not use a Gen Z sample, concluded that servant leadership's positive impact on the work environment significantly impacted employees' work engagement. In support of further research, Lee et al. (2021) found a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and Gen Z employee work engagement. Lee et al. suggested testing other leadership styles and variables using a quantitative methodology and regression analysis with the Gen Z cohort to determine which best impacts Gen Z work engagement. Research to test other leadership styles, such as servant leadership with the Gen Z cohort, is essential and urgent to address this study's research questions.

The key components of this chapter focus on the literature search strategy, theoretical underpinning, and literature review. The literature review closely examined the evolution of leadership theory from the great man theory to today's transformational and servant leadership types. A particular focus on the generational cohorts in the workplace provided a backdrop to help readers understand the differences between the generational cohorts. Details on servant leadership theory development and servant leadership characteristics outlined by Liden et al. (2015) are included in this review. The

topic of Generation Z concerning organizational performance, the COVID-19 pandemic, stress, employee engagement, and the relationship between employee engagement and servant leadership, highlighting the role of social exchange theory, were discussed. The literature search strategy highlighted major data sources that contributed to this study.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I conducted this literature review using several databases in the Walden Library, including EBSCOhost, ProQuest Central, SAGE Online, ABI/INFORM Collection, Academic Search Complete, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. Key consulting professional websites such as Deloitte and Gallup had data on recent studies since the COVID-19 pandemic regarding Generation Z and turnover within this cohort. The keywords searched included *servant leadership*, *Generation Z*, *Gen Z*, *iGen*, *work engagement*, *employee engagement*, *leadership and Gen Z*, *leadership style and engagement*, *employee engagement*, and *productivity*. The focus was on scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles published over the past 4 years and included articles and books on seminal work on servant leadership, Gen Z, and work engagement.

The EBSCO host database search yielded only two peer-reviewed articles on Gen Z and leadership within the last 5 years. One of the researchers measured the impact of both servant leadership and authentic leadership on Gen Z engagement. When I searched for Gen Z and engagement, the search revealed 89 articles, some unrelated to the topic, but at least 80% in some way to the search terms. The terms *leadership* and *engagement* revealed 21,882 articles between 2017 and 2023.

Using the search terms *Gen Z* and *servant leadership* in ProQuest Central revealed two articles between 2020 and 2022. At the same time, the search terms *Gen Z* and *leadership* revealed 20 peer-reviewed articles. Only four of these articles specifically related to the search terms. A search in the SAGE Online database using the search term *leadership style and engagement* resulted in 15,575 peer-reviewed articles dated between 2018 and 2022. While the terms *Gen Z* and *work engagement* resulted in 1,849 articles, most were unrelated to the search terms. Using the search terms *employee engagement* and *productivity* resulted in 23,299 peer-reviewed articles. The terms *Gen Z* and *leadership* resulted in 7,753 research articles.

I searched ABI/INFORM Collection using the search words *Gen Z* and *employee engagement*, resulting in nine peer-reviewed research articles. Search terms *Gen Z* and *servant leadership* resulted in only one result. The search terms *Gen Z* and *leadership* resulted in only two research articles within 5 years. A search within the Academic Search Complete database using the search terms *Gen Z* or *iGen* and *employee engagement* resulted in one peer-reviewed article. The search terms *Gen Z* and *leadership style* resulted in three peer-reviewed articles. The search using *Gen Z* and *servant leadership* revealed zero results.

A search in the Emerald database using the search terms *work engagement* and *leadership* resulted in over 38,000 peer-reviewed articles and 7,575 parts of books. The search terms *Gen Z* and *servant leadership* resulted in 71 research articles, of which only one related specifically to servant leadership and did not use a Gen Z sample. The terms *Gen Z* and *leadership* resulted in 7,081 research articles between 2018 and 2023. These

articles related in some way to either Gen Z or leadership or both Gen Z and leadership. Finally, Google Scholar database searches resulted in 8,630 articles using the search terms *Gen Z* and *servant leadership* between 2018 and 2023. Several articles were not peer-reviewed and focused on either Gen Z or servant leadership. Many included servant leadership and millennials. The search terms *Gen Z work engagement* and *leadership* resulted in 16,800 articles between 2018 and 2023.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Theories help researchers to understand, explain, and predict a phenomenon. A research study's theoretical framework is its foundation. The theoretical framework supports the study's problem statement, purpose, and research questions and anchors the literature review, methodologies, and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). A *theory* is an explanation that enables one to comprehend how and why an observable phenomenon happens (Hall, 2013). I used Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership, Blau's (1964) social exchange, and Kahn's 1990 employee engagement seminal theories to connect my research to what is already known about the subject. These theories were explained in relation to each other and their impact on employee work engagement.

### **Servant Leadership Theory**

Leadership has been a well-researched phenomenon for decades after transcending from the Industrial Revolution and the autocratic and transactional leadership styles to more modern, flexible styles of the servant, adaptive, and transformational leadership approach. Previous researchers have used several theories to explain the various leadership styles (Bao et al., 2018; Behr, 2021; Ismail et al., 2021;

Lee et al., 2021). This study uses Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory to explain how this leadership style works. Greenleaf purported that servant leaders naturally desire to serve others and consciously decide to lead. Servant leadership prioritizes the needs of employees and moves the focus away from themselves to the employees benefiting the organizations (Greenleaf, 2014). Servant leaders delegate power to their followers, prioritize and emphasize followers' growth and development, cultivate a caring culture, and communicate with their employees. Servant leaders keep promises, are honest, regard themselves as stewards of the company, and are role models for followers' expectations (Jaramillo et al., 2015; van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leaders assist the organization in creating a healthy work environment in which employees foster commitment and trust (Bao et al., 2018; Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). Servant leadership theory explains and adds to the knowledge of how organizations impacted by servant leadership may improve performance outcomes. The unique characteristics of servant leaders, with their selfless nature, contribute to organizational success.

An understanding of how servant leadership theory enhances organizational performance is important since it differs from traditional approaches to leadership. The holistic approach of servant leaders focuses on employees concerning the relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions while simultaneously focusing on a commitment to the organization, resulting in followers' devotion to the leader and ultimately to organizational goals (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011). The theory of servant leadership diverts from other leadership theories because it focuses on the leader as a servant prioritizing the needs, growth, and development of their followers.

Comparatively, traditional approaches to leadership concentrate on power and prioritize profit at the expense of others (Sendjaya, 2015). When leaders prioritize the needs and concerns of their employees and cultivate a positive work environment, employees may grow in their commitment to both the leaders and the organization. Leaders and followers may cultivate a positive relationship facilitated through social exchange.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory, pioneered by Homans (1958) and further popularized by Blau (1964), described and demonstrated the principles of cost and benefits, which fueled relationships based on the cost of what has been given and received. Blau postulated that the recipient is obliged to reciprocate behavior pleasing to the reward giver. Homans explained that when individuals are in a relationship of influence, it involves cost and benefits, and the one who benefits values the reinforced behavior. Social exchange theory demonstrates how servant leadership influences followers' behavior; when servant leaders prioritize their welfare, they will want to make their behavior toward the servant leaders and others more valuable (Bao et al., 2018; Eva et al., 2019). Understanding social exchange theory may explain how servant leadership characteristics positively impact Gen Z's work engagement. Leaders must understand the employee engagement theory and see how social exchange theory may impact employee performance and organizational outcomes.

### **Employee Engagement Theory**

In a seminal work on employee engagement, Kahn (1990) described personal involvement as allowing individuals to display physical, cognitive, and emotional

behavior during the performance of their jobs, thereby fusing the personalities of organization members with their job duties and fostering engagement. Employee or work engagement is not new and has been widely studied (Bailey, 2022). Work and employee engagement are used interchangeably and refer to the degree to which employees are inspired to perform. Shimazu et al. (2008) described work engagement as a state of well-being in the workplace characterized by vitality, dedication, and absorption. Vigor relates to employee energy and resilience; dedication involves commitment, meaning, and pride, while absorption refers to being focused and involved (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Servant leadership is related to and influences employee work performance through social exchange theory, which facilitates reciprocation (Bao et al., 2018; Paesen et al., 2019; Sawan & Suryadi, 2020). Using Liden et al.'s (2015) servant leadership characteristics, which are supported by Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, allows for a deeper understanding of their effect on employees. Through understanding the social exchange mechanism, servant leadership provides a sound basis for testing the problematic issue of Gen Z work engagement, with their many differences and nuances compared to previous generations.

The theories of servant leadership, social exchange, and employee engagement may help answer the research question regarding the impact of servant leadership characteristics on Gen Z's work engagement. Researchers argued that theories could explain "when, how, and why" in addition to the descriptive "what" (Davis et al., 2015; Elragal & Klischewski, 2017). Answering the research question may advance the knowledge of servant leadership's impact on the newest Gen Z cohort that has entered the



workplace and may dominate over the next 6 decades until retirement. Answering the research question is also important because the population of Gen Z is the largest compared to previous generations and thus may be influential enough to change how leaders lead in the future. Implications for the research literature may include servant leadership theory's impact on the Gen Z cohort. For organizational leadership globally, it may indicate the skills current and future leaders need to create a work environment that engages Gen Z employees better. The literature review will provide details of the study's key components that are already known, what is controversial, and what is yet to be determined about the variable being studied.

### **Literature Review**

The evolution of leadership from great man to transformational leadership theories will highlight how leadership has evolved since the 1800s. The evolution of generations in the workplace will also be a key feature, looking closely at the characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, and X, and the factors that have contributed to the unique characteristics of each generation. The seven servant leadership dimensions articulated by Liden et al. (2015) were defined and explored using empirical research findings and their applicability to effective leadership. The chapter will include the relevance of servant leadership in today's context and the current state of servant leadership research. Also included in this section is a focus on Generation Z concerning organizational performance, stress, the COVID-19 pandemic, employee turnover, and employee workplace engagement. The role of social exchange theory in explaining the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and the gap in the

literature that led to this current study are vital components to address. Finally, the chapter will close with a summary and conclusion. The literature review in this study begins with the evolution of leadership, which will unfold the transition over the last 10 decades from great man theory to transformational leadership.

### **Evolution of Leadership**

Leadership theories have evolved over the last 100 years. Researchers have sought to identify the leadership approach of the eras and determine which approach best improves leadership effectiveness and, ultimately, organizational performance (Allport, 1927; Bass, 1985, 1990; Burns, 1934; Greenleaf, 1977; House, 1977). These are just some researchers who sought to understand and determine the true meaning of effective leadership during their era. Allport (1927) postulated that effective leaders possessed superior traits that determined their personality, while Burns (1934) developed the concept of transactional and transformational leadership. Burns postulated that transactional leadership involved an exchange between followers and leaders motivated by punishment and rewards in response to output levels. Burns also indicated that transformational leadership involves a relationship of influence between leaders and followers to achieve objectives that prioritize the organization's needs above that of the leader (Flynn, 2019). Bass (1985, 1990) expounded on Burns's work by creating a model of the two approaches to leadership but included a third somewhat opposite behavior termed laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire leadership refers to those leaders who are unconcerned about satisfying the needs of their followers and either ignore or distance themselves from their misbehavior (Flynn, 2019). House (1971) developed the path-goal

theory of leadership, a contingency theory approach that involved leaders helping subordinates improve at their jobs, positively impacting their work unit and the organization. Transactional and transformational leadership dominated for many years until other approaches to leadership, including servant leadership, dominated. Greenleaf (1977) coined servant leadership to explain that effective leaders prioritize their employees' needs over their own, resulting in reciprocation and positively impacting organizational outcomes. Servant leadership may be considered to have some similarities to path-goal theory in that it helps followers to improve.

Researchers have continued to be interested in understanding leadership theories to determine the most appropriate approach to leading in different contexts. Vasilescu (2019) argued that leadership is both a process and an art critical to influencing followers toward effective performance. Although leadership is one of the most studied social sciences concepts, it may also be the least understood. Avolio (2007) concluded that leadership literature lacks theoretical integration. Allport (1927) first introduced the term leadership, which refers to the various personality types or behaviors specific to psychology. Though studied for almost a century, leadership remains a research topic of interest for several reasons. One reason for interest in studying leadership includes the changing nature of the global environment and the differences in generational attributes and leadership challenges. Another reason for the continued interest in studying leadership may be the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, characterized by the government's forced quarantine and lockdown, which resulted in social isolation for some individuals.

Organizations benefit from a positive leadership style that fosters employee engagement. According to de Oliveira Dias et al. (2022), individuals are influenced by authority figures from a young age. From the 1840s to the present, several leadership theories (i.e., the great man theory, trait, behavioral, situational, and contingency theories) have evolved (Vasilescu, 2019). Leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, charismatic, authentic, and servant have evolved since the 1970s out of positive psychology (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; de Oliveira Dias et al., 2022). The evolution of numerous leadership theories from the 1970s has been a significant development due to the need to foster more significant employee commitment and output, considering increased organizational complexities due to increased global competition. Leadership style plays a critical role in driving organizational success.

Global competition has resulted in organizations needing to become more competitive to improve their performance. Leadership is crucial in driving and achieving performance objectives (Ahmad & Karadas, 2021; Vasilescu, 2019). Leadership theories have evolved from the great man theory to transformational and servant leadership to achieve organizational success. Both transformational and servant leadership are associated with positive organizational outcomes. Hutabarat et al. (2021) postulated that increased servant leadership enhances service innovation. Kanu et al. (2022) discovered a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee work engagement among Nigerian bank employees, with the caveat that employees must view the organization as reputable. Pamara and Bayudhirgantara (2022) discovered that transformative leadership positively affected job satisfaction, not employee work

engagement. Febrianti and Yulian (2022) concluded that servant leadership boosted employee engagement and productivity, while employee engagement boosted productivity. Febrianti and Yulian's findings were consistent with those of Hutabarat et al. regarding the positive effect of servant leadership on employee outcomes. The conclusions of these studies concur with Kortmann et al.'s (2014) view that organizational leaders play an integral role in engaging employees if they are to achieve or sustain financial success. An engaged workforce will likely result in improved organizational performance. Before the 1970s, theorists believed that organizational outcomes were based on theories, including the great man theory, which fostered the idea that men thought to be great were destined to accomplish great things within organizations. Understanding the evolution of leadership is critical for consideration as it helps to improve understanding in today's context.

### ***Great Man Theory***

The great man theory is one of the earliest theories of leadership that helped to promulgate the belief that the unique qualities of great men fostered their ability to be great leaders. This belief would change as other theories of leadership were developed. Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish author, philosopher, and historian, first advocated the great man theory in his 1840 book *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (as cited in Dziak, 2020). Carlyle espoused that great men were men and not women, and successful individuals were considered heroes with abilities and competencies that were inborn and not learned (Comstock, 2021). These great men were all-knowing geniuses with an extraordinary capacity to foresee and orchestrate complicated group endeavors

(Dziak, 2020; Mouton, 2019). The great man theory was initially well-received. Though it had generally lost respect as a leadership theory, it was still being promulgated in some parts of the world (Mouton, 2019). By the middle of the 20th century, great man theory began to falter under the influence of behavioral science and a diminished emphasis on traditional heroic characteristics.

In contrast to Dziak's (2020) and Mouton's (2019) view of the great man theory, Tolstoy (1996) was a strong opponent. Tolstoy's contribution to the dialogue included a series of philosophical arguments to make the implicit assumptions of the theory explicit to facilitate critical, unbiased evaluation. In addition, the great man theory appears flawed in today's leadership training and development context and the positive outcome for organizations that invest in these efforts. Organ's (1996) logic established a medium ground by concluding that the great man theory appeared to have died, taking into account advanced behavioral science studies that demonstrated that leaders might be developed. Organ contended that leaders are born with certain specific qualities that may be fostered and developed through opportunities such as training, development, and environmental influences. Organ argued that leaders are born with special abilities that can be nurtured and developed through opportunities such as training, development, and environmental factors. Organ strengthened the point by stating that since everyone is not born with the same abilities, not everyone can effectively lead. Still, some ideas of the great man theory persist with leaders such as Vladimir Putin, the Russian leader, and others highly regarded for their intellect and manipulation ability (Mouton, 2019).

Natural abilities, learned skills, and a focus on the needs of others characterize good leadership.

The great man theory conflicts with humility and the other-centered nature of servant leadership. Wallace (2008) postulated that servant leadership is demonstrated by leaders who intentionally use their God-given gifts in selfless ways to create a positive change in the world. Wallace's view extended and supported Wu et al.'s (2021) findings that the behavior of servant leaders influenced their followers to exhibit servant leadership characteristics and may even become servant leaders themselves, explained through social learning theory. The learned behavior implies that these skills may be transferred from leaders to followers through learning; the value of modeled behavior or training and development in enhancing one's leadership skills challenged the philosophy of the great man theory. Other theories, such as trait theory, emerged from the great man theory and may play a role in determining the effectiveness of leaders, such as servant leaders.

### ***Trait Theories***

The trait theory followed the succession of the great man theory in the 1930s, undergirded by similar principles, and emphasized the value of traits in determining leadership success. Allport (1927) was a major proponent of trait theory. Allport defined a trait as behavior that emanates from integrating several habits, culminating in a particular pattern of behavior in response to their environment. Comstock (2018) postulated that researchers in the 1950s focused on trait theory to improve their understanding of the personalities that characterized effective leadership, as the theory

supposed there was one best way to lead. Understanding these characteristics could help predict which individuals would perform better in each situation. The theory underwent several iterations before settling into the critical behavioral traits of leaders.

Trait theory has had several iterations, which has reduced the number of personality traits that define leader effectiveness. McAdams (1992) outlined that after Allport's contribution to the trait in the mid-1930s, British psychologist Raymond Cattell enhanced trait theory in the late 1940s by limiting the number of personality traits from thousands to only 16. German psychologist Hans Eysenck developed a personality model that reduced the list to three key traits. These key traits comprised: (a) introversion and extroversion, which is determined by one's interactions with the outside world; (b) neuroticism/emotional stability, defined by an individual's basic temperament; and (c) psychoticism, related to the display of antisocial behavior that breeds hostility. McAdams postulated that the trait hypothesis, the five-factor model, sometimes labeled the Big Five, was developed in the seminal works of Fiske (1949) and Tupes and Christal (1961). McAdams explained that the model combined five key traits to form the foundation of human personality. The five traits include: (a) openness to experience, (b) conscientiousness, (c) extroversion and introversion, (d) agreeableness, and (e) neuroticism or emotional stability factors, which can explain almost any personality and bring some order and structure to the competing systems of personalities (Costa & McCrae, 1990). McAdams argued that given that the five-factor model is taking over as the dominant theoretical framework in the field of personality psychology, observers and participants needed to evaluate the status and purpose of the model critically. McAdams



justified that the advent of the Big Five would fundamentally alter the area of personality studies. Other researchers would later challenge the trait theory's validity.

Innate traits and environmental factors influence a leader's effectiveness. Without reducing the value of the five-factor model, Epstein (1994) argued that any theory, including the trait theory, serving as a general theory of personality, has limitations. Epstein's postulation concurred with Comstock's (2018) argument that the trait theory served to understand one's personality traits since there was no one best way to lead and include limitations as only a smaller percentage of personality contributed to a leader's success. Similarly, Pervin (1994) also supported Epstein's view. Pervin proposed that the enthusiasts of trait theory may not be as dominant as was purported in the literature and expressed concern regarding the nature of the evidence supporting the theory and its conceptual issues. Comstock proffered those scholars of trait theory who examined physical characteristics, including height and appearance, and personality traits, such as motivation, self-confidence, honesty, and extraversion, to predict leadership. Pervin argued that the static nature of trait theory does not adequately explain personalities, which may be dynamic.

In contrast to earlier philosophers of the great man and trait theories, Comstock hastened to add that twin studies revealed that inborn characteristics account for only 30% of the effectiveness of great leaders. At the same time, the remaining 70% is due to extrinsic factors such as environment and experiences. Comstock's view, in this regard, supported Epstein's view about the limitation of trait theory to leadership effectiveness. Servant leaders' traits and behavior would help them become effective leaders.

Servant leadership became increasingly popular as a difference in leadership traits and behavior, which engendered a caring approach to leadership that empowered and motivated followers, focusing on the needs of employees over those of the leaders. Sun and Shang (2019) indicated that servant leaders' values and personality traits are critical to success. Sun and Shang's findings supported the view of both Comstock (2018) and Epstein (1994) regarding the role of personality traits in contributing to leadership success, even with the limitations of such traits. The findings suggested that personality traits play a role in leadership behavior, contributing to their effectiveness. The dimensions of servant leadership are traits and environmental factors that may influence the behavior and attitudes of a servant leader (Sun & Shang, 2019). Consequently, it is also critical to look at the development of behavioral theory and its impact on leadership success.

### ***Behavioral Theory***

A focus on behavioral theory emerged as scholars in the 1940s concentrated on comprehending behavior's role in leadership styles. Proponents of behavioral theory suggest that individuals may learn to become effective leaders through opportunities for training and development, including observation and reflection, providing leadership is defined in terms of people and work expectations (Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Lewin et al., 1939). Proponents of the behavioral theory examined the behaviors exhibited by leaders to determine from followers' perspectives which of these behavioral variables most influenced their actions (Yukl, 1971). The behavioral theory arose from rejecting the trait theory and a desire to focus on the behaviors of effective

leaders. Understanding how leadership skills translate into effective leadership from a behavioral theory perspective is critical.

Understanding the environmental factors that influence leadership effectiveness is critical to leadership success. The Ohio State leadership studies conducted by Stogdill (1950) sought to shift the focus from traits to situational leadership during the behavioral theory development period (Schriesheim & Bird, 1979). In seeking to understand better the problems associated with leadership, Stogdill discovered that leadership only exists where there is task differentiation among the group members. In this group situation, at least one member needs to have obligations distinct from those of the other members, and the group itself needs to have a common goal or purpose. Stogdill discovered two key characteristics that increased leadership effectiveness. First, clearly defined expectations and clear job-specific objectives with guidelines, supported by the required resources, in an environment where communication is clear and sufficient, occurring vertically and horizontally as the job role requires. The second was the importance of a positive working environment characterized by support in which subordinates experienced warmth and care. Stogdill found that these two characteristics demonstrated by leaders may operate independently. Kwon and Silva (2020) conducted a systematic literature review to map the landscape of behavioral theories. Kwon and Silva found 62 behavioral theories, creating a chart of four groups: (a) factors, (b) strategies, (c) learning and conditioning, and (d) modeling. These behavioral theories encompassed Stogdill's two characteristics of effective leadership, which included clearly defined roles and expectations on the job and cultivating a positive work environment in which employees

feel supported. Behavior theories dominate leadership dialog today, as leadership remains a dominant, dynamic, and complex phenomenon.

Organizational leaders must understand and explain the relevance of traits and behavior to effective leadership to help them better recruit and train leaders. An integrative approach is necessary to understand the phenomenon. Derue et al. (2011) used a meta-analysis methodology that examined the leadership traits and behavior most tested in empirical research to arrive at an integrative trait-behavioral model of leadership effectiveness. Derue et al. indicated that behavior and traits accounted for a minimum 31% variance in leadership effectiveness. Derue et al.'s study further enhanced Stogdill's (1950) findings. The study's findings contradicted dogmatic proponents of the trait and behavior theories with their views of the dominance of either theory of leaders that drives their effectiveness. Derue et al.'s findings have implications for organizational leadership in understanding the key traits and behavior that exemplify effective leadership to aid in recruiting and developing leaders, which is also critical in developing servant leaders. A comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of leadership is incomplete without looking at the impact of leadership behavior in specific situations, which gives rise to situational and contingency theories.

### ***Situational and Contingency Theories***

Situational and contingency theories dominated leadership research in the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1960s, psychologist Fred Fiedler initially coined, studied, and defined the contingency theory. The central tenet of the contingency theory is that varying contexts call for varying leadership styles, and there is no universally optimal

way to lead an organization (Hoffman-Miller, 2022; Woolf & Wren, 1973). Contingency theory is task- and relationship-motivated and is called a leader-match theory (Hoffman-Miller, 2022). In the 1970s, Hersey and Ken Blanchard conducted further studies, which enhanced the development of situational leadership theory, one of the contingency theories focused on the situation the leader faces and the followers involved (Campbell, 2021). Situational and contingency theory researchers established no one correct approach to leading (Ayman & Lauritsen, 2018; Hall, 2013; Podgórska & Detko, 2023). In effect, the theories imply that the leader's effectiveness may be influenced by the situation, the motivating factors, and the variables involved, and there is no one best leadership approach.

Several researchers indicated that leadership effectiveness and employee performance are influenced by the situation in which leaders and employees find themselves. House (1971) developed the path-goal theory. House explained that effective leaders engage in actions that complement their subordinates' settings and skills, compensating for weaknesses and contributing to the pleasure and performance of both the subordinate and their work unit. This definition is supported by Evans (1970), who elaborated that leaders choose their response to employees based on the situation and needs of those employees and included four distinct models of leadership behavior, which include: (a) directive, (b) supportive, (c) participative, and (d) achievement-oriented. Fabac et al. (2022) postulated that the path-goal theory was the most influential in contingency and situational leadership approaches. Fabac et al. opined that the support role of leadership is referred to as servant leadership, as it focuses on supporting

subordinates rather than on their power and authority. Fabac et al. discovered that self-assessment regarding leadership style before and during the pandemic revealed small changes before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Fabac et al. reported a difference in leadership style driven by gender, as women preferred supportive leadership, while men were more directive than women. In addition, the authors found that education level and organization size affected path-goal leadership approaches.

Arguably, the COVID-19 pandemic may have been one of the most significant tests of the effectiveness of contingency leadership. That is the extent to which leaders can effectively respond to a crisis. Mazzei et al. (2022) argued that basic applications of contingency theory and their specialized uses in crisis communication revolved around the concept of threat. Pang et al. (2020) indicated that recent researchers applied contingency theory to the study of strategic conflict management, emphasizing crisis communication. At the same time, Coombs and Tachkova (2022) suggested that the concept of threat was essential to both general contingency theory and its crisis communication applications. Mazzei et al.'s findings revealed that the accommodative approach to leadership mitigated the risk of lower employee engagement and the danger to employee health and safety, which were highly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the risk of reputational damage to the firm was less. The findings implied that effective leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic context may have been more relational and directional when compared to the other leadership approaches. Organizational leaders generally seek to improve the engagement of their employees at work; researchers have placed increased focus on empirical research to measure and

understand the impact of transactional, transformational, authentic, and servant leadership, among others.

### ***Transactional Leadership***

Leadership research evolved throughout the 1970s and 1980s, during which researchers focused on transactional leadership. Transactional leadership grew during this period, built on the notion that leadership effectiveness was based on the authority to get things done through individuals (Biscontini, 2019). Burns (1978) was an early proponent of transactional leadership. Burns coined transactional leadership, explaining that employees are punished for non-achievement and rewarded for achievements (see Flynn, 2019). Transactional leaders are convinced that self-interest motivates employees, and rewards and punishment are the best strategies to accomplish organizational goals and objectives (Biscontini, 2019). The transactional leadership style aims to foster mutually beneficial exchange, not necessarily long-term relationships (Northouse, 2019). The transactional leadership style still engages employees and impacts organizational outcomes based on the mutual exchange between employee and employer.

Despite the advancement of leadership theories such as transformational and servant leadership in the modern context, several empirical research studies concluded that transactional leadership may or may not play a role in employee work engagement and positive organizational performance. Suhendra (2021) concluded that motivation, employee engagement, and commitment were all significantly impacted by transactional leadership. Similarly, Thanh and Quang (2022) examined the impact of leadership styles, including transaction leadership, on employee engagement within Vietnam's public

sector and concluded that transactional leadership positively impacted employee work engagement. Suhendra accepted Thanh and Quang, who showed that transactional leadership supports positive organizational outcomes, which is not always true.

There is sufficient evidence in the literature to support the view that transactional leadership may not always yield positive organizational outcomes. Lee et al. (2021) evaluated the impact of corporate social responsibility, leadership—transformational and transactional, work-life balance, autonomy, and technology on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. Lee et al. concluded that all six variables positively correlated with work engagement, with transformational leadership having the highest and transactional the lowest. Similarly, Thapa and Parimoo (2022) examined how emotional intelligence moderated the impact of transactional leadership style on organizational performance. Emotional intelligence theory was defined and popularized by Goleman (1995) to include four main constructs that aid an individual's ability to perceive and regulate one's emotions and those of others. The four main constructs include: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, and (d) relationship management. Thapa and Parimoo discovered a negative and insignificant relationship between transactional leadership and organizational performance and the weak moderating role of emotional intelligence. The finding minimized transactional leadership as a strong motivator for employee work engagement and organizational performance. There may be a place for transactional leadership to support positive organizational outcomes through a mutual exchange between employees and leadership. The impact of transformational leadership



on employee engagement and organizational performance seems stronger than the impact of transactional leadership.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership has gained much traction in research literature because of its positive organizational outcome. In the 1970s, scholars and practitioners explored the distinction between management and leadership, leading to Burns' transformational leadership theory (1978). Since then, research has indicated that transformational leadership positively correlates with employee work engagement and organizational outcomes. Transformational leadership is the opposite of transactional leadership. Transformational leadership prioritizes relationships with followers and motivates them to achieve objectives beyond their self-interest (Biscontini, 2019). Transformational leadership has grown in popularity and is closely related to leadership success and organizational outcomes.

Findings from empirical research indicate a positive relationship between transformational leadership and positive organizational outcomes. Valldeneu et al. (2021b) conducted a study that measured the relationship between leadership styles and employees' work engagement in multinational contexts and found that transformational leadership behavior strongly and positively correlated with work engagement and organizational outcomes. Valldeneu et al. concluded that leaders must embrace a transformational leadership strategy and avoid passive-avoidance traits to improve organizational performance, company success, and recognition. Valldeneu et al. (2021a) also conducted a study to measure the impact of transformational style on millennials'

job satisfaction and found a positive correlation. Similarly, Lee et al. (2021) concluded that transformational leadership had the strongest relationship to employee engagement of all the variables tested. Transformational leadership is one influence that inspires followers to accomplish goals rather than being based on rewards and punishment, the converse of transactional leadership. The ability of transformational leaders to inspire others has made it a popular leadership style that has propelled organizational success.

Empirical research on the impact of transformational leadership has increased in popularity in the 21st century because of its value to organizational performance. Transformational leaders tend to have strong moral convictions and are charismatic in their personalities (Comstock, 2018). Many studies' findings support a positive relationship between leaders with the transformational approach, employee engagement, and organizational success (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Lee et al., 2021; Thanh & Quang, 2022). Breevaart and Bakker (2108) examined the impact of daily transformational leadership behavior on employee work engagement. Breevaart and Bakker's findings indicated that transformational leader behavior was crucial in motivating employees when work demand was challenging and may fluctuate daily depending on the level of transformational leadership applied on specific days. When the transformational leadership applied toward employees was high, the work engagement was also high, and vice versa.

Gemeda and Lee (2020) discovered that the transformational leadership style is significantly associated with increased employee engagement and creative problem-solving. In addition, Enwereuzor et al.'s (2018) cross-sectional design study examined

whether a person-job fit moderated the relationship between transformative leadership and employee work engagement. The study's results showed a significant positive predictive relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, as did a significant positive predictive relationship between person-job fit and work engagement. The findings from these studies are instructive for organizational leaders, particularly those concerned with the issue of employee work engagement, as transformational leadership improves employee work engagement. Other leadership styles, such as charismatic leadership, have also proven valuable in promoting positive employee work engagement and organizational outcomes.

### ***Charismatic Leadership***

Charismatic leadership evolved in the 1940s and emphasized the value of charisma and charm in leadership success. Charismatic leadership emerged in the context of religion before being applied to other fields and goes beyond empathy (Behr, 2021). Auerbach (2021) argued that the radical political shifts in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th century inspired Max Weber in the 1940s about the notion of legitimate power, in which charismatic leadership evolved as a theory. Behr (2021) argued that charismatic leadership formed ties and bonds that included a high level of emotional influence from the leader, which engendered dedication and commitment from followers toward the leader and, ultimately, organizational goals. The theory of charismatic leadership indicates that some leaders have special gifts or powers that influence followers to become part of something bigger than themselves (Auerbach, 2021; Tucker, 1968). These beliefs helped charismatic leaders to achieve organizational goals. House (1977)

formalized the charismatic leadership theory. House postulated that the theory highlighted these leaders' highly visionary nature and how their characteristics helped create an environment that motivated employees to increase their performance. Charismatic leadership driven by personality and charm rather than power and autonomy was the key to engaging employees to excel.

Several studies on charismatic leadership and employee engagement provided insight into the relationship between these leaders and employee outcomes. Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010) examined a model linking charismatic leadership to organizational citizenship behaviors via work engagement. The study's results showed a significant positive relationship between charismatic leadership and work engagement, between work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, and between charismatic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. In comparison, Zhao et al. (2021) explored the mechanisms regarding how charismatic leadership affected employee innovation performance in China and how leadership, professional, and organizational identity mediated this effect. The study results showed that employees' leadership, professional, and organizational identification mediated the favorable influence of charismatic leadership on millennial employees' innovation performance. Though Zhao et al. did not specifically measure work engagement, employee innovation is a positive performance outcome from which the organization benefits. Numerous researchers supported the view that employee work engagement fosters innovative behavior (Agarwal, 2014; De Spiegelaere et al., 2015; Ge & Sun, 2020). Charismatic leadership

may positively impact work engagement and organizational performance. Charismatic leaders may foster positive followers' behavior.

Conger et al. (2000) examined the impact of charismatic leadership on followers. The findings revealed a robust correlation between the level of respect shown by followers and the leader's charisma. The findings of Conger et al. concluded that respect for the leader was a mediator between the happiness and contentment of the followers. Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010), Conger et al. (2000), and Zhao et al. (2021) agreed that charismatic leadership on followers' performance outcomes had a positive relationship that may foster high levels of engagement, resulting in better organizational performance.

Work engagement may be due to the qualities of charismatic leaders, including respect for leaders, emotional connection to followers, visionary leadership, and charm of the leader, which may create an environment that fosters work engagement. Some researchers have concluded that charismatic leadership, with its emotional connection to employees, has positively influenced employees' performance (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010; Brown et al., 2020). Brown et al. (2020) theorized that a charismatic leader with servant leadership skills might be more trustworthy, less self-centered, and more concerned with the well-being of their followers. In this global competitive work environment, leaders must make every effort to develop the skills necessary to engage their employees. Authentic leadership is an approach to leadership that has also proven to affect employee outcomes positively.

### ***Authentic Leadership***

Authentic leadership is among the approaches that tend to be associated positively with work engagement. Authentic leadership emerged in the 1960s with its roots in ancient Greece and is associated with positive work outcomes (Zimmer, 2021). Harter (2002) suggested that authentic leadership involves being true to oneself. Walumbwa et al. (2008) revised the original proposal made by Luthans and Avolio (2003) concerning authentic leadership. Walumbwa et al. identified authentic leadership as a pattern of leadership behavior that draws on and develops positive psychological capacities. In addition, Walumbwa et al. indicated that this included cultivating an ethical atmosphere to increase leaders' self-awareness, internalized moral viewpoint, equanimity in information processing, and relational transparency in the workplace among its devotees, encouraging healthy growth. Similarly, Brown et al. (2020) described the authentic leadership construct as having four key characteristics: (a) self-awareness, (b) internalized moral perspective, (c) balanced processing, and (d) relational transparency. The authentic leadership style has evolved as a positive approach to leadership in the 21st century, with several researchers linking the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement mediated by several variables (Bamford et al., 2013; Başaran & Kiral, 2022; Oh et al., 2018; Stander et al., 2015). The positive relationship between authentic leadership and employee engagement may be due to the behavior of adaptive leaders being open and genuine toward employees. Several variables may influence the relationship between authentic leadership and employee engagement.

Using mediated variables, researchers have discovered a favorable association between authentic leadership and employee engagement. Oh et al. (2018) analyzed the role living by one's core beliefs plays in mediating the relationship between authentic leadership and employee work engagement in corporate South Korea and found that core values mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' work engagement. Similarly, using a cross-sectional research design, Stander et al. (2015) examined whether authentic leadership influenced optimism, trust in the organization, and employees' work engagement in the public healthcare sector. Stander et al. discovered that authentic leadership was related to a higher level of optimism, organizational trust, and work engagement.

Maximo et al. (2019) evaluated the effect of authentic leadership on supervisor trust, psychological safety, and employee engagement within the South African mining industry. According to the findings, authentic leadership was not a strong predictor of employee engagement but instead had a statistically significant indirect effect on work engagement mediated by trust in supervisors. Based on previous research, a positive relationship was expected between authentic leadership and work engagement (as cited in Başaran & Kiral, 2022; Niswaty et al., 2021; Stander et al., 2015). Trust is an essential factor in effective relationships. Therefore, Maximo et al.'s findings of an indirect statistically significant effect of authentic leadership on work engagement mediated by trust add value to the research literature.

Other researchers, including Bamford et al. (2013), tested to determine the connections between nurses' assessments of nurse managers' authentic leadership,

nurses' overall person-job fit in the six areas of work-life, and nurses' level of engagement at work in Canada. The study's results indicated that six work-life areas fully mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement among nurses in Canada. In addition, Başaran and Kiral (2022) investigated the relationship between authentic leadership behaviors of school administrators and teacher work engagement, as perceived by secondary school teachers. Başaran and Kiral's findings indicated a strong positive relationship between administrators' authentic leadership and the teachers' work engagement. Authentic leadership attributes may be considered critical contributors to employee engagement and organizational success.

Although an authentic leadership approach may positively affect employee outcomes, employees' needs are not the most important. Authentic leaders may not prioritize the needs of others above their own (Brown et al., 2020). In response to the adverse outcomes associated with leadership styles that prioritize the leader's self-interest, morally based leaderships have emerged to foster integrity and give support and development of followers higher priority than the leader's advancement (Liden et al., 2015). Towards the beginning of the 21st century, moral leadership theories, including servant leadership, garnered more consideration from scholars (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). The increased interest in the theory and construct of servant leadership is because of its other-centered nature and its link to positive organizational outcomes (Eva et al., 2019). In an organizational context, leaders must provide support through resources and demonstrate empathy and care for employees based on their needs. The needs of employees differ based on their respective generational groups. Understanding the



various generations is essential to identify the leadership styles that best suit that generation.

### **Evolution of Generations in the Workplace**

Several factors have contributed to a multigenerational workforce. Generation refers to a specific group or birth cohort that experienced a common set of historical, cultural, and social events (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Neves & Casimiro, 2018). Increased life expectancy and working for extended years after retirement have resulted in a multigenerational workforce with five generational cohorts (Eldridge & Stevens, 2017). These generations include Traditionalists (born 1925–1945), though retired, a few remain, Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), Millennials or Generation Y (1981–2000), and finally, Generation Z (born 1995–2012). Understanding each generation's impact on the work environment is important for organizational leadership success.

The theory of generations helps to explain the differences between generational cohorts. Mannheim (1952) first coined the generational theory, which was extended by researchers Strauss and Howe (1991) and others. According to Mannheim, each generation with unique social and intellectual experiences impacts their cognitive development. In comparison, Strauss and Howe explained that the early experiences of the generational cohort in their specific cultures shape their development and worldview. Al-Asfour and Lettau (2014) concluded that an insufficient understanding of the differences between generations and their unique skill sets creates challenges for organizational leaders.

Leaders must understand the importance of generational theory and the differences in generation preferences to get the best from each generation. Leaders may better serve their employees when they comprehend their values, attitudes, and the flexibility necessary to engage each generation in the workplace. Some researchers have varying views on the value of generational theory (Parry & Urwin; Van Rossem, 2019). Even though some researchers have differing opinions on the impact of generational differences, it is incumbent upon leaders to recognize any differences and implement strategies to mitigate the adverse effects that influence desired organizational outcomes. Parry and Urwin (2011) determined that the views on generational differences are somewhat mixed. Constanza and Finkelstein (2015) confirmed that many stereotypes regarding generational similarities existed. Parry and Urwin, Constanza, and Finkelstein's conclusions were again confirmed when Van Rossem (2019) explored generational identity and stereotypes in a multigenerational workforce. Van Rossem discovered that generational and age-based stereotypes may not always coincide, and an identity-based approach to generations is preferable to a cohort-based one. Van Rossem recommended that generations in the workplace should be a valid phenomenon. McGuire et al. (2007) and Hernaus and Pološki Vokic (2014) agreed on generational differences in attitudes and approaches toward work, which foster intergenerational conflicts. The potential for these intergenerational conflicts makes it necessary for leaders to understand generational differences in theory and practice to impact work design and organizational performance positively. Each generation brings unique qualities that may make the organization a complex business. It is incumbent upon leaders to improve their understanding of the

leadership attributes that will most positively impact employees' work engagement to improve organizational performance.

### ***Traditionalists***

The traditionalist generation has brought its unique characteristics to the workforce. The traditionalist generation was born between 1925 and 1945 and is characterized by key events of their time (Neville & Brochu, 2019). The traditionalist generation has been defined by their unique characteristics influenced by world events, including the Great Depression and world wars (Neville & Brochu, 2019). Traditionalists are portrayed as diligent workers who value loyalty and respect for authority, with strong moral and ethical standards, are inflexible, do not like change, prioritize work over family, value security and stability, and are risk averse (Martin & Ottemann, 2016; Neville & Brochu, 2019). These characteristics may have served organizations well in the early years when they were less complex. Though the traditionalist generation has retired, a few remain in the workforce.

For various reasons, some traditionalist retirees desire to return to the workforce. John et al. (2021) indicated that most traditionalists have retired and may occupy approximately 2% of the current workforce in the United States. Many retired health professionals, teachers, and other essential workers may have returned to the workforce due to the COVID-19 pandemic to assist in various sectors and industries during the period of staff shortage because of the pandemic. Martin and Ottemann (2016) explained that some researchers suggested that traditionalists desire to return to work for three main reasons, which include: (a) finances, (b) the need to upgrade their skills, and (c) some

missing their jobs. Whatever the reasons, the traditionalist generation in the workplace presents challenges for leaders who must be flexible enough to lead in a context with multiple generations. Traditionalists may add value to the pool of tacit knowledge that sometimes goes missing when they retire.

The traditionalist generation may have been one of the easiest generations to lead in the workplace as they are loyal, have a good work ethic, are often non-confrontational, dislike conflict, are patriotic, and prioritize the organization's goals. The traditionalist generation operated when their business was less complex than it is today. Hernaus and Pološki Vokic (2014) found that the traditionalist generation is compliant, uncomfortable with technology, and tries to avoid or reduce conflict. The traditionalist generation values loyalty and respect and prioritizes the organization's needs above everything else, even at the expense of family.

The traditionalist generation places a high premium on being respected. Luscombe et al. (2013) argued that traditionalists must be respected and may disengage if they feel disrespected and their knowledge and experience undermined. Martin and Ottemann's (2016) view about traditionalists concurred with those of Luscombe et al. regarding the high premium traditionalists place on respect for their experience. In addition, Martin and Ottemann justified that those traditionalists who remain in organizations want to be respected for their expertise and to participate in coaching and mentoring others. Traditionalists value respect for their experience and ability to make a difference in today's work environment. The baby boomer generation soon joined the

traditionalists, slowly increasing the intergenerational differences and influencing the leadership style that best motivates that generation.

### ***Baby Boomers***

The baby boomer generation has brought its unique characteristics to the workforce. The second oldest generation in the workplace, baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964, are characterized by key events of their generation (Neville & Brochu, 2019). Baby boomers occupy approximately 25% of the workforce in the United States (John et al., 2021). Neville and Brochu (2019) indicated that baby boomers were shaped by key events of their time, including the civil rights movement, television, and racial challenges, including Rosa Parks' arrest and Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy's assassinations. Martin and Ottemann (2016) summarized that baby boomers are inspired, focused, and driven to succeed, are hierarchical by nature, respectful of authority, take credit for success, and pass blame when failures occur. Baby boomers also tend to stay in the workforce longer (Fry, 2019). Baby boomers are motivated by material wealth gained through career and positional power, hence a workaholic mentality. Baby boomers served well during their time, and many remain in the workplace today.

While there are many similarities between the baby boomers and traditionalists, these groups vastly differ from Generation Y and X because of the different experiences that shaped them. Huber and Schubert (2019) discovered that each generation had different attitudes toward work engagement. Baby boomers placed greater importance on work and were more willing to give of themselves on the job compared to Generation Y.

Hapsari et al. (2019) examined the influence of generational diversity management and LMX on innovative work practices through employee engagement. Hapsari et al.'s findings indicated that when employees are engaged, leader-member relationships improve, and diversity management promotes creativity and good work behaviors. Compared to Generation X, Generation Y had the lowest levels of generational diversity, leader-member interchange, and innovative work habits, while baby boomers had the highest employee engagement. The findings from Hapsari et al. and Huber and Schubert confirmed the presence of generational differences and that the baby boomer generation exhibited the highest level of engagement in their work and understood its value to positive organizational outcomes. Generation X followed the baby boomers, adding to the leadership challenge of three generations in the workplace.

### ***Generation X***

Generation X has brought its unique characteristics to the workforce. Generation X, the third oldest generation in the workplace, was born between 1965 and 1981 and is referred to as Gen X or Xers (Neville & Brochu, 2019). Xers occupy approximately 33% of the workforce (John et al., 2021). They were influenced and shaped by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the influence of personal computers and video games, and the rising divorce rate (John et al., 2021; Neville & Brochu, 2019). Gen Xers, when compared to traditionalists and baby boomers, are more likely to question authority and value work-life balance. Gen Xs are more flexible and adaptable, though still hierarchical and driven by power and position, are impatient, and have high moral standards. Xers are risk takers, workaholics, passionate about professional development and advancement, rewards and

recognition, promote fairness and equal work for equal pay, and display loyalty to their profession rather than to the specific organization (John et al., 2021; Martin & Ottemann, 2016; Neville & Brochu, 2019). Xers born in the 1980s are more flexible and creative than the earlier cohorts in that generation. Each progressive generational group increases its need for flexibility and prefers flatter organizational structures. Comparatively, Generation Y employees challenge the status quo more than Gen X employees and have added to the complexity of leadership.

### ***Generation Y***

Generation Y has brought its unique characteristics to the workforce. Generation Y, or Millennials, were born between 1981 and 2000 and were influenced by several world events. These events included 9/11, the advent of social media, increased acts of terrorism globally, and reality television influenced by technological advances such as Google and text messaging (John et al., 2021). Millennials occupied about 35% of the workplace and were the first to hone their digital competency and career skills, meaningful work, flexible time off, fairness, and pro-work-life balance (John et al., 2021).

Generation Y employees are positive, tenacious, multitaskers, and open to change (Neville & Brochu, 2019). Martin and Ottemann (2016) extensively reviewed the research literature on the four generations in the workplace. Martin and Ottemann posited that Generation Y employees are dedicated to making a difference while securing a comfortable lifestyle, value work-life balance, are fast and eager to learn, and are satisfied with their jobs. The authors indicated that Generation Y employees want

security and not necessarily stability. Martin and Ottemann shared that Generation Y employees are sociable, work well in teams, are optimistic, creative, and highly expressive, expect too much of themselves, and are technologically inclined. Generation Y employees have poor communication skills and an entitlement mentality and can be impatient (Martin & Ottemann, 2016). Generation Y employees, now leaders in organizations, have played an essential role in changing organizational cultures toward the effective use of technology. Generation Z employees have been the most technologically savvy and may likely transform how leaders lead even as they struggle to keep them engaged at work.

### ***Gen Z***

Gen Z has brought its unique characteristics to the workforce. Gen Z or iGen was born between 1995–2012 and occupied about 5% of the workforce but may not be as engaged at work as previous generations (John et al., 2021; Statnickè et al., 2019). Gen Zs are shaped by an era characterized by the economic recession, the introduction of mobile devices, global warming, and mass shootings. Gen Z, comprising of 32% of the global population, represents the largest generational group in history. Gen Zs may be the most isolated generation because their lives revolve around and depend on technology (Cooper, 2020; John et al., 2021). Gen Zs are also the least prepared of all the generation cohorts to enter the workforce, the most accepting of diversity, are easily stressed, and have a high rate of depression compared to previous generations (Pendell, 2021; Schroth, 2019). Leaders must, therefore, understand these characteristics and be prepared to lead with compassion and care, prioritizing the needs of employees to engage them better.



Gen Z tends to be more ethically inclined. Several studies have found that Gen Zs prefer work environments with high ethical and moral standards (Leslie et al., 2021). Researchers sought to improve their understanding of engaging Gen Zs due to their unique characteristics (Črešnar & Nedelko, 2020; Maloni et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2020). Gen Z displays unique characteristics that differ from those of previous generations. They are ethically and digitally inclined but may not be as engaged at work as previous generations. Statnickè et al. (2019) concluded that Gen Zs are only moderately engaged at work. Gen Zs prefer open communication, are autonomous, and like their independence, many choose to work as entrepreneurs (Magano et al., 2020). Gen Zs are egotistical, self-centered, and driven by personal goals (Lev, 2021). Gen Zs are technologically driven, intrinsically motivated, and may easily quit their jobs. Gen Zs have strong inclinations to change the world and are highly motivated to excel; they want to do so on their terms. Gen Zs are pro-work-life balance, easily quit a job, self-confident, ambitious, and accepting of decisions (Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy, 2021; Scholz, 2019). Leaders must prioritize the needs of Gen Zs to foster a work environment in which they can be effectively engaged to contribute to positive organizational outcomes. A servant leadership approach may be suitable for this generation of employees.

### **Servant Leadership Development**

The historical development of various leadership theories has been crucial to the advancement and understanding of leadership in enhancing employee contribution to helping organizations meet their objectives. Greenleaf (1970) coined the term servant leaders out of his observation and understanding of the current context of his day in the

United States of America, considering the war, the civil rights struggle, and the escalating alienation and violence in the country. Greenleaf discussed the disarray, confusion, and dissonance he observed between many institutions and the people they were designed to serve (Broetje, 2021). Greenleaf felt that the way to correct the status quo for societal good was to have individuals lead as servants first across all sectors and organizations. Darvish and Rezaei (2011) highlighted the growing issue of ethical failure and trust breaches among leaders, prompting experts to explore new approaches to leadership. Researchers took notice of ethical leadership strategies due to a plethora of data showing their effectiveness in boosting employee well-being and productivity and improving employee well-being (Liden et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Different leadership theories have been proposed, studied, and understood to maximize employee contribution to improve organizational outcomes. Organizations operate in an environment that has become increasingly complex. Understanding the most effective leadership approach to get the best from employees is critical for organizational success.

Increasingly, servant leadership has been identified as an appropriate and effective style, as organizations seek leaders who prioritize the needs of others while achieving organizational goals. Interest in servant leadership has gained traction because of the attention given to prioritizing employees' needs and well-being while still achieving organizational objectives, as the positive effects impact the financial goals (Bavik, 2020; Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership differs from other leadership styles due to its focus on people over profits (Eva et al., 2019; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Servant leadership's "follower first" stance makes it stand out from other forms of leadership and

concentrates on the followers' success first and then on the organization's success (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2004). Central to examining servant leadership effectiveness is its importance in influencing organizational outcomes. Servant leadership's focus on prioritizing employees' needs above those of the leaders makes this approach vastly distinct from other approaches to leadership, including the prevailing transformational leadership style.

### ***A Biblical Perspective of Servant Leadership***

Jesus Christ may be the quintessential example of servant leadership. Many scholars have contributed to advancing the servant leadership theory (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2008; van Dierendonck, 2011). Since Greenleaf's (1970) thought-provoking essay, which purported an effective leader as a servant to followers, researchers in the literature have embraced the concept of servant leadership (Liden et al., 2008; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership's popularity has grown as the failure of business leaders becomes more rampant due to a lack of integrity and selfishness. Integrity and selflessness in service to others are crucial to servant leadership. (Liden et al., 2008). Liden et al. (2008) argued that servant leaders exhibited nine dimensions, including (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first (g) behaving ethically (h) relationships (i) Servanthood. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) indicated that the essence of servant leadership includes five key dimensions, which include: (a) altruistic calling, (b) emotional healing, (c) wisdom, (d) persuasive mapping, and (e) organizational

stewardship. Similarly, van Dierendonck (2011) articulated six dimensions of servant leadership to include: (a) empowering and developing people, (b) showing humility, (c) authentic, (d) accepting others for who they are, (e) providing direction, and (f) stewardship focused on the good of the whole. These researchers played an important role in developing servant leadership as a leadership theory and model with the central philosophy that servant leaders are motivated to serve their constituents with selfless leadership demonstrated through caring and focus on others.

In the Bible, Jesus Christ first epitomized what is described as servant leadership today (Broetje, 2021; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). According to Blanchard (1998), despite one's religious orientation, many will agree that Jesus Christ epitomized superior leadership skills. Jesus Christ's leadership is displayed in the Bible in the book of St. Mark as he appointed 12 unlearned disciples to help him accomplish his vision and mission, which they bought into and the purpose of which, after 2000 years, continues to this day. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, encouraged the disciples to have the same mindset as Jesus Christ regarding their relationships with one another. Jesus Christ, who did not consider himself equal to God, though he was the son of God, was in a privileged position, but instead took on the nature of a servant and humbled himself even to the point of death (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011). Paul and St. Mark, the Apostles of Jesus Christ, described Jesus Christ as a servant, reflecting his servant identity. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus Christ came to earth to serve and gave His life as payment for man's sin (Holy Bible, New Living Translation, 1996). Jesus Christ

humbled himself, left the splendors of heaven, and willingly gave his life to others. Jesus Christ's humility characterizes the servant in the leader.

Jesus Christ epitomized agape love, a servant's heart. Several authors supported that servant leadership's foundation is in the Bible, as Jesus Christ instructed 12 disciples, whom he led, that to be the greatest, they must first be servants (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Hutchison, 2009; Irving, 2011). In addition, in Christian and secular servant leadership literature, Jesus Christ is cited and elevated as an example of servant leadership (Chung, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Shirin, 2014). Jesus Christ exemplified the characteristics of a servant leader by teaching his disciples that those who seek to be first must put the needs of others before their own (New Living Translation, 1996, Mark 9:35). Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020) agreed that Jesus Christ is the model of a leader who puts others first. This idea accords with his teachings and actions as a servant and leader. Throughout Jesus Christ's ministry on earth, he taught his 12 disciples to maintain the posture of a shepherd who looks after the sheep and cares for them. Jesus Christ depicted an image of the shepherd who takes care of the sheep and does what is best for them, having their well-being and interests as central to his ministry.

The most pivotal demonstration of Jesus Christ's servant leadership may have been when he washed his disciples' feet just before his crucifixion. In St. John Chapter 13, Jesus Christ demonstrated servant leadership character by washing his disciples' feet (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011). Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) concluded that Jesus Christ's leadership power was displayed by his willingness to serve his people by performing a duty regarded as very low and degrading; that is, the power to serve, not

the power to dominate others. Sendjaya and Sarros explained that Jesus Christ's actions redefined the meaning of leadership power as an enabler to serve others by choice. In this regard, Jesus Christ demonstrated his love and commitment to serve others, though he was more powerful than any other, and encouraged the disciples to do likewise.

### ***Servant Leadership Research***

Greenleaf's (1970) seminal work in servant leadership first developed as a philosophy that later evolved into a theory that promulgated its value to organizational leadership (Liden et al., 2015; Spears, 1998). Greenleaf worked at AT&T from 1926 to 1964 as a construction worker and later transitioned to head of management research (Liden et al., 2014). Greenleaf (2002) explained that after reading Hesse's *Journey to the East* (1956), in which the fictional Leo took care of the practical needs and lifted the spirits of the group members with music and song, Leo's disappearance sent the group into disarray, resulting in an abandoned journey. Leo had returned to the rightful Order of which he was head, a discovery made sometime after he left. This same Order had sponsored the journey. The fictional Leo was used to illustrate the image of a great servant leader. The story inspired Greenleaf. Greenleaf's seminal work on "The Servant as Leader" identified the fictional character of Leo to depict servant leaders. Greenleaf concluded that to be a servant-leader, as Leo was represented, means putting others before oneself. Greenleaf postulated that to develop into a servant-leader, one must first feel a genuine desire to serve and, in serving, make a conscious decision to lead.

The aspiration to lead is a deliberate choice, having served and recognized the value of serving. That individual is very different from one who becomes a leader to

satisfy the need for power or amass wealth. A decision to serve will come after an individual's established leadership structure. There are two extreme personalities of the leader: leader-first and servant-first. The gray zones between them reflect the immense diversity of human nature. The servant goes above and beyond to meet the needs of those for whom they are responsible. One of the best measures of success is the extent to which the individuals being led are also developed. Servant leaders should help others become better versions of themselves, improve communities, and offer hope.

Greenleaf (1970) contributed substantially to advancing the servant-like approach to leadership and its relationship to positive employee outcomes. Greenleaf's contribution to the field of leadership has helped shape the direction and value in an organizational context. In his original essay on servant leadership, Greenleaf concluded that based on his own experiences and his reflection on society at that time, serving others should be a critical disposition for leaders who want their organizations to be productive. Chaudhry et al. (2021) determined that Greenleaf's seminal texts were a basis for the conceptual overview provided by Graham (1991), Spears (1995), and van Dierendonck (2011). Chaudhry et al. stated that researchers used Greenleaf's seminal texts to define and measure the construct to better understand its utility in illuminating attitudes and behavior in the workplace. Greenleaf's work continues to be further refined by several authors to improve the approach to leadership that will positively impact the organizational outcome.

Several academic scholars have systematically analyzed servant leadership to determine the most common and suitable definition. Eva et al. (2019) explored servant

leadership literature using a meta-analysis approach due to a lack of consistency and clarity surrounding the construct. Eva et al. proposed that the lack of consistency and clarity has slowed the theory development of servant leadership despite the growth of servant leadership research with over 100 publications in the previous 4 years. The authors provided an integrative and complete assessment of 285 articles published on servant leadership over 20 years (i.e., 1998–2018). Eva et al.'s study led to the development of a definition of a *servant leader* who prioritizes the needs and interests of their followers on an individual basis, encourages them to look beyond themselves, and creates and adds value to the organization, community, and society. The literature on servant leadership corresponds with Greenleaf's 1970 other-centeredness of the leader. Servant leadership stands in contrast to other leadership approaches, where self-centeredness is descriptive of the leader, focusing on the leader's ambition and individual goals (Eva et al., 2019). Comparatively, Chaudhry et al.'s (2021) systematic literature review on the construct of servant leadership resulted in findings that concluded that servant leadership was comparable to transformational leadership in some respects. In support of the similarities, Ahmad and Karadas (2021) discovered the positive effect of both servant and transformational leadership on organizational performance, both together and independently. Chaudhry et al. concluded that there were distinct differences between the two approaches to leadership that give servant leadership a better employee outcome than transformational leadership.

The findings from several studies concluded that servant leadership might be superior to transformational leadership concerning improved employee outcomes.



Chaudhry et al. (2021) referred to Graham's (1991) findings that transformational leadership relied on skills and training to motivate followers. Servant leadership attributes such as support, caring, humility, and spiritual insight build followers and increase morality and creativity, resulting in more positive employee outcomes when compared to the transformational leadership approach. Graham's findings supported van Dierendonck's (2011) view that positive attitudes among workers were fostered by servant leaders who put them first and treated them with respect and dignity. Servant leaders' action toward subordinates distinguishes servant leadership from other traditional leadership approaches.

Researchers have embraced servant and transformational leadership due to the benefits of inspiring followers and delivering positive organizational outcomes. The servant leadership characteristics of humility, honesty, and interpersonal acceptance, which are not the core of transformational leadership, inspire employee confidence in their leader (Chan & Mak, 2014; Joseph & Winston, 2005; Schaubroeck et al., 2011). Servant leadership's "follower first" stance distinguishes it from other forms of leadership and concentrates on the followers' success first and then on the organization's success (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2004). The foundation and core of servant leadership is its focus on others, putting their needs before those of the leader and organization, whose actions result in positive employee outcomes (Eva et al., 2019). Leaders who prioritize their employees' needs above their own and not just focus on organizational performance results may likely benefit from employees' commitment toward these leaders and, ultimately, the organization. Leaders and human resources practitioners must

understand the characteristics of servant leadership to ensure they recruit and train leaders and prospective hires to improve these competencies.

### **Dimensions of Servant Leadership**

Liden et al.'s (2015) short form, which defines and measures seven dimensions of servant leadership, is consistent with those of other researchers. Liden et al. identified seven dimensions based on Liden et al.'s (2008) 28-item servant leadership measurement scale (Liden et al., 2015). The seven dimensions include: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically (Liden et al., 2015). Similarly, Walumbwa et al. (2010) discovered that attributes of compassion and honesty favored follower outcomes. Liden et al. (2015) and Walumbwa et al.'s characteristics of servant leaders are consistent with van Dierendonck (2011). van Dierendonck discovered that leaders exhibit servant leadership by demonstrating humility, sincerity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship, as well as by offering direction and empowering others. Liden et al.'s and van Dierendonck's servant leadership measurement scales are widely used in the literature on servant leadership and consistently report a positive effect of servant leadership impact on followers' outcomes and, ultimately, organizational performance. Understanding each of the seven dimensions of servant leadership is crucial as it could indicate the skills and attributes that will help leaders be more effective.

## **Emotional Healing**

The first of Liden et al.'s (2015) seven dimensions of servant leadership is emotional healing. Emotional healing includes traits of empathy and compassion. Liden et al. indicated that emotional healing involves the leader's concern for personal issues and the well-being of subordinates. Individuals have dreams, aspirations, and relationships that sometimes fail to materialize into their expectations, and when this happens, emotional healing becomes necessary (Spears, 1995). Researchers validated the importance of leaders providing an environment that fosters emotional healing and proposed that healing is one of the most essential skills for an effective leader (Jit et al., 2017; Sturnick, 1998). Similarly, in defining their measurement of servant leadership, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) emphasized the value of an emphatic leader towards employees. Barbuto and Wheeler postulated that when leaders can put themselves in the circumstances of others, they can better listen to what others have to say, understand how they feel, and respond accordingly. Individuals are at different stages of their lives and have different experiences. A work environment that supports employees during difficult times may result in positive employee outcomes. The ability of leaders to empathize with followers is critical.

Empathy is an essential emotion for leaders to display and is critical to fostering an environment where emotional healing can occur. Some researchers agree that empathy is a crucial characteristic of a manager and leader (Pescosolido, 2002; Schuster, 1994). Wolff et al. (2002) explained that empathy is crucial to emotional intelligence. Wolff et al. argued that empathy allows for the development of cognitive processes and skills in

autonomous teams by facilitating an awareness of and sensitivity to the feelings and needs of the team members. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) postulated that healing is a facet of leadership that gets too little attention but distinguishes servant leadership from other leadership theories. Developing sensitivity to others by being emphatic will help followers become more open and vulnerable. Emotionally intelligent leaders will display empathy towards others, and together, these characteristics are essential to facilitate an environment of emotional healing as leaders choose to serve.

Several authors suggested that emotional healing can positively influence a leader's effectiveness. Khan et al. (2021) discovered a positive correlation between emotional healing and employee affective commitment. Similarly, Hasanuddin et al. (2021) concluded that employees reported higher levels of job satisfaction when they experienced greater emotional healing. Jit et al. (2017) agreed with Khan et al. and Hasanuddin et al. regarding the positive effects of emotional healing on followers. They supported the view that organizational leaders must create an environment that reduces pain and suffering regardless of the sources of employee stress. Emotional healing qualities are critical skills for creating an environment that fosters employee satisfaction, which may influence positive employee outcomes. Compassion is an important contributor to the process of healing.

Servant leaders who cultivate an environment where emotional healing is present have a heart of compassion toward others and positively impact the organizational outcome. A servant leader possessing the characteristics of compassion and healing cultivates an environment that looks after the well-being of employees, which in turn

provides a positive work climate (Black, 2010; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Neubert et al., 2008). Similarly, other researchers have indicated a direct correlation between servant leadership, well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, as well-being influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cerit, 2009; Jenkins & Stewart, 2010). Singh and Ryhal (2021) discovered a direct and positive correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction. In addition, other researchers have found that engaged employees have a high level of psychological well-being, provided leadership implements strategies to promote the well-being of employees (Svensson et al., 2021; Wieneke et al., 2019). Specifically, Jit et al. (2017) concluded that servant leaders emotionally heal employees by creating an environment of care where their employees with emotional pain are well supported. There is sufficient evidence that emotional healing is a crucial characteristic of servant leaders and critical to positive organizational outcomes. Servant leaders are not only concerned with providing support to facilitate emotional healing, but they also care deeply for community impact.

### **Creating Value for the Community**

The second dimension of servant leadership is creating value for the community. Liden et al. (2015) indicated that creating value for the community encapsulates the leader's involvement in assisting the communities within which the organization operates and inspiring followers to become involved. Servant leaders create value for the community by helping employees focus on contributing to the community and society. Servant leaders assist subordinates in connecting to the value of their contribution at work to society. The community focus of servant leadership is one of the unique

characteristics of this leadership approach (Meuser & Smallfield, 2022). Gen Z employees are concerned about the issues of diversity, equity, social justice, inclusion, and climate change and want to have a global impact (Schroth, 2019). Employees want to feel connected to their organization and the community. Gen Zs want to make a difference in the world. When servant leaders create value for the community, they may help employees fulfil their need to make a difference locally and globally.

Several researchers support the view that servant leaders create value for the community. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) concluded that servant leaders demonstrate characteristics that foster value creation for the community within the organization. In addition to Liden et al.'s (2015) servant leadership measurement scale, Barbuto and Wheeler's scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership identified 11 characteristics of servant leadership, of which stewardship and community building are two. Barbuto and Wheeler indicated that stewardship involves the role of servant leaders in preparing the organization and its employees to impact the community and society significantly by instilling a spirit of community within the organization. The service theme, which builds trust with followers, extends beyond the organization and into the home and community (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008). Eva et al. (2019) concluded that Liden et al.'s (2008) servant leadership attributes entailed their intentional and genuine care for providing value for the community and inspiring followers to be engaged in community efforts. Servant leaders must prioritize their focus on community impact, which contributes to helping followers make a difference in the community and the wider world.

Servant leaders' focus on creating value for the community may be critical to impacting social change positively. Ogochi et al. (2022) discovered that servant leadership characteristics such as a holistic approach to work, service to others, a feeling of community, and uprightness significantly affected community impact. Servant leadership's focus on creating value for the community is fostered by prioritizing the needs of their followers and community above their own, contributing to employees extending care to others internally and externally of the organization. Creating value for the community is therefore essential for followers' commitment to external social change impact. Servant leaders' conceptual skills are also vital to their effectiveness.

### **Conceptual Skills**

The third dimension of servant leadership is conceptual skills. Liden et al. (2015) justified that the conceptual skills of a servant leader include expressing the leader's competence in resolving work issues and comprehending the organization's goals. The ability to think creatively, outside the box, and produce novel ideas that may necessitate deviating from standard operating processes is fundamental to the conceptual competencies necessary to manage an organization more effectively (Chandler & Jansen, 1992). When leaders use their conceptual skills, it helps employees reframe their perspective or mental model and become more creative in their work (Barbutto & Wheeler, 2006; Spears, 1995). The conception skills of servant leaders help solve complex problems and support followers, which is necessary to help them be more creative and innovative as part of the problem-solving process. Leaders must possess

conceptual skills as employees will look to them for guidance and solutions to complex organizational challenges to foster success.

A leader's conceptual skills are critical to organizational success. Research findings suggested that management skills have indirectly affected business results (Carruthers et al., 2019; Mahohoma & Agbenyegah, 2020). Mashavira and Chipunza (2021) examined the impact of managerial conceptual competencies on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Zimbabwe. Mashavira and Chipunza concluded that conceptual abilities considerably impacted returns on investment and innovation in business performance. This result was consistent with previous research findings on the relationship between management's conceptual competencies and the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (Botha et al., 2015; Ikupolati et al., 2017). A leader's ability to have insight into the organization's existence, daily operations, and complexities and the ability to deal with organizational challenges are critical to its success. The servant leader's empowering attributes contribute to employees' growth, development, and performance at work.

### **Empowering**

The fourth dimension of servant leadership is empowering. Assessing the extent to which the leader gives subordinates authority, independence, and a voice in decision-making is listed among the servant leader's empowering abilities (Liden et al., 2015). Empowering leaders to delegate authority, decision-making, and trust to their subordinates to boost productivity at work (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Sims et al., 2009). Eva et al. (2019) opined that servant leaders inspire



their subordinates to reach their full potential by taking a relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual approach to leadership. Empowering employees is vital to organizational success because a servant leader's empowering skills are essential for encouraging followers to take ownership of their work, which may result in greater commitment and a determination to succeed. Through opportunities for decision-making, delegated autonomy, and increased responsibility, employee trust may be heightened, and they experience growth and success.

Several studies confirm the value of leadership empowering skills to followers' outcomes. Wen et al. (2023) examined the impact of empowering leadership on employee engagement, with psychological empowerment as a mediator and cultural orientation as a moderator. Wen et al. concluded that positively empowering leadership affected employee work engagement. The link between an empowering leader and employee engagement at work was moderated, in part, by the extent to which employees felt psychologically empowered. Similarly, Alif and Nastiti (2022) used psychological empowerment and self-leadership to explain the relationships between empowering leadership, creativity, and job effort. Alif and Nastiti discovered that employees benefit from empowering leadership in two ways: (a) directly, by encouraging them to take charge of their own lives and careers, and (b) indirectly, by increasing their sense of personal agency and responsibility at work. Specifically, the effect of an empowering leader on workers' inventiveness and hard labor is partially mediated by their sense of psychological autonomy.

Ashraf et al. (2022) examined the impact of servant leadership on employees' voluntary green behavior. The finding confirmed that servant leadership greatly encourages individuals to engage in environmentally conscious actions on their own time. These studies demonstrate the value of a leader's ability to empower their followers to positively impact the organization through fostering higher levels of employee work engagement, particularly when the followers feel psychologically empowered. Servant leaders also play a vital role in helping employees grow and succeed.

### **Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed**

The fifth dimension of servant leadership is helping subordinates grow and succeed, an important attribute that prepares them for greater levels of responsibility in the organization. Liden et al. (2015) explained that leaders might aid their subordinates' development by measuring how much the leader helps followers attain their full potential and thrive in their professions. Servant leadership is a holistic approach that engages followers in numerous dimensions, fostering an environment of support and opportunities that encourages them to evolve into the best version of themselves (Eva et al., 2019). Employees led by servant leaders usually demonstrate high levels of commitment through a bond developed between leaders and followers facilitated through social exchange. Servant leaders prioritize helping their subordinates develop and grow as they are genuinely interested in their success; hence, training and career development to prepare them for opportunities are fundamental to their character (Franco & Antunes, 2020). Organizations characterized by servant leaders prioritize the growth and development of their teams. Many internal promotions rather than external hiring for

senior-level jobs may also serve as a key motivating factor that helps foster their engagement at work.

Employee development is necessary for their growth and success, ultimately benefiting the organization. Jayathilake et al. (2021) proposed that investing in Gen Z employee development may increase their commitment to their responsibilities, increase organizational performance, improve competitiveness, and even reduce employee turnover. Leaders should consistently invest in their employees to stay ahead of the competition. By investing in human resources, a company may expand its reach and gain the vital edge it needs to stay at the top of its field. Servant leadership may be even more relevant today because of the need for leadership influence on employees. Franco and Antunes (2020) deduced that the organization in which servant leaders showed genuine concern for subordinates' career development and goal achievements and provided opportunities to improve their skills augured well for filling vacancies within the organization. Martin et al. (2021) examined burnout and its relationship to leadership. They discovered that the servant leadership trait of caring about subordinates' development and success significantly predicted employee burnout. In the healthcare sector, employee burnout was inversely related to the degree employers invested in their staff members' professional development and advancement. In addition to providing a source of human resources to fill job vacancies within organizations, servant leaders may mitigate employee burnout when they help subordinates grow and succeed. Putting subordinates first is an essential principle that servant leaders should prioritize.

### **Putting Subordinates First**

The sixth dimension of servant leadership is putting subordinates first. Liden et al. (2015) indicated that putting subordinates first involves assessing the extent to which a leader puts their subordinates' needs ahead of their own. This dimension emanated from Greenleaf's (1977) articulation that servant leaders are servants first, putting the needs of those they serve before the organization's needs. Franco and Antunes (2020) used several exploratory case studies to recognize, explore, and discuss the concept of servant leadership, discover its dimensions, and comprehend how employees interpret this leadership style. They found nine dimensions of servant leadership, including "putting subordinates first" (p. 356). Their case studies revealed that servant leaders prioritize the needs of followers, with all other requirements of the organization taking a secondary position. The findings indicated that the actions and attitude of servant leaders demonstrated their commitment to their followers, who put their subordinates' needs ahead of their own.

The findings in the literature regarding the positive impact of leaders who treat their subordinates well and the related organizational outcomes should serve as an indicator of those who fail to prioritize good leader and subordinate relationships. Franco and Antunes's (2020) findings concurred with those of Greenleaf (1977) and Liden et al. (2015) regarding the value of treating subordinates well and the positive impact on organizational outcomes. These findings indicated that servant leaders put their subordinates' best interests before their own. In addition, servant leaders seek and promote opportunities such as training and development, fair compensation, and ensuring

that subordinates have the resources they need to do their jobs while offering daily assistance to foster a positive work environment.

Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) pointed to the disconnect of organizations' failure to prioritize putting their others first, even when the research and experience indicate a direct relationship between organizational success and treating people well. Pfeffer and Veiga explained that organizations would fail to recognize and benefit from their competitive advantage until they recognize the importance of treating employees as assets. Canavesi and Minelli (2022) distinguished that not all organizations might find servant leadership beneficial, especially if they are fast-paced and require quick decision-making. In such cases, servant leadership may be found to be counterintuitive. To mitigate this effect, Canavesi and Minelli, in dissecting these arguments, proposed that servant leaders should lead by example while providing their followers with just enough freedom and responsibility to do their jobs. There is value in employing servant leadership attributes, such as putting subordinates first. These servant leaders must portray themselves as role models to be emulated while providing subordinates with autonomy and responsibility in executing their jobs to counteract possible counterintuitive behaviors from followers. Other servant leadership dimensions, such as ethical behavior, may find universal acceptance among researchers.

### **Behaving Ethically**

The seventh dimension of servant leadership is behaving ethically. Liden et al. (2015) indicated that servant leaders' ethical behavior involves honesty, trustworthiness, and serving and operating with integrity. Servant leadership's top management must be

intrinsically motivated toward ethical leadership and a desire to serve others in and out of the organization to increase the strength and impact of the organization and the community (Greenleaf, 1977). Brown et al. (2005) characterized ethical leadership as modeling proper conduct through one's actions and relationships with others while encouraging similar behavior in followers through transparent interaction, reinforcement, and collaborative decision-making. Ethical leadership has become increasingly important due to increased unethical leadership practices. Employees also demand to work in a more ethical climate; therefore, leaders must act ethically.

There is value in organizational leadership that builds an ethical work culture, and the shift is both important and urgent. There is sufficient evidence in the research literature to suggest a change from traditional leadership attributes to ethical, pro-social, and people-centered leadership (Page & Wong, 2020; Parris & Peachey, 2013; van Dierendonck, 2011). The shift to an ethical organizational climate became increasingly evident after Enron failed in the late 1990s to early 2000 (Premeaux, 2009). Premeaux (2009) argued that managers' ethical or unethical activities significantly affect workers, shareholders, suppliers, and customers. Mendonca and Kanungo (2007) defended the view that talent alone cannot bring organizational success; instead, leaders must be ethical and build an environment defined by morals. Researchers suggested a positive correlation between ethical leadership and work engagement, with some of these studies using mediating variables, including organizational trust and self-efficacy (Jia et al., 2022; Naeem et al., 2020; Zeng & Xu., 2019). The ethical dimension of servant leadership is

essential for the viability of organizations. The servant leadership approach allows organizations to be sustainable in this global environment.

### **The Relevance of Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership has become increasingly relevant because of its impact on improving organizational outcomes for prioritizing subordinate needs, providing emotional support, focusing on community, and the need for an ethical work environment, especially considering the 21st century's corporate scandals. Researchers suggested a strong relationship between servant leadership style and organizational outcomes mainly due to servant leaders' ethical disposition and focus on prioritizing the needs of followers (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Eva et al., 2019; Miao et al., 2021). Multiple corporate scandals in a short period, such as Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and Xerox, among others, and the extraordinary failure of a Big Five audit company fed the perception of a systemic issue in financial reporting, leading to reform (Camfferman & Wielhouwer, 2019). The moral atmosphere of an organization is a direct reflection of its leader, who must set a good example (Nixon, 2021). Since the scandals, organizations have paid more attention to ethical leadership and prioritizing employee needs. In addition to stricter government regulations, it is essential for leaders to consistently introspect and ensure their actions contribute to a happy and ethical work environment, as this is important for organizational success. Employees emulate role models in their organizations. Leadership is critical in building and safeguarding an organization's ethical and moral environment.

Pressure to compromise ethics in the workplace is increasing. Often, managers may find themselves in compromising positions and must make judgments consistent with the organization's values, procedures, and morals (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño, 2018). Brown and Treviño (2006) identified that managers struggle to investigate ethical issues and moral predicaments in many workplace situations. Gan et al. (2023) discovered that ethical leadership reduced employees' unethical behavior. Naeem et al. (2020) concluded that the impact of ethical leadership on work engagement is stronger when the LMX is high. Those who follow the servant leadership model are more likely to place a premium on ethical conduct and foster an ethical culture inside their enterprises (McCune-Stein et al., 2020). Managers and leaders continue to struggle to make ethical and moral decisions. Organizational leaders who use a servant leadership model may likely create an environment that fosters the growth and development of subordinates, high ethical standards, trust, and followers' commitment. Collectively, these qualities may auger well for greater transparency and build trust. Leadership must pay keen attention to ensure the organization's culture reflects the ethical practice that will help it succeed. Engaging leadership approaches that foster ethical decision-making, focusing on individual and organizational success rather than personal power and control, drives the development of an ethical work environment.

Organizational leaders who are other-centered rather than self-centered in their approach to leadership may likely benefit from greater employee engagement as engaged employees contribute more to organizational success. In contrast to the traditional approach to leadership, with an emphasis on authority, control, and power, servant



leadership places a premium on followers' development, growth, and well-being (Kim et al., 2018). Prioritizing the needs of others above oneself removes the need for individual power and reveals the selfless nature of the servant leadership approach, which may counter the need for unethical business practices (Liden et al., 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011). Many organizations are focused on creating employee value by prioritizing the needs of employees and improving the ethical environment while also increasing customer satisfaction, which redounds to improved organizational outcomes. Many leaders of successful organizations, including Ritz Carlton, Zappos, Container Store, Intel, and Marriott, implement servant leadership practices within their organizations (Eva et al., 2019; McGee-Cooper & Looper, 2001). These well-known, successful company leaders appear to invest in their employees and operate in an ethical environment. This assumption is on the premise that servant leadership success is based on altruistic and ethical behavior (Eva et al., 2019). Greenleaf (1977) believed that servant leaders, unlike any other, demonstrated genuine concern for followers. As a result, these actions by leaders usually result in more engaged employees.

The qualities of servant leaders make them suitable for engaging employees in a global context where the engagement levels are lower than desired and employees operate in environments of high uncertainty. Servant leaders are compassionate, caring, focused on followers' growth and development, and are community-focused; therefore, servant leadership is an appropriate approach to today's leadership because of the dynamic global environment in which organizations operate (Eva et al., 2019). The uncertainty created by organizational change is part of the work context's global

complexity. De Sousa and van Dierendonck (2014) discovered that servant leadership profoundly influenced employee engagement during extreme uncertainty. Researchers agreed on the tremendous value of servant leadership in delivering a wide range of organizational outcomes. Servant leadership may be a better stand-alone approach to leadership when compared to other styles, including transformational, adaptive, and ethical leadership (Hoch et al., 2018). The importance and relevance of servant leadership cannot be overstated. The importance of servant leadership is because of its value to an organizational environment characterized by leadership that prioritizes good morals, ethics, a focus on community, and the growth and development of employees, which will augur well for organizational success.

### **The Future of Servant Leadership Research**

Servant leadership research has made significant progress from non-empirical to empirical studies, looking at servant leadership from a philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual perspective and its practical application. Researchers indicated that with the onset of the 21st century, their focus has shifted to a more moral and ethical approach to leadership (Eva et al., 2019; Fuller, 2021; Lemoine et al., 2019). The ethical characteristics of leaders have become good for society and necessary for organizational survival (Fuller, 2021; Lemoine et al., 2019). Servant leadership has evolved from other leadership philosophies because of its holistic approach and broad focus, and it has become an important philosophy for research in the scientific community (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Freeman et al., 2004). The study of servant leadership has evolved as

organizational leaders seek to identify the best way to lead to greater organizational success.

Empirical research is deemed valuable due to the positive organizational outcome reported in the literature. Servant leadership was first coined by Greenleaf (1970) as a philosophy, though its genesis can be found in biblical history. Since Greenleaf died in 1990, his work has been expanded by his protégé, Spears (1995), who continues his work on servant leadership. Spears spent 17 years advancing the theory of servant leadership before forming the Larry C. Spears Center for Servant-Leadership in 2008 and has contributed in whole or part to 15 books on servant leadership (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2021). Spears' continued efforts to promulgate the positive effects of servant leadership on organizational outcomes have contributed to the advancement of servant leadership in many organizations.

Servant leadership research has evolved from non-empirical to empirical. Spears (1995) and Greenleaf (2002) conducted non-empirical research related to their experiences as practitioners in the field of leadership. Following Greenleaf's death, Spears identified 10 characteristics of servant leadership based on the work of Greenleaf, which include: (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) awareness, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment to the growth of people and (j) building community. Organizations may benefit from using a servant leadership model to inspire positive organizational outcomes even as empirical research measures its impact as a variable of employee performance. The value of advancing the benefits of servant leadership from non-empirical to empirical research has provided confidence in

the theory and practice of servant leadership. Servant leadership has become a viable option for organizational leadership as it helps these organizations become more sustainable.

Empirical studies on servant leadership, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, have since dominated the 21st century. Ehrhart (2004) conducted the first empirical study examining the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. The prominent researchers who focused on scientifically empirical research, including developing the servant leadership measurement scales, included Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Liden et al., 2008, 2015; van Dierendonck, 2011. Several researchers have found a positive correlation between servant leadership and employee work engagement using mediated variables, including social exchange, psychological climate, and self-efficacy (Bao et al., 2018; Zainab et al., 2022; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Multiple empirical studies using various methodologies have strengthened the value of servant leadership, its impact on employee work engagement, and its contribution to organizational performance.

Several researchers have contributed to the field of servant leadership, which has advanced its conceptual, theoretical, and measurement framework. The extensive work of Liden et al. (2015) on measuring servant leadership resulted in a short version of the Liden et al. (2008) scale used in this study. Servant leadership characteristics have gained momentum within organizations (Eva et al., 2019). A servant leader's focus on ethical leadership and well-being can improve employee engagement and positively impact organizational performance.

When organization leaders focus on selfless ethical leadership and prioritize the needs of employees, this fosters higher levels of employee engagement and results in a positive organizational outcome. Servant leaders are highly ethical in their leadership approach (van Dierendonck, 2011). Liden et al. (2015) explained that servant leadership has emerged as an attractive alternative style due to servant leaders prioritizing integrity, helping others, and bringing out the best in others. The servant leadership approach appropriately responds to the increasing demand for improved employee engagement, teamwork, innovation, and the societal need for ethical behavior in organizations. Liden et al.'s findings supported those of other researchers that servant leadership improves employee performance due to the positive response of followers toward servant leaders (Chen et al., 2015; Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; van Dierendonck et al., 2014). So far, there have been three systematic reviews of the literature on servant leadership. The first was by Parris and Peachey (2013), with the second by Eva et al. (2019) and the third by Mcquade et al. (2021). Eva et al. (2019) reviewed 287 articles spanning 20 years between 1998 and 2018, of which 100 were published in the last 4 years. This systematic review increased the coherence and clarity of the servant leadership construct toward theory development and provided recommendations for the future to improve theoretical and empirical advancement (Eva et al., 2019). Conversely, Mcquade et al.'s third systematic review of the servant leadership literature derived its outcome from thematic analysis.

The two earlier systematic reviews had several weaknesses, which the third sought to improve. Mcquade et al. (2021) argued that, comparatively, Eva et al.'s (2019) study did not include an inclusion/exclusion criterion. At the same time, Parris and

Peachey (2013) used only databases from their universities and excluded those other respected academic databases. Neither study reflected the search criteria, making it possible for other researchers to replicate. The findings regarding the required skills of servant leaders were somewhat consistent across the literature. More research is needed to increase understanding of servant leadership's antecedents and determine which leadership characteristics may be most effective in engaging Gen Z employees. Future studies may inform human resources practitioners about characteristics to look for in the recruitment of leaders, and the skill sets leaders must develop to foster greater employee engagement and ultimately improve organizational outcomes associated with servant leadership. In determining a suitable leadership style for Gen Zs, it is important to understand their characteristics and traits.

### ***Gen Z***

Understanding the Gen Z cohort of employees is critical to identifying the leadership attributes that best engage them. Cora (2019) outlined that Gen Z is the generational cohort that entered the world between 1995 and 2012. Information is more readily available to Generation Z than to previous generations. Gen Zs started school earlier than previous generations and exhibit indicators of cognitive maturity much beyond their years, though they have less work experience. Gen Zs focus more on their identities than Generation X and Y. Schroth (2019) opined that employers and work settings must be ready for the arrival of Gen Zs. Although Gen Z shares many characteristics with millennials, they exhibit distinct behavioral differences (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018; Schroth, 2019). The behavioral differences between Gen Zs and

millennials make it essential for organizational leaders to understand each cohort and demonstrate flexibility and patience to manage this new breed of employees characterized by world events.

Many differences between Gen Z employees and previous generations are due to the defining moments in their childhood that have shaped their mental models. Defining events include the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the financial crisis of the 1990s, and the advancement of technology (Khatri & Dixit, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2019). For instance, members of Gen Z are eager for constant praise from superiors and are adept with modern technology. In addition, they are more easily stressed, eager to contribute to the world, have high ethical and moral standards, and want to be mentored (Kuzior et al., 2022; Loring & Wang, 2022; Muduli & McLean, 2020). The challenges Gen Z employees face in the workplace make it necessary to identify the leadership attributes that best engage this cohort of employees. Servant leadership attributes may suit Gen Z to improve their work engagement.

Empirical research findings have demonstrated that servant leadership is valuable to organizational success. The servant leadership approach focusing on the needs of employees has proven to positively impact employees and the organizational outcome (Bao et al., 2018; Eva et al., 2019; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Servant leadership attributes of emotional healing, creating value for community impact, focusing on employee well-being, and leading ethically (Liden et al., 2015) may augur well for an engaged Gen Z cohort. In addition, the unique characteristics of Gen Zs make it essential for leaders of organizations to pay keen attention to Gen Zs regarding

organizational performance, stress level, and employee turnover, among other drivers that may negatively impact their work engagement.

### ***Organization Performance***

Organizational performance is a top priority for many leaders due to increased globalization and the advanced use of technology, which increasingly require leaders to engage their employees to improve organizational success. Prioritizing a focus on Gen Zs due to their unique challenges of being easily stressed and reportedly only moderately engaged and requiring a supportive work environment is critical for improved organizational performance. Ebrahimi and Modaber (2023) defined *organizational performance* as the result of its output and the extent to which it meets the pre-established goals and objectives. Sencherey et al. (2022) explained that employee commitment in the workplace is a state of mind in which workers feel positively about their employer and is critical for organizational performance. Issah (2018) concluded that the dynamic nature of the business world and the fierce competition make it extremely challenging for organizations to realize their goals. Many organizational leaders find it essential but difficult to increase employee commitment to the desired level, which is critical to reducing turnover, lateness, and absenteeism and significantly affects how well an organization does as it improves organizational performance and intention to stay (Armstrong & Baron, 2015; Sencherey et al., 2022). A positive and supportive work environment is critical to achieving employee commitment that positively impacts organizational performance and has become increasingly crucial to organizational success (Sencherey et al., 2022). Though challenging to increase organizational



performance, leaders must make a concerted effort to engage their employees by providing a positive and supportive work environment that impacts organizational performance.

The appropriate leadership approach may influence Gen Z employees toward improved work engagement and organizational performance. Decuyper and Schaufeli (2020) proposed that positive leadership styles result in leaders demonstrating congruent behaviors on the job, which in turn affects employee work engagement. Abrudan (2021) proffered that leadership significantly impacts how well an organization performs its job. Organizational leadership must prioritize effective management and explore new, universally understood approaches to leading people. Aggarwal et al. (2022) explained that Gen Z employees, the youngest in the current workforce, are unique in their perceptions of workplace norms and careers. Aggarwal et al. recommended that leaders recognize the value of catering to the Gen Z generation by playing to their skill sets and giving them work that matters. Leaders must improve their understanding of the leadership approaches to best engage this cohort to increase their output level toward organizational performance. Further empirical research to understand and measure the effectiveness of other leadership approaches, such as servant leadership, on Gen Z organizational performance may be increasingly relevant, especially considering the literature's finding that they are easily stressed.

### ***Stress Level***

Gen Z employees' stress level may negatively affect their engagement at work. Selye (1979) first defined *stress* as a sense of demands placed on an individual to which

the body develops General Adaptation Syndrome, which triggers the fight-or-flight stage to satisfy the demand. Salleh (2008) described *stress* as the incapacity to deal with external mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual pressures that negatively affect one's health. Gallup's 2020 State of the Global Workplace report found that younger workers were hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic than their older counterparts (Pendell, 2021). The report indicated that compared to their older counterparts, employees under 40 reported higher levels of stress and anger, lower levels of employee engagement, and poorer levels of well-being (Pendell, 2021). The results of the Gallup research indicated that employee well-being should be an important goal among Gen Z and millennial workers when combined with pre-COVID-19 pandemic data (Pendell, 2021). Deloitte's (2020) study found that stress levels continue to be high among respondents, particularly Gen Zs. Nearly half of Gen Zs, 46%, and about 44% of millennials are stressed all or most of the time (Deloitte, 2020). Research findings from Pendell (2021) concurred with Deloitte's (2020) conclusions. Gen Zs may have a greater propensity toward becoming more easily stressed than their older counterparts, contributing to substandard work engagement. Organizational leaders and human resources practitioners must possess the skills to get the best from Gen Z employees by cultivating a work environment that prioritizes their well-being. A leadership style demonstrated by servant leaders could add value to Gen Z work engagement due to the caring and positive work environment they create, which is especially beneficial during stressful periods like the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***COVID-19 Pandemic***

Some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected Gen Zs in the workplace more severely than other generational groups. Findings from a Gallup 2020 study indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted younger workers more severely than older workers (Pendell, 2021). Lathabhavan and Padhy (2022) examined the relationship between problematic Internet use and stress among several generational cohorts, including Gen Zs. Lathabhavan and Padhy discovered that fear of COVID-19 and problematic internet use heightened stress among all the cohorts, particularly Gen Y and Gen Z. Zhang et al. (2022) found a positive correlation between Gen Z hotel employees' perception of advanced information technology and work intention and the COVID-19 pandemic. These research findings indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had different impacts on Gen Z employees relative to their sectors and possibly the culture or country. Since organizations are still grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their current and prospective employees, leaders must be aware of these impacts to understand them better and develop their future leaders with the necessary skills to lead this cohort.

Another event, the great resignation, may have been triggered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and has affected many Gen Z employees. Kuzior et al. (2022) explained that the great resignation was the vast surge of workers voluntarily resigning across industries in 2021 following the end of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anthony Klotz, a psychologist and professor at Texas A&M University, coined the phenomenon of the great resignation. This was in response to what he thought would be

the natural reaction of employees after the restrictions were eased following the period of lockdown, the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuzior et al., 2022). However, the COVID-19 pandemic may have been an intensifier rather than an instigator of the great resignation (Baum et al., 2020). Working during COVID-19 drastically impacted people's emotive, cognitive, and behavioral processes, and the reason for quitting one's job may have differed before and during COVID (Malmendier, 2021). Rising workplace demands, employee dissatisfaction, and the desire for greater autonomy over one's work life have always been associated with turnover intentions (Ng & Stanton, 2023). Organizational leaders must not underestimate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employee life cycle. Leaders need to recognize those critical drivers of their employees' engagement and seek to enhance these in their organization's leadership to reduce employee turnover.

### ***Employee Turnover***

Employee turnover can become costly for organizations and may affect their productivity. Mobley (1982) explained that employee turnover is when individuals paid by an organization quit. There has been a rise in employee turnover when the demand for labor has also increased, a severe challenge many organizations face in the United States and other countries (BQ Prime, 2021; Klotz et al., 2021). Chillakuri and Mahanandia (2018) proposed that Gen Z employees are markedly distinct from prior generations in their thinking and work habits. Boyer et al. (2020) discovered that Gen Z's entrepreneurial attitude makes them less loyal to an organization. Gen Z's turnover rate tends to be higher than previous generations, which challenges organizations. Less

loyalty has resulted in higher turnover intentions (Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008). Higher turnover intentions result in a higher actual turnover. Dimock (2019) stated that an intention to leave impacts future and actual turnover. A high turnover rate will negatively impact organizational performance, which may negatively impact organizational performance. The substantial work of Mobley (1977) regarding employees' intention to resign proposed that once employees were dissatisfied with their organizations and had alternatives, they would leave that organization and seek opportunities to be more satisfied. Organizational leaders must understand the cost of employee disengagement and mitigate the turnover of valuable employees.

Though employee turnover is vital to the sustainability of an organization, high turnover can be costly. The average costs connected with an employee's departure can equal 150-200% of that individual's annual income (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). Duda and Žůrková (2013) justified that though employee turnover is necessary to prevent stagnation and increase competitiveness, high levels of turnover are not desirable because of the associated high cost. Organizational leaders must understand the factors influencing an employee's intention to stay to reduce high employee turnover. The cost of skills lost, rehiring, and training may significantly impact organizational performance. Organizational leaders must recognize the importance of understanding Gen Zs because their population is greater than previous generations and will eventually become a dominant generation in the workforce. Gen Z turnover may negatively impact organizations if their needs are not understood, prioritized, and met.

Factors outside of compensation are essential in employee turnover for the Gen Z cohort. Kuzior et al. (2022) explored the reasons for the great resignation. They discovered that the great resignation was influenced by salary and ethical, cultural, relational, and personal factors. Kuzior et al. indicated that a Pew Research study in early 2022 showed that twice as many Gen Zs, which is 77% compared to Gen Y and baby boomers who planned to leave their jobs within the following year. Kuzior et al. analyzed three different studies of Gen Zs in the United States, Poland, and Germany. They concluded that this cohort valued meaningful work, a good working environment, and respect for company values and ethics. Kuzior et al. also indicated that opportunities for growth and development, diversity, equity, and inclusion actions were essential to the Gen Z cohort. Gen Zs placed a high value on focusing on social issues, which was also primary to their engagement at work and retention. Jayathilake et al. (2021) discovered that concentrating on Gen Z's development might improve performance and retention. Jayathilake et al.'s findings supported Kuzior et al.'s conclusion that focusing on employee development plays a vital role in Gen Z's retention. Organizational leadership must pay keen attention to those non-monetary factors essential to fostering greater engagement at work, reducing the potential for high levels of employee turnover.

### ***Employee Workplace Engagement***

Employee workplace engagement, the outcome variable in this study, is of tremendous interest to researchers and human resources practitioners because of its positive impact on organizational outcomes and the reported low rate of employee engagement globally. Since Kahn's (1990) seminal academic research on employee

engagement up to 2014, over 5,771 articles have been found in academic databases (Bailey et al., 2015a). Engagement at work arose as a desirable workplace practice between 2003 and 2013 as job insecurity increased (Agarwal, 2014). Since 2017, over 1,200 scholarly articles have been on employee engagement, including three systematic literature reviews (Loring & Wang, 2022). Kahn (1990) defined engagement as the extent to which one feels personally connected to one's work. Engagement is also called work engagement and employee engagement (Borah & Barua, 2018; Medhurst & Albrecht, 2011). Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined *employee work engagement* as those pleasant and rewarding experiences of employees in the work environment that motivate them to excel, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Employee work engagement has become of great interest to organization leaders because of the many benefits to organizational success and the reported low levels within organizations.

Employee engagement contributes many benefits to an organization's success; the cost of disengaged employees remains a significant concern for many organizational leaders. Researchers have concluded that employees' work engagement across the United States is generally lower than desired. A 2021 study by the Gallup group indicated that 34% of employees were actively engaged, with 16% actively disengaged (Pendell, 2021). An organization where employees are engaged produces better results when compared to those who are moderately engaged or disengaged. Employee well-being and health are enhanced, and organizations see a boost in productivity and profits due to employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017). When employees are not engaged, an organization's competitiveness is challenged. The literature indicated that

employee disengagement costs organizations in the United States approximately \$350B annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The high expense associated with disengagement threatens organizational survival and sustainability and is an essential issue for organizational leaders to address. Focusing on Gen Z work engagement is critical since they are comparatively the largest generational group in history, and their work engagement is critical to positive organizational outcomes.

Employee work engagement among Gen Z employees is essential because they will dominate the workforce within the next 10 years, at least at the entry level. By then, some should be supervisors and managers. Al-Asfour and Lettau (2014) indicated that addressing issues related to Gen Zs is essential since, by 2030, this cohort will fill most entry-level jobs in the United States. A Deloitte Global Millennial survey indicated that approximately 48% of Gen Z employees were stressed all or most of the time, which suggests a high level of absenteeism from work (Deloitte, 2020). The low engagement level of employees is costly to organizations. Organizations with an engaged workforce generate four times greater earnings per share than their competitors (Harter, 2018). Organizations with engaged workforces have fewer issues with the retention of employees and are at least 21% more profitable (Harter, 2002, 2018). Organizational leadership must place greater value on understanding those attributes that foster higher levels of engagement among Gen Z employees.

Academics and human resources practitioners should focus on understanding leadership and other variables that may best engage Gen Z in the workplace. The Gen Z cohort is the largest and perhaps the most impactful in changing how leaders must lead.



Sigaeva et al. (2022) measured the impact of servant leadership and authentic leadership on the psychological capital and the work engagement of Gen Z employees in the hospitality industry. The authors found that authentic and servant leadership styles positively impacted Gen Z's psychological capital and work engagement; however, the impact was more significant with authentic leadership than servant leadership.

Jung and Yoon (2021) examined the effect of workplace flexibility and other variables on the work engagement of Gen X, Y, and Z employees. Jung and Yoon found that workplace flexibility positively impacted each generation; however, the most significant impact was on Gen Z employees. These findings concluded that different variables might affect Gen Z's work engagement. The findings also showed that more flexible leaders who are more flexible might impact Gen Z work engagement better.

Other researchers have confirmed the positive relationship between different variables on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. Lee et al. (2021) discovered that transformational leadership, transactional leadership, corporate social responsibility, work-life balance, autonomy, and technology positively impacted Gen Z work engagement. Transformational leadership had a more significant impact than transactional leadership. Prasetyaningtyas et al. (2022) examined how leadership, job characteristics, and workplace environment affected Generation Z's motivation at work and how this motivation affected their performance. Prasetyaningtyas et al. concluded that all three variables impacted Gen Z motivation and performance at work. The findings from these researchers confirmed that authentic, servant, transformational, and transactional leadership, workplace flexibility, leadership job characteristics, workplace

environment, corporate social responsibility, work-life balance, autonomy, and technology significantly impacted Gen Z work engagement. Social exchange theory may explain the work engagement of Gen Z employees through the social exchange mechanism between followers and leaders.

### ***Social Exchange Mechanism-Social Exchange Theory***

The social exchange theory may influence the social exchange mechanism in the relationship between leaders and followers. Social exchange theory suggests that social behavior is shaped by the exchange of personal gains and disadvantages aimed at maximizing personal gains and minimizing personal disadvantages (Hoffman-Miller, 2022). According to social exchange theory, personal gains and disadvantages drive social behavior. Social exchange theory explains followers' commitment to leaders who prioritize their needs and development. Many servant leadership researchers have used social exchange theory to explain how servant leaders display sincerity, compassion, and genuine concern for and prioritize the needs of followers, including their development, and usually see followers' positive responses to their superiors (Greenleaf, 1977; Ling et al., 2016; Paesen et al., 2019). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) explained that leaders and followers form relationships influenced by exchanging benefits, including resources and support between the two parties. Social exchange theory explains followers' commitment to leaders who prioritize their needs and development.

Several researchers have examined the impact of LMX through understanding social exchange theory to explain the relationship between leader and followers, which results in positive work outcomes. Bao et al. (2018) examined the effect of servant

leadership on followers' work engagement using two mediating factors: the social exchange mechanism using LMX and the social learning mechanism. The findings indicated that servant leadership fostered work engagement in followers through a social exchange mechanism. Bao et al. concurred with Walumbwa et al.'s (2011) findings that through the process of social exchanges, high LMX managers and followers developed relationships that foster the reciprocal behavior of followers. Walumbwa et al. suggested that the relationship between leaders and followers promotes a commitment to their leaders, influences organizational citizenship behavior, and fosters higher levels of job performance. Organizational leaders should engender a positive work environment by building good work relationships, which will likely promote organizational success.

Organizational leaders may discover that Gen Z employees who are highly stressed, focused on individual growth, and committed to making a difference are more likely to be engaged by leaders from whom they gain advantages that assist them in achieving their goals. Walumbwa et al. (2011) found that social connection and the emphasis on reciprocity are the primary motivators for followers to invest effort on behalf of their leaders and organizations. Gen Z work engagement may be possible through reciprocation due to followers' obligation towards servant leaders who have prioritized their needs, as explained through social exchange theory. Although several researchers have measured the impact of different leadership styles on the engagement of employees using social exchange theory to explain the reciprocated relationship, few have done so using the Gen Z sample.

### ***Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Work Engagement***

Authors in extant literature indicated a positive correlation between servant leadership and work engagement. Tims et al. (2011) explained that leadership becomes the primary factor in mobilizing an engaged workplace because strong leaders can influence the attitudes and behaviors of their workforce. Several researchers have conducted empirical studies to understand better servant leadership's effect on employee work engagement using several mediating variables influencing employee behavioral outcomes (Anselmo-Witzel et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2014; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Many researchers have found that servant leadership positively impacts employee outcomes and organizational performance. Anselmo-Witzel et al. (2020) found that Gen Z nurses were motivated to stay at their jobs due to the servant leadership influence of their superiors.

Similarly, Zeeshan et al. (2021) confirmed the positive effects of servant leadership on employee engagement mediated by self-efficacy. De Clercq et al. (2014) found that servant leadership increased employee engagement with strong goal congruence and social connection. Greenleaf (2002) postulated that leaders who serve others get better results. Several studies across countries and industries prove this belief, which is explained through social exchange relationships.

Organizations with a servant leadership culture that prioritizes employees' needs seem to benefit from higher levels of employee performance. Ozturk et al. (2021) measured the impact of servant leadership on absenteeism, in-role performance, and extra-role performance via the mediating roles of work engagement and job satisfaction,

using hotel employee supervisors' dyadic data with time-lagged measurement in Russia. This quantitative study's findings revealed servant leadership's positive effect on work engagement and that work engagement is a mediator between servant leadership and absenteeism, in-role performance, and extra-role performance. In these cases, the effect was stronger on work engagement than job satisfaction. Servant leadership's positive effect on employee performance augers well for attractive organizational results.

Evidence in the research literature confirms the positive relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Zainab et al. (2022) examined the effect of servant leadership on the faculty's work engagement and tested this relationship mediated by psychological climate. Zainab et al. found that servant leadership was a key leadership style that positively impacted the faculty work engagement in these universities and that psychological climate significantly mediated the relationship. Carter and Baghurst (2014) explored servant leadership from the perspective of two focus groups of 11 employees of servant leadership-led restaurants in the United States. The findings revealed common themes such as servant leader experience, traits, the impact of servant leadership, the application of servant leadership, and low employee attrition. Carter and Baghurst's findings from the themes indicated that servant leadership positively influenced employee engagement and fostered employee loyalty at work. Carter and Baghurst concluded that the servant leaders' experience resulted in employees being committed, enjoying healthy work relationships, and actively contributing to organizational performance. These outcomes are consistent with other research findings in the academic and professional literature that suggested that leaders who prioritize the needs of others above their own

and are other-centered tend to get better outcomes from employees than traditional leadership motivated by self-interest. These findings confirm servant leadership's positive effect on employees' work engagement and performance outcomes or behavior consequences.

### ***Servant Leadership and Generation Z Work Engagement***

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. Findings in the literature overwhelmingly indicated that employee engagement is an issue for organizations, and Gen Z employees are not exempt (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018; Statnickè et al., 2019). Gen Z represents 27% of the population in the United States and is the largest generational group to date and 32% of the world's population of 7.7 billion, ahead of the 31% millennials and growing (Lee et al., 2021; Lev, 2021). One unique characteristic of Gen Z compared to other generational groups is their propensity to quit an organization (Chillakuri, 2020). An improved understanding of Gen Zs and how to mitigate their tendency to disengage at work is paramount to improving their work engagement and organizational performance.

Unsurprisingly, some researchers have suggested that many Gen Zs across different industries may not be engaged at work. Statnickè et al. (2019) examined the relationship between work engagement and mobile learning variables to determine if there are substantial generational differences between the two variables. The findings indicated differences in generational commitment to the workplace. Gen Zs were less

engaged than Gen X and Gen Y. Gallup's findings showed that Gen Zs are highly stressed and report lower levels of engagement by approximately 34% (Pendell, 2021). Other researchers reported that Gen Zs are easily bored, plan to quit their jobs in 3 months, are impatient, and quickly disengage from work (Chillakuri, 2020; Opriş & Cenuşă, 2017; Schroth, 2019). Chillakuri (2020) examined Gen Z's unmet expectations and work-related boredom and its impact on their intention to quit work. Chillakuri investigated the moderating role of supervisor support in the relationship between Gen Z work-related boredom and intention to leave. Chillakuri discovered that the link between boredom at work and wanting to leave is less intense when employees have more supervisor support. Chillakuri's findings also showed that when there is supervisor support, the adverse effects of unmet expectations and work boredom become less.

The results from Chillakuri's research findings were consistent with those of Opriş and Cenuşă (2017), who recognized that the changes in technology and the cognitive and structural makeup of Gen Zs necessitated an adjustment of educational methodologies. Opriş and Cenuşă used experimental subject-spotting to deal with the challenge Gen Zs may face with uncertainty in measurements due to their short attention span and need for quick results. The authors posited a solution by applying subject spotting, which deconstructs a complex topic into smaller, more easily understood, and remembered pieces requiring minimal sustained concentration. Each subject spot establishes a connection between theory and practice, facilitating multitasking. Chillakuri, Opriş, and Cenuşă's research findings may support Schroth (2019), who indicated that coaching and support based on positive relationships with supervisors and

managers might be valuable to Gen Z engagement at work. Gen Zs are quickly bored, easy to quit work, and moderately engaged at work. A positive work environment with leaders who support and ensure employee needs are met may foster an environment that encourages engagement, reduces the tendency to quit work, and increases employee focus and drive to perform well. The servant leadership approach may help organizations better engage Gen Zs.

When compared to other leadership approaches, the characteristics of servant leadership may have the potential to be compatible with meeting the needs of Gen Zs to foster higher levels of workplace engagement. Research has been conducted on the value of servant leadership to improve the engagement of employees (Bao et al., 2018; Bilge et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021). These contexts include samples from different industries and countries, such as public sector employees in China, knowledge workers in the service industry in the United States, and Pakistani banking employees. Bilge et al. (2021) demonstrated that servant leadership practices' accountability and forgiveness components increase job satisfaction, while the accountability and forgiveness dimensions boost personal success. Bao et al.'s (2018) findings indicated that servant leadership fosters work engagement in followers mediated through social exchange mechanisms. Khan et al. (2021) discovered that servant leadership played a critical role in engaging employees mediated by meaning. Bakker et al. (2020) argued that work can add meaning to people's lives. There is little research on how the various dimensions of servant leadership impact Gen Z work engagement (Khan et al., 2021). The potential of the compatibility of servant leadership to impact Gen Z engagement is based on



Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership philosophy, which postulated that servant leaders see themselves as servants first and prioritize followers' needs above their own.

Servant leadership distinguishes itself from other leadership styles by prioritizing followers over self. Unlike other leadership styles, servant leadership focuses on followers' growth and well-being, sometimes above the organization's needs (Bavik, 2020). Kiker et al. (2019) discovered that servant leadership positively impacted both job performance and employee attitudes regarding their jobs. Servant leaders' attributes may positively impact Gen Z's need for self and professional development, as well as a work environment that fosters emotional healing and support to help Gen Z employees deal with stress, which may increase their level of engagement.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

There is insufficient evidence to determine which leadership style best fosters Gen Z employees' work engagement. Thanh and Quang (2022) defended the view that leadership style is one of the most influential predictors of employee engagement with the leader, which impacts organizational success. Hobfoll et al. (2006) indicated that the Gen Z cohort is the most emotionally unstable among the generations. Psychological approaches to ensure Gen Z employees have the necessary resources to support their mental and physical well-being at work are critical (Hobfoll et al., 2006). The servant leadership style is unique and distinct from other traditional types of leadership because of its focus on meeting the needs of others rather than the self (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders prioritize the growth, development, and well-being of others and create a positive work environment that fosters emotional healing (Liden et al., 2015). Servant leadership

may present an alternate approach to leadership for Gen Z employees because of its unique characteristics.

Previous studies have shown the connection between leadership and employee engagement using various leadership styles, mediating variables, samples of populations, and industries (Lee et al., 2021; Prasetyaningtyas et al., 2022; Sigaeva et al., 2022; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Researchers have explored and examined leadership's impact on employee engagement and work performance, focusing on transformational and transactional leadership (Chin et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021). Sigaeva et al. (2022) measured the impact of servant leadership and authentic leadership on Gen Z work engagement mediated by psychological capital in Russia, a country known for leadership masculinity, dominance, and an impersonal approach to leadership. Sigaeva et al. stated that both leadership styles positively impacted psychological capital and work engagement, but the impact was greater with authentic leadership. Prasetyaningtyas et al. (2022) found three independent variables: leadership, work characteristics, and workplace environment; each positively and significantly impacted the dependent variable of work performance, including a mediating effect of work motivation. Research findings have confirmed the many positive effects of aligning leadership styles to the preferences of each generation (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014; Andrea et al., 2016). Al-Asfour and Lettau (2014) concluded that leaders must understand generational differences to lead a multigenerational workforce to lead effectively. Andrea et al. (2016) indicated that the differences between Gen Y and Gen Z, compared to previous generations, will present management challenges that require leaders to be patient,

understanding, and empathetic, rearranging organizations and laying a technical foundation. Characteristics of patience, understanding, and empathy are consistent with that of servant leaders. Chillakuri (2020) cited a dearth of empirical studies regarding Gen Z's work expectations and intention to quit work. A better understanding of Gen Z's work expectations and leadership preferences will reduce issues such as the intention to resign from work and other factors that drive employee disengagement.

There is sufficient evidence that Generation Z plays a vital role in the workplace, and this generation will dominate in the future. The literature highlighting Generation Z's value in the workplace is expanding. Most studies have been descriptive, and there are only a few empirical investigations of Generation Z. The research on the impact of the dimensions of servant leadership and employee work engagement in respect of Gen Z employees is not exhaustive. Previous studies on Generation Z have centered on analyzing generational dynamics (Grow & Yang, 2018; Jaska et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Grow and Yang (2018) focused on the needs of Gen Z in the advertising industry and concluded that too few studies on Gen Z expectations exist and should be the future focus of researchers. Jaska et al.'s (2022) study identified environmentally and socially sustainable practices among young Polish residents and the potential of mobile applications to promote these behaviors. Zhang et al. (2022) examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Generation Z employees' perception and behavioral intention toward advanced information technologies in hotels. Researchers have investigated the issue of Gen Z engagement; however, the topic has not been examined in this way. There is very little literature on the preferred leadership style to engage Gen Z employees in the

United States; therefore, much more must be understood (Lee et al., 2021). Since Gen Z is the newest generation to enter the workforce, much of the research has been focused on understanding them.

While a few researchers have conducted empirical studies to examine and explore the variables that impact the work engagement of Gen Z employees, few have measured the impact of servant leadership. Researchers have sought to improve their understanding of Gen Z characteristics and what affects their engagement (Lee et al., 2021; Lev, 2021). Arrington and Dwyer (2018) concluded that the literature on leadership lacked a focus on the leadership approach most suitable for Generation Z. There is insufficient evidence of research measuring the engagement of Gen Zs and the impact of servant leadership characteristics on Gen Z engagement. Lee et al. (2021) suggested that additional variables, including leadership styles, be tested in another context of the Gen Z cohort using the multiple regression analysis. Further research on different leadership styles to determine leadership characteristics that may best engage the Gen Z cohort is crucial. Using Liden et al.'s (2015) servant leadership scale with its seven dimensions to measure each dimension's impact on the engagement of Gen Z workplace will fill this gap in the literature. The findings from this study may help identify which dimensions of servant leadership, if any, impact Gen Z's work engagement.

Organizations must identify the leadership styles and approaches that best suit Gen Z employees to get the maximum contribution. This current study may contribute to filling the research gap on servant leadership and its impact on Gen Z work engagement in Florida while helping organizational leaders understand further the leadership

characteristics that affect Gen Z's engagement at work. The study may also have implications for positive social change as servant leadership tends to have a favorable societal implication on advancing the welfare of organizations, communities, and society. The timing and impact of this study may add value to all interested in improving organizational performance and increasing goodwill through leadership's positive impact on Gen Z employees within organizations.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

I provided a comprehensive review of the research literature on the progressive evolution of leadership theories, servant leadership, and generational cohorts, focusing on Gen Z work engagement. The literature review focused on organizational performance and critical factors affecting the Gen Z population, including the COVID-19 pandemic, employee turnover, the role of social exchange theory, and its mechanism in understanding how servant leaders may impact work engagement. The literature review also included the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and servant leadership and Gen Z work engagement.

The literature review revealed that most of the previous empirical research examined and explored the impact of servant leadership on employee engagement using several mediated variables across different industries and sample populations. These studies proved the positive relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement, which positively impacts organizational performance. Few researchers have measured the impact of servant leadership on Gen Z work engagement using a Gen Z population sample (Nauman et al., 2022; Sigaeva et al., 2022). I have not found any

studies that have specifically measured the dimensions of servant leadership on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. Gen Zs present unique challenges to organizational leadership compared to previous generations, making this study critical and urgent.

In this research, I measured how Liden et al.'s (2015) seven dimensions of servant leadership affected the level of engagement shown by members of Gen Z employees in the workplace. The findings extended the understanding and knowledge of the specific servant leadership characteristics that may significantly impact Gen Z employees' engagement at work. The study contributed to filling the research gap using a quantitative methodology, including regression analysis, to determine the impact of servant leadership characteristics on Gen Z work engagement. This study advanced the research literature on servant leadership and its effects on Generation Z work engagement. The findings may assist human resources practitioners and organizational leaders in determining the extent to which servant leadership attributes may be valuable to hone.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. I used a quantitative approach to measure how each dimension of servant leadership impacted the workplace engagement of Gen Z employees. A quantitative approach facilitated the predictions and generalizations concerning the impact of servant leadership attributes on the workplace engagement of the Gen Z sample population. This chapter describes the research design and rationale for conducting this study, the target population, sampling and sampling processes, recruiting and data collecting techniques, instrumentation, validity threats, and study-specific ethical issues. In addition, I demonstrate the alignment between the research questions and the chosen research design and method.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In this study, I used a quantitative, non-experimental, and correlational design to investigate the nature of a relationship or association between the variables. A quantitative research design was deemed appropriate to execute this study because of its focus on quantifying the data analysis. The independent variable in this study was servant leadership. The dependent variable was Gen Z employees' workplace engagement. Burkholder et al. (2020) indicated that a correlational research design is an optimum choice to determine the relationship between variables without manipulation to facilitate making predictions. Choosing a correlational design was to better explain the degree of

association between the seven dimensions of servant leadership and their impact on the participants' work engagement.

A non-experimental correlational design could produce findings that advance the knowledge of the impact of servant leadership on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. These findings may assist practitioners in developing identified servant leadership attributes that best engage Gen Z employees. The study's findings may also contribute to the literature and advance the knowledge of the specific servant leadership characteristics that best engage the Gen Z cohort. The findings may help organizational leaders improve their hiring, training, and development decisions to foster higher levels of employee engagement among Gen Z employees.

I created and proposed the following research questions and hypotheses to address the specific research problem and the gap in the literature:

RQ1: What is the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

$H_01$ : There is no statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

$H_11$ : There is a statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

RQ2: To what extent do the servant leadership characteristics of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping



subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

*H<sub>021</sub>*: Emotional healing does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>121</sub>*: Emotional healing does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>022</sub>*: Creating value for the community does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement In Florida.

*H<sub>122</sub>*: Creating value for the community does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>023</sub>*: Conceptual skills do not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>123</sub>*: Conceptual skills do predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>024</sub>*: Empowering does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>124</sub>*: Empowering does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>025</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>125</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>026</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>126</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>027</sub>*: Behaving ethically does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>127</sub>*: Behaving ethically does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

### **Methodology**

The data were collected and analyzed using correlation and multiple regression techniques to address the research questions. Multiple regression techniques can be employed when there is more than one predictor variable (Burkholder et al., 2020). The primary objective of this study was to determine the extent of the relationship between servant leadership and Gen Z employee workplace engagement and determine which of the seven dimensions of servant leadership impacts work engagement. In this section, I describe the target population, sampling and sampling procedure, recruiting procedures, instrumentation and operationalization of constructs to include survey instruments, plan for data analysis, threats to validity, and ethical considerations in executing this research.

### **Population**

The target population for this study was Gen Z employees who work in Florida. The target population was not industry-specific. The inclusion criteria included (a) generation-specific individuals born between 1995–2012, (b) occupying a non-

management role in an organization, and (c) must be employed full-time for no less than 1 year. The exclusion criteria included (a) being born before 1995 and after 2006 and (b) being unemployed or employed for less than one year. The United States Census Bureau (2023) reported that the Gen Z working-age population is approximately 1.4 million of Florida's total population of 21,538,187. The population's median age is 42.8 + -.2, with an employment rate of 55.4%. The recorded ancestry in Florida includes English, French, German, Irish, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Scottish, and Sub-Saharan Africa (United States Census Bureau, 2023). Florida may be considered a melting pot of different races and cultures. A multicultural population may provide rich data sources; however, there were no inclusion criteria for the participants' race.

### **Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

I used a purposive sampling of individuals who met the eligibility criteria in this study. Burkholder et al. (2020) defined purposive sampling as selecting a sample for a specific purpose that fulfills the research requirements. A purposive sampling technique was most appropriate for this study as the target population was Gen Zs born between 1995 and 2012. A purposive sampling strategy helped to ensure that only individuals who met the inclusion criteria participated in the study. In addition, a purposive sampling method for this study's Gen Z population sample allowed for generalization to the wider population of Gen Z employees.

Gen Z participants were drawn from those employed full-time and part of SurveyMonkey's pool of qualified participants. The SurveyMonkey platform is a crowdsourcing mechanism that has the potential to provide an adequate number of

qualified participants for this study. The use of crowdsourcing mechanisms such as SurveyMonkey as a survey tool to gain access to participants in social research has recently grown. Once participants met the criteria, they were asked to participate in the study and to complete the relevant electronic survey instrument through SurveyMonkey. In addition, SurveyMonkey facilitated the screening of participants with qualifying questions, which, if not answered correctly, resulted in disqualification and the inability to proceed with completing the survey. An alternative was to use social media to solicit participants who meet the inclusion criteria.

Tremendous value was placed on determining the appropriate sample size for one's research because of the negative impact on the results if the sample size was too small. A well-proven scientific approach is critical in determining the accurate number of participants required. I conducted a power analysis using Faul et al.'s (2007) G\*Power analysis for multiple regression analysis to determine the suitable sample size. Standard parameters were used, including an effect size of .15, an alpha of .05, a power of .95, and seven predictor variables of servant leadership. The outcome of the power analysis resulted in a sample of 153 participants (see Appendix C). Aguinis et al. (2020) argued that in addition to conducting a power analysis to determine the appropriate sample size, researchers should also add 15% + more participants to compensate for any attrition. The larger the sample, the greater the possibility for generalization of the results to that sample. I used a larger sample size of 166 participants to mitigate these risks and to ensure the best possible outcome representative of the study population.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection (Primary Data)**

Participants for this study were recruited through SurveyMonkey crowdsourcing online platform marketplace, which has numerous participants and a diverse population from which to access the required participants. I posted an announcement on SurveyMonkey introducing the purpose of my study, the survey involved, and the criteria for participation. The announcement included the criteria of participants who fall within the Gen Z generation, having been born between 1995–2012 and employed full-time for at least 1 year in Florida in the United States. The SurveyMonkey tool segmented eligible participants. Participants who saw this announcement with the inclusion criteria and were interested and met those criteria were required to click on a survey link.

Prospective participants who confirmed they met the criteria were directed to click the informed consent form, which forms part of the authorization. The participants were required to click next before being permitted to attempt to participate in the study. The informed consent form indicated that participants must have met the inclusion criteria to participate. The inclusion criteria include that they fall within the Gen Z population and have been employed full-time by an organization for at least 1 year in Florida. The informed consent form also stated that participation was voluntary and that participants may exit the survey at any time and withdraw from the study if they became uncomfortable answering the questions. The informed consent indicated that each participant's response would be anonymous. Demographic information included age, sex, race, and gender, which provided data for the descriptive statistics. There were no other identifying questions.

The consent form was on the first page of the survey, and participants were required to click next, which indicated an agreement to participate and complete the survey within 14 days. The survey required approximately 15 minutes to complete. Once participants had finished the survey, they were required to click done. Participants, having clicked done, signaled that they had completed the survey, and the instrument closed. SurveyMonkey facilitated the gift of \$5 to each participant who had completed the survey.

### **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

In this study, I used two published validated instruments to gather participant data for each variable: the independent variable of servant leadership and the outcome variable of work engagement. The predictor variable included the seven dimensions of servant leadership using the Liden et al. (2015) SL-7 measurement scale. I employed the survey methodology, including 16 statements between the two variables and four questions. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes and consist of nine questions for the work engagement survey, seven for servant leadership, three demographics, and one attention checker.

#### **Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7)**

Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-7 survey instrument was used to gather data on the independent variable of servant leadership. This instrument was selected because of its concision, validity, and internal consistency. The SL-7 measurement scale of seven statements is a short version of Liden et al.'s (2008) SL-28, consisting of 28 questions in the original measurement scale. Servant leadership is a multidimensional construct

supported by empirical research (Liden et al., 2015; Parris & Peachey, 2013). The SL-7 was created to reduce the arduous nature of the 28-item survey and is well-accepted in conducting empirical research.

Eva et al. (2019) evaluated 16 measures of servant leadership based on the rigor employed in their theoretical and methodological development by previous researchers. Eva et al.'s findings indicated that three measurement scales, including Liden's (2015) SL-7, Sendjaya et al.'s (2018) SLBS-6, and van Dierendonck's (2011) SL-6, were among the most rigorous. Liden's SL-7 scale was tested using two undergraduate and a graduate sample and three organizational samples in the United States, China, and Singapore. The average correlation between the SL-7 and SL-28 across these samples was .90. Reliability for the SL-7 remained above .80 in all samples (Liden et al., 2015). These findings confirmed the effectiveness of the scale.

Liden et al.'s (2015) measurement scale was the optimal choice for this study. The 7-item measure of global SL-7 filled the gap for a valid and concise tool to assess global servant leadership based on key dimensions of that leadership type. The effectiveness of the SL-7 used in several research studies by many researchers further confirmed its validity (Bao et al., 2018; Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2019; Ozturk et al., 2021). Eva et al.'s (2019) analyzed Liden et al.'s scale. They confirmed its continued use in meeting the needs of researchers who wish to measure the dimensions of servant leadership using a concise but valid instrument.

Liden et al.'s (2015) instrument SL-7 follows a 7-point Likert-type scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The sample statement from the scale includes,

“My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.” Liden et al. (2015) pre-approved the use of their instrument for student research purposes, provided the developers are appropriately cited as indicated by the PsycTests source document. The SL-7 survey instrument resides in Appendix B.

### **Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9)**

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) was used as a survey instrument to collect data on the dependent variable of work engagement of Gen Z employees in the United States. Schaufeli et al. (2006) developed the UWES scales, which consist of nine statements to confirm an employee’s level of work engagement characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The UWES-9 scale is a shorter version of the original 17-item UWES. The factorial validity of the UWES-9 was confirmed using confirmatory factor analyses, and the three scale scores exhibited excellent internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Schaufeli et al., 2006). This scale has been used considerably to measure employee work engagement.

Several researchers confirmed the reliability and validity of the Schaufeli et al. (2006) UWES-9 scale measuring work engagement. Tsaur et al. (2019) and Du et al. (2021) confirmed the popularity of the UWES for measuring work engagement. The alpha coefficient in Du et al.’s (2021) study was .89, while in another study by Ozturk et al. (2021), the work engagement scale’s coefficient alpha was .94. The literature is replete with research that has effectively used the UWES (Sigaeva et al., 2022; Zainab et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). In this study, the UWES-9 scale was used to measure the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Schaufeli et al.’s (2006)



instrument UWES-9 follows a 7-point Likert-type scale of 0 = never to 6 = always. A sample statement of the scale includes, “At my work, I feel bursting with energy.” Schaufeli et al. (2006) pre-approved the use of their instrument for non-commercial research and educational purposes without the authors’ written permission, provided the developers are appropriately cited as indicated by the PsycTests source document. The UWES-9 survey instrument resides in Appendix A.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In this study, I used data collected from the surveys, which were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 to provide descriptive and inferential statistics, including statistical correlations, to answer the research questions and hypotheses. Statistical analysis using IBM SPSS has been popularly used by researchers in educational, social, and behavioral sciences (Hinton et al., 2014). The alpha level for this study was set at  $p < .05$ . Scales were scored based on the recommendations from the scale authors (Liden et al., 2015; Schaufeli et al., 2006). Since the seven leadership dimensions are Likert ratings, each was dichotomized using a median split to put those variables into a multiple regression model. The data were downloaded into IBM SPSS version 29 for data cleaning and screening. The number of missing answers was calculated for each respondent. Those respondents with answers that were missing less than 5% were retained. Those missing answers were estimated and imputed using the grand mean for continuous variables and the grand mode for categorical variables. Data analysis aligned with the research purpose, method, research

questions, and hypotheses. Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS version 29 to answer the research questions and hypotheses.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

RQ1: What is the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

*H<sub>01</sub>*: There is no statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>11</sub>*: There is a statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

RQ2: To what extent do the servant leadership characteristics of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

*H<sub>021</sub>*: Emotional healing does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>121</sub>*: Emotional healing does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>022</sub>*: Creating value for the community does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>122</sub>*: Creating value for the community does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>023</sub>*: Conceptual skills do not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>123</sub>*: Conceptual skills do predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>024</sub>*: Empowering does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>124</sub>*: Empowering does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>025</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>125</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>026</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>126</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>027</sub>*: Behaving ethically does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>127</sub>*: Behaving ethically does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

First, the data analysis process included transporting data from SurveyMonkey to Microsoft Excel, where the data were recoded. The recoded data were then transported to the IBM SPSS version 29. Pallant (2020) indicated that SPSS is user-friendly and enables easy data export from Microsoft Excel. The data were examined to remove incomplete surveys or those who did not accurately answer the attention checker question of “How long have you been working in your current job.” Once cleansed, the data were ready to generate the relevant statistical output.

Second, I used Cronbach’s alpha test to confirm the scale’s reliability. In executing a test for internal consistency of the two instruments, Liden et al.’s (2015) SL-7 and Schaufeli et al.’s (2006) UWES-9 engagement scales, the aim was to achieve at least a Cronbach  $\alpha = .70$ . Hatcher (2013) concurred with Cronbach (1951) regarding the popularity of internal-consistency reliability estimate of coefficient alpha. Hatcher also agreed with Nunnally’s (1978) position that a  $.70$  value is an acceptable reliability of a multi-item scale or test. The test examined the univariate normality of scale scores and univariate and multivariate outliers. The SL-7 and UWES-9 can affect scale reliability and multivariate regression analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Standard data cleaning and screening practices were followed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Testing for scale reliability is critical to ensuring the reliability of the measures in this study.

Third, descriptive statistics were generated to determine the average age, gender, and race of the sample population. Descriptive statistics categorized the data gathered from the survey. Frequency distribution and percentages were calculated to describe the data effectively (Hoe & Hoare, 2012). Descriptive statistical output was analyzed, and if

any were statistically significant, these were to be included in the regression model as covariates.

Fourth, to answer RQ1 and to determine the presence of a relationship or association as outlined in the related hypotheses, Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was analyzed. Pearson's  $r$  measures the relationship or association between variables with interval-ratio data (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2019). For this study, the independent variable of servant leadership using the SL-7 Likert scale and the dependent variable of work engagement using the UWES-9 Likert scale was treated as a continuous variable. A Pearson correlation with an accompanying scatterplot was generated to answer RQ1 (servant leadership with workplace engagement). Determining the presence or absence of a relationship between the variables may advance the literature on servant leadership style concerning Gen Z work engagement.

To answer the RQ2, the seven related alternate hypotheses were answered using the multiple regression analysis to determine the impact of each of the seven dimensions of servant leadership on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. Multiple regression outputs were generated to assess the impact of each of the seven independent servant leadership variables on the dependent variable work engagement score. Regression analysis serves three primary purposes in helping to answer the research questions: (a) description, (b) control, and (c) prediction (Nimon & Reio, 2011). Using multiple regression analysis to assess the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable is consistent with previous research (Gašková, 2020). A multiple regression model was presented for RQ 2 (leadership dimensions with workplace engagement). The

key parameters of the model included the unstandardized beta weight (B), the standard error estimation (SE), the standardized beta weight ( $\beta$ ), lower (LL) and upper (UL) confidence intervals, the probability ( $p$ ) and the variance inflation factor (VIF). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was also included as a measure of the effect. Multiple regression analysis was the optimum choice to determine the degree of association between the independent and dependent variables.

To effectively analyze data to measure the relationship between the variables, it is critical to ensure the required assumptions of the tests are met. These tests include Pearson's correlation coefficient, which measures the strength and direction, and multiple regression analysis to predict the value of a variable based on whether two or more other factors are met (Laerd Statistics, 2023). The five required assumptions were met when using the Pearson correlation coefficient to analyze data. These assumptions included the following: (a) levels of measurement, (b) linearity, (c) outliers, (d) normality, and (e) paired assumptions (Wagner, 2019). These assumptions must be satisfied to protect the data analysis quality. The level of measurement is a critical assumption in this study.

### ***Levels of Measurement***

The independent and dependent variables in this study were measured on a Likert scale, which indicates that they are ordinal variables. However, these variables were treated as continuous to meet the levels of measurement assumption requirement in Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis (see Laerd Statistics, 2023). This treatment facilitated the relevant statistical tests to answer the research

questions. The appropriate level of measurement also helps to preserve the quality of the data analysis.

### ***Linearity and Outliers***

Assumptions (b) linearity and (c) outliers in the case of Pearson's correlation and similarly for items four and seven in the case of multiple regression were satisfied. The aim was to achieve linearity between the two variables and identify and remove any outliers. A scatterplot was generated to examine the two variables against each other and collectively to see if there is a linear relationship between the variables. Examining the linearity determined whether any outliers exist.

Pearson's correlation cannot be accurately executed with the presence of outliers or a non-linear curve to which this test is sensitive (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2019; Laerd Statistics, 2023). I used IBM SPSS version 29 to screen and remove the outliers. Any existing outliers were removed. The curve normality is a critical assumption for consideration.

### ***Normality of Curve***

According to the normality assumption, data should have a bell-shaped distribution with a mean of zero for a standard normal distribution, a standard deviation of one, and a symmetrical bell-shaped curve (Finch, 2005). The premise of linearity indicates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, which should follow a straight line through the scatterplot instead of a curve (Bücher et al., 2011; Keith, 2006). A scatterplot was created to examine if there were any violations of the linearity assumption to meet the normality of curve requirements.

### *Paired Assumptions*

Paired assumption refers to the two variables paired in this study. Each participant in this study had two values referred to as data points (see Laerd Statistics, 2023). These two values represent the predictor variable of servant leadership dimensions and the outcome variable of work engagement. The assumption is that each participant will have a pair of values comprising the two variables.

According to Laerd Statistics (2023), eight assumptions must be met for multiple regression. Multiple regression is a statistical analysis method that must adhere to eight assumptions, which include:

- (1) the dependent variable should be measured on a continuous scale;
- (2) two or more independent variables that can be categorical or continuous;
- (3) independence of observations;
- (4) a linear relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable and the dependent variable and independent variables collectively;
- (5) homoscedasticity;
- (6) multicollinearity;
- (7) no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential points; and
- (8) residuals are approximately normally distributed (Laerd Statistics, 2023).



### ***Continuous Dependent Variable***

The dependent variable of work engagement measured on a Likert scale was treated as an interval-level scale based on its design. Though this scale has individual Likert items, it is considered an interval-level scale with good reliability and content validity when aggregated together. In addition, I created dichotomous variables, such as high and low.

### ***Continuous or Categorical Independent Variables***

The independent variable of servant leadership with seven dimensions, measured on a Likert scale, defined the variable's categorical nature. Therefore, this assumption was met based on the study's design.

### ***Independence of Observation***

Assumption 3 was met by the study's design (each participant only answered the survey once), evidenced by the unique assigned code and an adequate Durbin-Watson statistic for the regression model.

### ***Linear Relationship***

The aim was to achieve linearity between the two variables and identify and remove any outliers. Examining the linearity determined whether any outliers exist. Pearson correlations were used to identify any outliers. Using Pearson's correlation instead of scatterplots was the optimal choice because scatterplots are not typically used with dichotomized variables.

***Homoscedasticity***

The assumption of homoscedasticity refers to the extent to which the variance along the line of the fit remains similar. Standardized residuals were plotted against the unstandardized predicted values for the regression model to determine homoscedasticity.

***No Multicollinearity***

The aim of meeting the assumption of multicollinearity in multiple regression analysis is to ensure there is none. Two or more highly correlated independent factors cause multicollinearity. Multicollinearity makes knowing which variable explains the dependent variable and calculating ordinal regression difficult (Laerd Statistics, 2023). In this study, multicollinearity was not an issue since two or more dimensions of the independent variable of servant leadership having a similar effect on the dependent variable of work engagement is not an issue. Multicollinearity between variables would indicate a similar impact of the independent variable of servant leadership dimensions on the dependent variable of work engagement. Multicollinearity was examined based on inspecting VIF statistics for the regression model.

***No Outliers or Other Influential Points***

The terms outliers or influential points describe the observation of unusual occurrences that could negatively impact the data analysis in multiple regression analysis. These may influence the regression equation and alter the impact of the variables on each other. Outliers were addressed based on examination of the casewise diagnostics, identifying studentized deleted residuals greater than  $\pm 3$  standard deviations, Cook's scores greater than 1.0, and leverage values greater than .20. Specifically, the inspection

process for influential points was executed, and then the model was recalculated without the identified outliers.

### ***Normally, Distributed Residuals***

Normally distributed residuals were examined based on the inspection of the residual histogram and the P-P plot. Checks were made to ensure the normal distribution of residuals. Should the assumption testing process result in failing to meet the assumptions, Spearman correlations would be used.

Laerd Statistics (2023) indicated there are three assumptions for Spearman correlations:

1. two continuous or ordinal variables,
2. variables are paired, and
3. monotonic relationship between the paired variables.

Assumptions 1 (continuous or ordinal variables) and 2 (paired variables) were met by the study's design. Assumption 3, the monotonic relationship, was examined based on the Spearman correlations. This was done instead of scatterplots because the scatterplots are not typically used with dichotomized variables. Threats to validity are crucial considerations to preserve the study's validity and reliability.

### **Threats to Validity**

Researchers must ensure that their research is sound in both design and method. Validity refers to the degree to which measures correspond to what they are designed to measure (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2019). A study's validity confirms the ability of the findings to be generalized and that the instrument used measures the construct tested. In

this study, I measured the two variables, servant leadership and work engagement, using pre-established unchanged instruments with proven validity. Three types of validity applicable to this study included: (a) internal, (b) external, and (c) construct. These validity concerns were explored, and strategies to mitigate risk were executed.

### **External Validity**

Researchers must identify and mitigate any threats to external validity to maintain the integrity and quality of their findings. External validity refers to the extent to which the study's findings may be applied to a larger population and may be influenced by the instrument's validity in the data collection process (Burkholder et al., 2020). The validity of Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-7 survey instrument and Schaufeli et al.'s (2006) UWES-9 has been confirmed by each author, as discussed earlier. I mitigated the risks associated with external validity by not altering the research instrument. The demographic and attention checker questions were separate and used to generate descriptive statistics. Gall et al. (2003) identified 12 barriers to a study's external validity, which include: (a) the extent to which the experimental sample is generalizable to a defined population, (b) the extent to which phonological variables interact with treatment variables, (c) an explicit description of the experimental treatment, (d) multiple-treatment interference, (e) the Hawthorne effect, (f) novelty and disruption effects, (g) the experimenter effect, (h) pretest sensitization, (i) posttest sensitization, (j) the interaction of history and treatment effects, (k) measurement of the dependent variable, and (l) interaction of time between the measurement and treatment effects. Since this is a descriptive study of a single group in which all measurements were collected simultaneously, there were three risks to

consider, which include: (a) the extent to which the sample is generalizable to a defined population, (b) the Hawthorne effect, and (c) the issue of socially desirable responses from participants. Consideration was given to these risks to ensure mitigation.

The extent to which the sample is generalizable to a defined population, the Hawthorne effect, and the issue of socially desirable responses from participants were critical risks for consideration. The extent to which the sample can be generalized to a specific population remains unknown until after data collection. Due to the respondent's right to voluntarily withdraw from completing the survey, fewer than 153 of the sample may participate, resulting in a sample response rate of less than 100%. To mitigate this risk, I targeted more than the required number of participants to facilitate attrition and incomplete surveys. This decision was taken based on the advice of Aguinis et al. (2020). Aguinis et al. identified that in addition to conducting a power analysis to determine the suitable sample size, researchers should include an additional 15% or more to mitigate any attrition. The targeted sample size was 176 participants to minimize this risk. The Hawthorne effect may occur if respondents know they are participating in a study, which may alter their genuine thoughts and opinions (Merrett, 2006). The likelihood of socially desired responses makes bias possible in evaluating the predictor variables. The predictor variables were servant leadership characteristics of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. The dependent or outcome variable was workplace engagement. To mitigate the Hawthorne effect and socially desired responses, on the consent form, I emphasized the importance of participants meeting the

inclusion criteria and their honesty in responding to the survey, which ensured the findings genuinely reflect the population. The inclusion criteria will include being born between 1995 and 2012, employed full-time for at least 1 year, domiciled in the United States, and working in Florida. I underscored the importance of carefully reading the study requirements before agreeing to participate and about the minimal incentive offered before being allowed to proceed with the survey. I did not generalize about other populations that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Internal validity is critical for consideration in this study as it may affect the quality of the findings.

### **Internal Validity**

The internal validity of a study describes the extent to which the research instruments used in the study measure what they should. Research instruments should be viewed as tools, and whether they are used appropriately should be questioned (Shadish, 1995). Choosing the correct test to measure the relationships between the variables is critical to increasing internal validity. The measures used in this study have strong validity and reliability, having been used in previous studies. The proven record of accomplishment of these measures enhances the trustworthiness of the study's outcome (Liden et al., 2008, 2015). Individual testing of each variable to determine reliability is critical to increase internal validity. Gall et al. (2003) named 12 threats to the internal validity of the study, which include: (a) history, (b) maturation, (c) testing, (d) instrumentation, (e) statistical regression, (f) differential selection, (g) experimental mortality, (h) selection-maturation interaction, (i) experimental treatment diffusion, (j) compensatory rivalry by the control group, (k) compensatory equalization of treatments,

and (l) resentful demoralization of the control group. A research design that includes a pre-test, a post-test, a control group, and a treatment group is susceptible to all 12 internal validity threats. Such risks do not apply to this analysis, as it was a descriptive study of a single group, and all data were obtained simultaneously. Construct validity is critical for consideration in this study as it may affect the quality of the findings.

### **Construct Validity**

Construct validity, like other forms, including external and internal validity, is important to consider and helps confirm the quality of the research findings. Construct validity demonstrates that a test measures the construct it claims to be measuring (Stadtlander, 2018). Based on the literature, servant leadership has been proven to be a valid construct compared to other measures (Eva et al., 2019). These pre-established research instruments used in this study were not manipulated or altered. Otherwise, it would have been necessary to consider the numerous threats to construct validity. One threat to validity that is critical for consideration and mitigation is statistical conclusion validity. Stadtlander (2018) concluded that statistical inferences are valid if the data support the interpretations of variable relationships. Type I (false positive) and Type II (missing cause and effect) statistical errors (finding no difference when one exists) are two such types. The statistical validity of a conclusion accounts for study conditions that could cause such errors. I used reliable measurement and analysis procedures, including sampling and statistical testing, to obtain reliable statistical results. I did not alter the two pre-existing survey instruments, which would reduce the possibility of construct and statistical validity issues.

## **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical consideration is a priority when conducting research. Data collection can only start after approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Walden University IRB provided the following approval number for this study: (Approval# 11-01-23-1025377). Ethics generally refers to what is right or wrong and is associated with morality. Determining right or wrong is influenced by what is generally accepted in society. In scientific research, researchers must adhere to some general ethical standards (Babbie, 2016). The Walden University IRB has a four-step approval process for doctoral students to meet ethical requirements to conduct their research. These steps comprise 40 ethical standards to which one's research study must comply. These include documentation regarding consent, recruitment, and data collection steps and are the responsibility of the researcher and any partner organization. Participants were selected by purposive sampling from individuals registered on the SurveyMonkey platform who met the criteria to participate in this study.

In preparing to conduct my research, the following ethical criteria were used to maintain the integrity of the study. First, participants were not required to identify themselves, as the survey collected data anonymously identified only by an automatically assigned code in SurveyMonkey. Participating in this study may include some small discomforts faced in daily life, such as providing confidential information. Outside of personal data, including age, sex, and race, other identifying information will not be required. Information will be kept confidential. Pseudo-codes were used to designate each participant. Code P001, for example, was used for participant number one.



Quantitative data has been stored using a password-protected Microsoft Excel file and transferred to IBM SPSS version 29. The data were cleaned, managed, and analyzed. Data will be kept for 5 years and discarded by shredding all paper documents and permanently deleting all soft copy documentation. All participants are guaranteed confidentiality.

Secondly, the study's demographic information data include age, race, and sex. There was an attention checker question regarding the number of years in the current job. The codes do not identify participants, so they remain anonymous. There were no participating organizations in the data collection.

Next, potential participants were required to complete a consent form. The language was simple and easy to understand. The consent form outlined the study's purpose, why they were being asked to participate, and described the data collection procedures, the number of participants being recruited for the study, and the time required to complete the survey or interview. The consent form also included any foreseeable risk, benefits to individuals or society, and gifts for participants. The consent form also stated the minimal risk to participants and the freedom to withdraw from the survey at any time. Participants were given a minimal incentive of \$5 to encourage participation. The value of \$5 ensured that it was not an incentive to influence responses in one way or another but simply a gesture of appreciation for the participant's time to participate in the study. The consent form stated that participation is voluntary and that individuals may decline or decide not to participate at any time without any negative repercussion from anyone or any organization. The consent form addressed how privacy

would be maintained and indicated that the data collected would not be used for any other purpose. The form had a contact number and email for the researcher and the university's research participant advocate. The form indicated that participants may keep a copy of the consent form.

The ethical criteria to maintain the integrity of the study are critical to the effectiveness of the data collection and findings. The use of consent forms, data storage, how participants will maintain anonymity, and permission to use the required instruments in the study were critical to safeguarding the quality of the collected data. The authors of the two research instruments, Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-7 and Schaufeli et al. (2006) UWES-9, have permitted the instrument to be reproduced for non-commercial use.

Participants were informed of any potential risks, benefits of the study, and any incentives offered. The criteria of the 5 years for data storage are key to meeting the data storage regulations. The authorized use of established research instruments is important to ensure compliance with the author's requirements. Chapter 3 is summarized to capture the key component of this section.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented a detailed description of the methodology, which included the method and analysis aligned to answering the research question, which is to determine the impact of servant leadership on the work engagement of Gen Z employees. The description in this chapter outlined the data collection instruments, including Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-7 and Schaufeli et al.'s (2006) UWES-9. I also provided the rationale for selecting the chosen instruments. Data were analyzed using outputs from IBM SPSS

version 29 descriptive and inferential statistics, including ordinal regression analysis.

Chapter 3 contained details of the research questions, hypotheses, sample size, data collection, issues with validity, and the ethical treatment of participants' data collection and storage. In Chapter 4, findings from the study are presented and analyzed. Supporting tables and figures are shown to offer graphical and written details of the study's findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. The predictor variables were the servant leadership characteristics of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. The dependent or outcome variable was workplace engagement. Organizational leaders, therefore, need to identify the leadership characteristics that best engage Gen Zs. The theoretical framework supporting this study included servant leadership, social exchange, and employee engagement theories. The target population was Gen Zs employed full-time across various industries in Florida.

The survey was hosted by the online platform SurveyMonkey. Participants were solicited via this platform. An announcement was posted on SurveyMonkey to alert participants to the study. The approved consent form followed the announcement page and the survey instruments. The survey required 20 responses to four demographics, including one attention checker question, nine statements on workplace engagements, and seven on servant leadership. Survey responses from 166 Gen Z individuals employed full-time for at least 1 year were used. In Chapter 4, I will outline the process of data collection, the analysis of data, and the results. The following research questions and hypotheses were addressed using correlation and multiple regression analysis:

RQ1: What is the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

*H*<sub>01</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>11</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

RQ2: To what extent do the servant leadership characteristics of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

*H*<sub>021</sub>: Emotional healing does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>121</sub>: Emotional healing does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>022</sub>: Creating value for the community does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>122</sub>: Creating value for the community does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>023</sub>: Conceptual skills do not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>123</sub>*: Conceptual skills do predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>024</sub>*: Empowering does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>124</sub>*: Empowering does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>025</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>125</sub>*: Helping subordinates grow and succeed does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>026</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>126</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>027</sub>*: Behaving ethically does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>127</sub>*: Behaving ethically does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process commenced following the written approval of Walden University IRB (Approval# 11-01-23-1025377). The data were collected on the SurveyMonkey platform based on a flyer posted on that platform to attract targeted

participants who met the inclusion criteria. One hundred eighty-eight participants took the survey via SurveyMonkey's website on November 10, 2023. Data were collected on the SurveyMonkey platform, which was open for 24 hours on November 10, 2023, and closed on November 11, 2023.

The demographics represented in this study included 166 participants between the ages of 18 and 28. Table 1 displays the frequency counts for selected variables. Two-thirds of the sample were females. Age categories were either 18-23 (47.6%) or 24-28 (52.4%). Most of the respondents were either White (52.4%) or Black/African-American (36%; see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables*

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	55	33.1
	Female	111	66.9
Age category	18-23	79	47.6
	24-28	87	52.4
Race/Ethnicity	Black or African American	60	36.0
	White	86	52.0
	Other	20	12.0

*Note.*  $N = 166$ .

Participants answered four demographic questions, which included one attention checker, nine statements on the workplace engagement Likert scale, and seven on the servant leadership Likert scale. The collated responses of 188 participants were transported from the SurveyMonkey platform to Microsoft Excel. The data were then recoded and transported to IBM SPSS version 29. The process of data cleaning began

thereafter. The data cleansing process is critical to ensure the reliability and validity of research findings.

Initially, 188 respondents began the online survey. Keeping only those respondents with either no missing answers ( $n = 165$ ) or one missing answer ( $n = 4$ ) reduced the sample size to  $N = 169$ . Missing answers were estimated/imputed using the grand mean for the sample. Based on the regression diagnostics (see Multiple Regression assumption 7), three more respondents were removed from the dataset, leaving the final sample  $N = 166$ . The recommended sample size based on the power analysis conducted was 153 participants. Therefore, the sample size of 166 participants represented the population of interest and is proportional to the larger population. In addition, the number of 166 participants was sufficient to satisfy the external validity risk concerning the generalization of results. This was informed by the G\*Power analysis, which was conducted to determine the suitable number of participants to facilitate the generalization of results (see Faul et al., 2007). The target number of participants was 153.

The data were transported from SurveyMonkey to Microsoft Excel and recoded to reflect pseudocodes. The recoded data were then transferred into IBM SPSS version 29 for cleansing and screening. The scale scores were calculated based on recommendations from the scale authors (Liden et al., 2015; Schaufeli et al., 2006). The relevant statistical outputs were generated, and the psychometric characteristics for the scale scores were analyzed.

Although the reliability of both survey instruments was confirmed in previous studies, I measured Cronbach's Alpha to establish the internal consistency of the SL-7



and UWES-9 scales. The SL-7 scale showed an internal consistency of .89, while the UWES-9 scored .93, as outlined in Table 2. According to Cronbach's alpha, both scales surpassed Nunnally's classification (1978), classification for the lowest level of basic research, boasting an alpha value of  $\alpha = .89$  and .93, respectively. Most items proved to be worthy of retention, as their removal would lead to a decrease in alpha and, hence, reduced internal consistency. Table 2 displays the psychometric characteristics of the two scale scores. Workplace engagement had a mean of  $M = 3.48$ , and servant leadership had a mean of  $M = 4.95$ . The mean scores and median scores were similar for each scale. I also examined the skewness and kurtosis values for the SL-7 and UWES-9. The data is skewed to the extent that it is distributed or tilts in one direction. The degree to which data clusters in a distribution's tail or peak is known as kurtosis. Table 2 exhibits the skewness and kurtosis of both scales, which were between the range of  $-.26$  to  $.48$ . The skewness and kurtosis scores were within normal limits of  $\pm 1.0$  (Laerd Statistics, 2023). Normality was also established by checking the contents of Table 2. The reliability of scales and the normality of data were also established. Examining the assumptions of multiple regression analysis was critical to confirm the quality of this study's findings.

**Table 2**

*Psychometric Characteristics for the Scale Scores*

Scale	#of Items	$M$	$Mdn$	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Min	Max	$\alpha$
Workplace engagement	9	3.48	3.50	1.25	-.26	-.48	.00	6.00	.93
Servant leadership	7	4.95	5.07	1.31	-.41	-.27	1.14	7.00	.89

*Note.*  $N = 166$ .

According to Laerd Statistics (2023), eight assumptions must be met for multiple regression: (a) the dependent variable should be measured on a continuous scale; (b) two or more independent variables that can be categorical or continuous; (c) independence of observations; (d) a linear relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable and the dependent variable and independent variables collectively; (e) homoscedasticity; (f) multicollinearity; (g) no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential points; and (h) residuals are approximately normally distributed. Assumptions 1, continuous dependent variable, and Assumption 2, two or more independent variables, were met based on the survey design. Assumption 3 was met by the survey design, as each participant only answered the survey once. In addition, the adequate Durbin-Watson statistic was executed. Durbin-Watson measures whether autocorrelation exists. An acceptable figure should be between 1.50 and 2.50. Durbin-Watson statistic for the regression model was 2.11, as outlined in the footnote of Table 5.

Assumption 4, linear relationship, was examined in Table 3 based on Pearson correlations. Pearson's correlation was deemed appropriate to answer RQ1 regarding whether a correlation exists between the predictor variable of servant leadership and the criterion variable of workplace engagement. Pearson Correlation was done instead of scatterplots since scatterplots are not typically used with dichotomized variables. Inspection of the seven correlations found the range in size from  $r = .43$  to  $r = .61$ , with the median-sized correlation being  $r = .53$ . With that, this assumption was met (see Table 3). Cohen (1988) established standards for determining the strength of a correlation and

measuring statistical power. Specifically,  $r = .10$ ,  $r = .30$ , and  $r = .50$  were classified as small, medium, and large in magnitude (Cohen, 1988, as cited in Gignac & Szodorai, 2016). This study's Pearson correlations were either medium or large based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines. For each of these ordinal leadership ratings (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), a median split was performed to dichotomize each variable (0 = *less leadership* to 1 = *more leadership*) so these variables would meet the assumptions for multiple regression \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . \*\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlations for Servant Leadership Variables With Workplace Engagement*

Variable	Workplace engagement	
Servant Leadership Scale	.75	****
Age	.19	*
10. Conceptual skills <sup>a</sup>	.59	****
11. Helping subordinates grow and succeed <sup>a</sup>	.61	****
12. Emotional healing <sup>a</sup>	.53	****
13. Creating value for the community <sup>a</sup>	.52	****
14. Putting subordinates first <sup>a</sup>	.55	****
15. Empowering <sup>a</sup>	.45	****
16. Behaving ethically <sup>a</sup>	.43	****

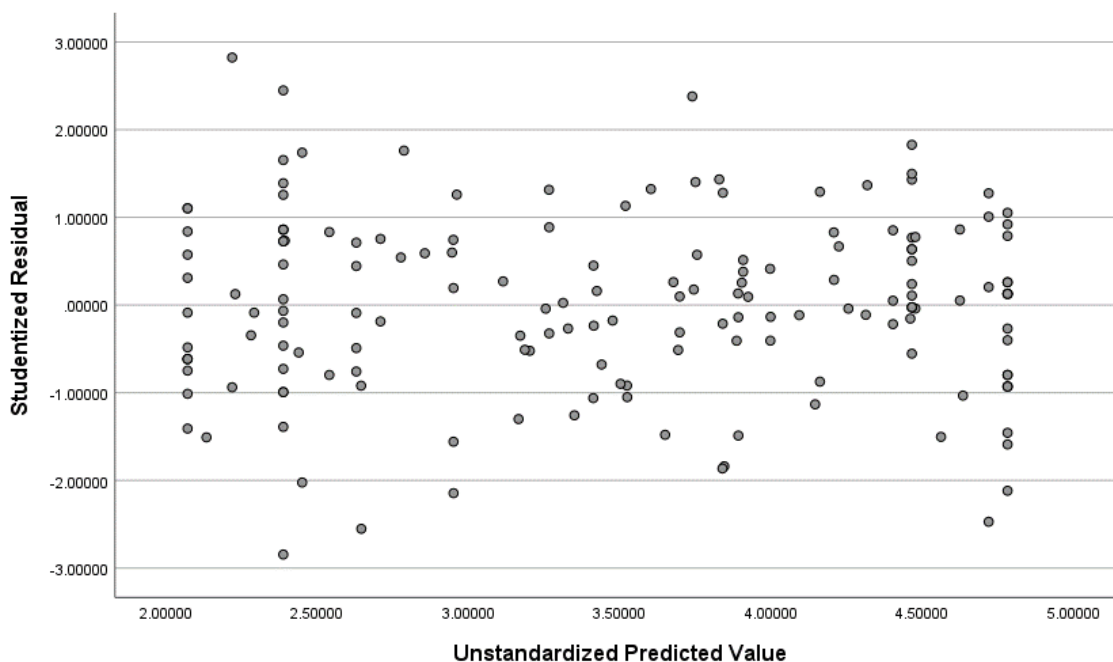
Note.  $N = 166$ .

Assumption 5, homoscedasticity, was met based on inspection of the scatterplot of studentized residuals against the unstandardized predicted values for the regression model (see Figure 1). A similar spread of data points was above and below 0.0 on the vertical axis. In addition, the left side of the plot had a similar number of data points as the right (see Figure 1). Meeting the assumption for homoscedasticity is critical. A scatterplot with the residuals measured against the dependent variable of work

engagement is one of the best ways to determine homoscedasticity. A scatterplot will show any uneven variance in a population, which may skew the data, negatively impacting the analysis.

**Figure 1**

*Homoscedasticity Plot for the Regression Model*



Assumption 6, no multicollinearity, was met by inspection of the VIF statistics for the regression model (see Table 4). Table 4 outlines the VIF for the regression model. VIF is a metric that explains how the independent or predictor variable explains the outcome or dependent variable of workplace engagement. All VIF statistics were less than 2.03. The multicollinearity assumption was answered based on the VIF statistic, as there were no unusually high correlations among the predictors.

**Table 4***Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) for the Regression Model*

Variable	VIF
Age	1.032
10. Conceptual skills	1.841
11. Helping subordinates grow and succeed	2.024
12. Emotional healing	1.419
13. Creating value for the community	1.887
14. Putting subordinates first	1.745
15. Empowering	1.647
16. Behaving ethically	1.509

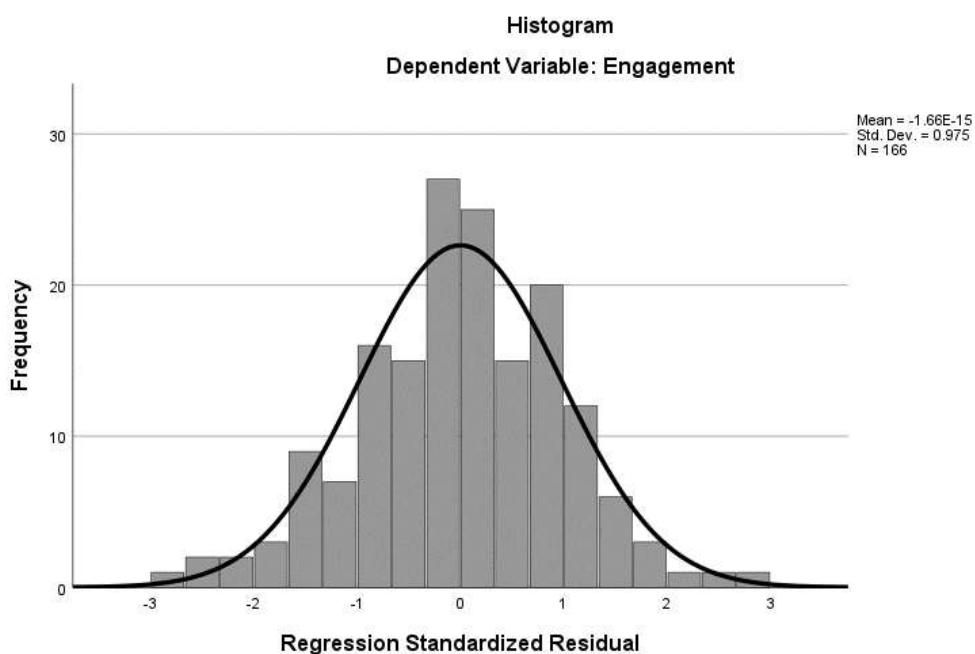
Next, as part of the test to determine the reliability of the scales, the analysis for univariate and multivariate outliers was executed to help determine the presence of any outliers that may need to be removed. The significance of this investigation lies in the potential effects of multivariate outliers on regression analysis as well as univariate normality and outliers on scale reliability. Statistical analysis may be adversely affected by either kind of outlier. The SL-7 and UWES-9 can affect scale reliability and multivariate regression analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). The reliability of a scale test determined the univariate normality of scale scores and univariate and multivariate outliers.

Assumption 7, no outliers or other influential points, was met based on examination of the casewise diagnostics, identifying studentized deleted residuals greater than  $\pm 3$  standard deviations, Cook's scores greater than 1.0, and leverage values greater than .20. Specifically, the inspection process with influential points was identified, and then the model was recalculated without the identified outliers. After three rounds of regression modeling, three outliers were removed, and this assumption was then met.

Assumption 8, normally distributed residuals, was met based on the inspection of the residual histogram and the P-P plot (see Figure 2). Figures 2 and 3 depict the residual histogram and the normal P-P plot. A residual is the actual workplace engagement score minus the predicted workplace engagement score. These residual scores are normally distributed in a good model, as shown in Figure 2. The eight assumptions for multiple regression, taken together, were adequately met.

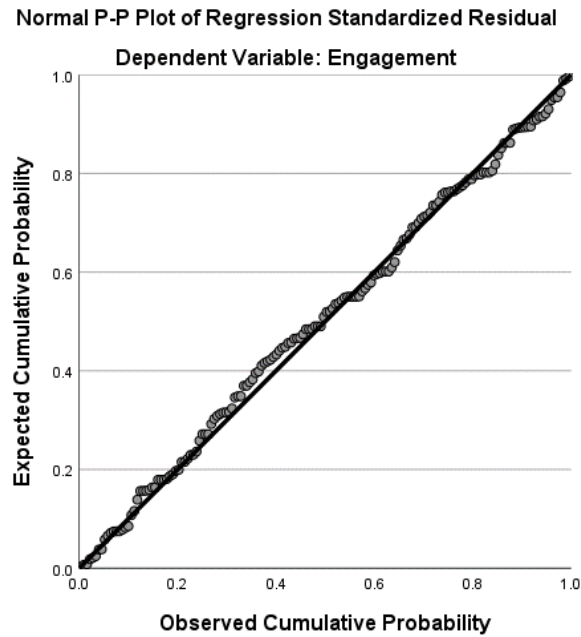
### Figure 2

*Residual Diagnostic Graphic 1 for the Regression Model*



**Figure 3**

*Residual Diagnostic Graphic 2 for the Regression Model*



### Study Results

The results from the two research questions were answered by 166 participants using the relevant statistical tests.

#### Research Question (RQ1)

RQ1: What is the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida?

$H_01$ : There is no statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

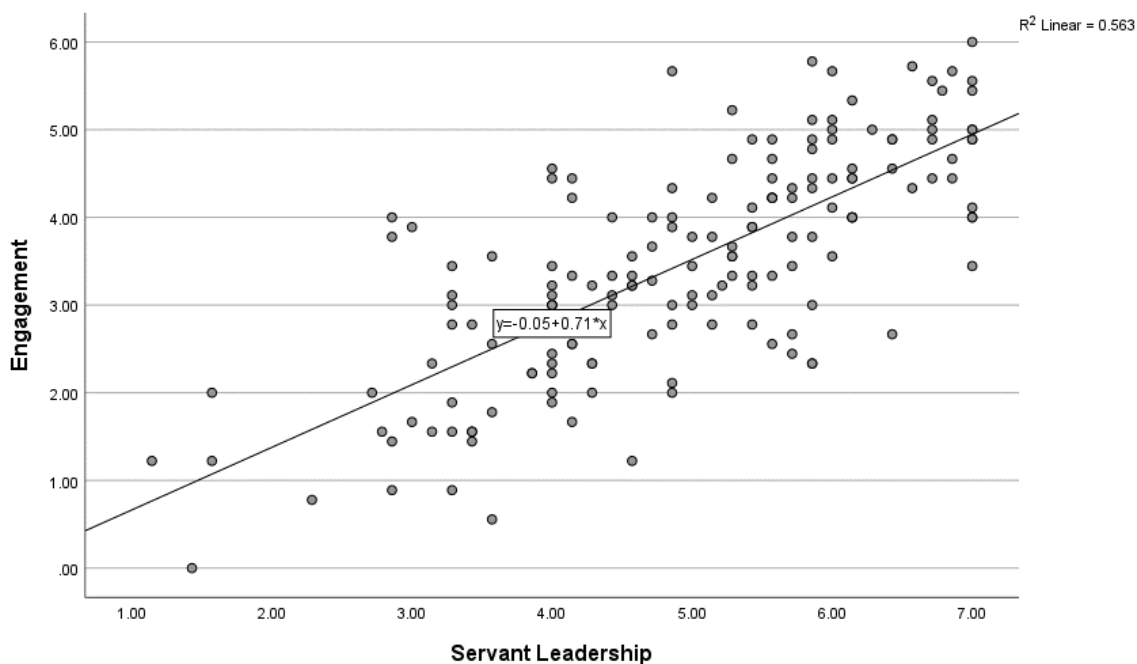
*H*<sub>1</sub>1: There is a statistically significant relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

Pearson correlation was executed to investigate and answer RQ1. The independent or predictor variable was the seven dimensions of servant leadership, and the dependent or outcome variable was work engagement. Figure 3 displays the scatterplot between workplace engagement and servant leadership to answer this question. Inspection of the plot found a strong positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .75, p < .001$ . As servant leadership increases, so does workplace engagement. These results supported rejecting the null hypothesis (see Figure 3). In Figure 3, the Pearson correlation between servant leadership and workplace engagement was  $r = .75, p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .563$ . This indicates that their total servant leadership score explains 56.3% of the variance in workplace engagement, and 43.7% maybe due to other factors not included in the analysis.



**Figure 4**

*Scatterplot for Workplace Engagement With Servant Leadership*



### **Research Question (RQ2)**

RQ2: To what extent do the servant leadership dimensions of emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida? This research question had seven related hypotheses. As previously shown in Table 3, all bivariate Pearson correlations between each of the individual servant leadership dimensions with workplace engagement were positive and significant, with the seven correlations ranging in size from  $r = .43$  to  $r = .61$ , with the median-sized correlation being  $r = .53$ .

Multiple regression analysis was executed to investigate and answer RQ2. The independent or predictor variable was the seven dimensions of servant leadership, and the dependent or outcome variable was work engagement. Table 5 shows the relevant multiple regression model. The multiple regression technique is suitable for investigating the impact of each dimension of servant leadership on workplace engagement. Table 5 identifies the relevant beta weights and other statistical outputs that help determine the strength of the relationship between the variables. The overall multiple regression model was significant:  $F(8, 157) = 24.91, p = .001, R^2 = .559$  (see Table 5).  $R^2 = .559$ . This indicates that the seven dimensions of servant leadership and age explain 55.9% of the variance in workplace engagement, and 44.1% maybe due to other factors not included in this study. The individual hypotheses are addressed using each predictor's beta weights and  $p$ -value at the .001 level depicted in Table 5. The beta weight can be positive or negative, reflecting the direction of the relationship between the variables. Table 5 also displays the  $p$ -values, which help determine the significance of the relationship between the predictor variables of servant leadership and the outcome variable of workplace engagement. A  $p$ -value  $< .05$  is significant. Table 5 also displays the confidence interval, indicating this to be 95% with upper and lower limits for the standardized beta weight, which means there is a 95% likelihood that the true beta weight in the population is between the lower and upper limits. For example, for the predictor variable of emotional healing, the  $p$ -value is .001,  $B = .221$ , and the 95% CI [.24 and .87].

**Table 5**

*Multiple Regression Model Predicting Workplace Engagement Based on Selected Variables*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>p</i>	VIF
Intercept	1.44	0.35		0.75	2.13	.001	
Age	0.32	0.13	.127	0.05	0.58	.020	1.03
12. Emotional healing	0.56	0.16	.221	0.24	0.87	.001	1.42
13. Creating value for the community	0.16	0.18	.063	-0.20	0.52	.387	1.89
10. Conceptual skills	0.57	0.18	.230	0.22	0.93	.002	1.84
15. Empowering	0.15	0.17	.059	-0.19	0.48	.387	1.65
11. Helping subordinates grow and succeed	0.57	0.19	.230	0.20	0.95	.003	2.02
14. Putting subordinates first	0.32	0.18	.128	-0.03	0.67	.069	1.75
16. Behaving ethically	0.06	0.16	.025	-0.26	0.38	.703	1.51

*Note. Full Model:  $F(8, 157) = 24.91, p = .001, R^2 = .559, \text{Durbin-Watson} = 2.11.$*

For each of these seven ordinal leadership ratings (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), a median split was performed to dichotomize each variable (0 = *less leadership* to 1 = *more leadership*). The median split was done so that these variables would meet the assumptions for multiple regression. As discussed in Chapter 3, all significant demographics would be included as covariates in the model. Age had a significant positive correlation with engagement, so it was included in the model, while gender and race/ethnicity were not significant, so they were not included. Age was found to have a *p*-value of .020. Older Gen Z respondents had more engagement, reflected in Table 5 with  $\beta = .127, p = .020, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05-.58]$ .

Each of the seven hypotheses was tested while controlling all others. The following results were obtained:

*H*<sub>021</sub>: Emotional healing does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>121</sub>: Emotional healing does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and *p*-value. Inspection of the table found the beta weight to be positive, and the *p*-value was significant ( $\beta = .221, p = .001$ ), which supported rejecting the null hypothesis (see Table 5). Emotional healing does predict Gen Z workplace engagement.

*H*<sub>022</sub>: Creating value for the community does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>122</sub>: Creating value for the community does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and *p*-value. Inspection of the table found the beta weight positive, and the *p*-value was not significant ( $\beta = .063, p = .387$ ), which provided no support to reject the null hypothesis (see Table 5). Creating value for the community does not predict Gen Z workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>023</sub>: Conceptual skills do not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H*<sub>123</sub>: Conceptual skills do predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and  $p$ -value. Inspection of the data found the beta weight to be positive, and the  $p$ -value was significant ( $\beta = .230, p = .002$ ), which supported rejecting the null hypothesis (see Table 5). A leader's conceptual skills do predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement.

$H_{024}$ : Empowering does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

$H_{124}$ : Empowering does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and  $p$ -value. Inspection of the table found the beta weight was positive, and the  $p$ -value was not significant ( $\beta = .059, p = .387$ ), which provided no support to reject the null hypothesis (see Table 5). Empowering does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

$H_{025}$ : Helping subordinates grow and succeed does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

$H_{125}$ : Helping subordinates grow and succeed does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and  $p$ -value. Inspection of the table found the beta weight to be positive and the  $p$ -value was significant ( $\beta = .230, p = .003$ ), which supported rejecting the null hypothesis (see

Table 5). Helping subordinates grow and succeed does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>026</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>126</sub>*: Putting subordinates first does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and *p*-value. Inspection of the table found that the beta weight was positive and the *p*-value not significant ( $\beta = .128, p = .069$ ), which provided no support to reject the null hypothesis (see Table 5). Putting subordinates first does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>027</sub>*: Behaving ethically does not predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

*H<sub>127</sub>*: Behaving ethically does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

To answer this hypothesis, Table 5 displays the relevant regression beta weight and *p*-value. Inspection of the table found that the beta weight was positive, and the *p*-value was not significant ( $\beta = .025, p = .703$ ), which provided no support to reject the null hypothesis (see Table 5). Behaving ethically does predict Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida.

## Summary

In summary, this study used survey responses from 166 Gen Z employees to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. Organizational leaders must urgently identify the leadership characteristics that best meet the needs of Gen Zs to improve their engagement at work. The theoretical framework supporting this study included servant leadership, social exchange, and employee work engagement theories. Survey responses from 166 Gen Z employees were used. RQ1 (servant leadership total score with workplace engagement) was supported (see Figure 3). The results of RQ 2 (seven servant leadership dimensions with work engagement) are summarized in Table 6. While the whole model was significant, when each dimension of servant leadership was tested, controlling for all others, three of the seven dimensions were significant. In addition, older Gen Zs tended to have higher levels of workplace engagement influenced by the servant leadership model.

**Table 6**

*Hypotheses Testing Summary for Research Question Two*

Hypotheses	Result
1. Emotional healing	Supported
2. Creating value for the community	Not supported
3. Conceptual skills	Supported
4. Empowering	Not supported
5. Helping subordinates grow and succeed	Supported
6. Putting subordinates first	Not supported
7. Behaving ethically	Not supported

*Note.*  $N = 166$ .

In the final chapter, the findings were compared to the literature, conclusions, and implications were drawn, and a series of recommendations were suggested. The discussion will also explore implications for positive social change specific to three of the 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Global Goals (United Nations, n.d.). Chapter 5 is instructive for organizational leaders, human resources practitioners, and researchers, all of whom may benefit from these findings. Finally, the literature on how servant leadership may impact Gen Z's workplace engagement through social exchange theory may be better understood.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. The nature of this study was quantitative. Data were collected from 166 anonymous online survey respondents to answer the research questions. The survey used two research instruments measuring the predictor variable of servant leadership and the outcome variable of workplace engagement. The results from the data collected were statistically analyzed using correlation and multiple regression techniques.

The findings from the data analysis indicated a strong correlation between servant leadership and Gen Z workplace engagement. In particular, the findings from the multiple regression analysis indicated a significant relationship between the independent variable of the seven dimensions of servant leadership and the dependent variable of workplace engagement. The findings also revealed that older Gen Zs tended to have higher levels of workplace engagement influenced by the servant leadership model. However, in testing each hypothesis, when each dimension of servant leadership was tested while controlling all other dimensions, only emotional healing, conceptual skills, and helping subordinates grow and succeed were significant in their relationship to Gen Z workplace engagement. In contrast, the other four dimensions of creating value for the community, empowering, putting subordinates first, and ethically behaving were not significant. This chapter will address the interpretation of findings, the study's

limitations, recommendations for future research, and the implications of promoting positive social change.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Researchers in scholarly literature have consistently confirmed a positive correlation between servant leadership and work engagement using various population samples across generation groups. Several of these studies included mediating variables (Anselmo-Witzel et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2014; Zeeshan et al., 2021). Anselmo-Witzel et al. (2020) discovered that Gen Z nurses were inspired to continue their employment owing to their superiors' servant leadership impact. Similarly, the favorable impacts of servant leadership on employee engagement were proven by Zeeshan et al.'s (2021) findings. Prasetyaningtyas et al. (2022) investigated how leadership, job characteristics, and the working environment influenced Generation Z's motivation and performance at work. According to Prasetyaningtyas et al., these three variables influenced Gen Z's motivation and performance at work. However, prior to this study, there was a gap in the literature regarding the impact of servant leadership on Gen Z workplace engagement. In particular, it remained unknown whether the seven servant leadership characteristics of (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically, when exhibited by organizational leaders, impact Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. This study contributed to filling that research gap.

The current study helped to extend knowledge and understanding of servant leadership's impact on Gen Z workplace engagement. The correlation results confirm what was previously known regarding the positive impact of servant leadership on workplace engagement. In Figure 3, the Pearson correlation between servant leadership and engagement was  $r = .75, p < .001$ . The  $R^2$  was .563, which means that the participants' total servant leadership score explained 56.3% of the variance in workplace engagement, and 43.7% was due to other factors not included in the analysis. The effect size of the regression model in Table 5, denoted by  $R^2 = .559$ , indicated that 55.9% of the reason for Gen Z's high or low workplace engagement may be related to age and the seven dimensions of servant leadership. The remaining 44.1% may be due to other factors not included in the analysis. For example, trust in the leader and self-efficacy.

The theoretical framework, comprising servant leadership, social exchange, and employee engagement, supports and explains the findings in this study. An understanding of servant leadership and its impact on workplace engagement facilitated through social exchange is evident in this study. As stated in Chapter 2, according to Tims et al. (2011), leadership becomes the major aspect in mobilizing an engaged workplace since effective leaders may impact their workforce's attitudes and actions. Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership theory proposed that servant leaders regard themselves as servants first, prioritize followers' needs before their own, and engender a caring, selfless approach to leadership. Greenleaf's servant leadership theory included cultivating an environment for emotional healing, development, and growth for followers, which is reciprocated through the social exchange as employees feel compelled to give back to their leaders.

The bivariate Pearson correlations between each leadership dimension in Figure 3 indicated that servant leadership characteristics significantly impacted Gen Z employees' workplace engagement, with an effect size of .563, which answered RQ1. The seven servant leadership characteristics are (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically. Social exchange theory has been used by numerous scholars studying servant leadership to explain how servant leaders prioritize and demonstrate genuine concern for their followers' needs, including their development, and how these actions are typically met with reciprocity (Chan & Mak, 2014; Ling et al., 2016; Paesen et al., 2019). The social exchange between leaders and followers may explain the above findings.

In answering RQ2, each of the seven dimensions was tested while controlling for all others in the multiple regression model, as depicted in Table 5. The results indicated that the whole model was significant, while the hypotheses testing revealed that only three of the seven dimensions were positive and significant. These included emotional healing, conceptual skills, and helping subordinates grow and succeed. The other four dimensions, which were creating value for the community, empowering, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically, were not significant. The findings suggested that servant leadership characteristics are critical to Gen Z workplace engagement.

The findings were generally consistent with previous research; however, the multiple regression techniques provided even more insight regarding the most impactful dimensions of servant leadership on Gen Z employees' workplace engagement. This

research addressed a gap in scholarly literature. The effect of the seven dimensions of servant leadership on Gen Z workplace engagement had not yet been the subject of any research. The present study has extended the literature on servant leadership characteristics that may likely improve Gen Z workplace engagement in Florida, providing leaders with opportunities to strengthen their organizations' leadership skills further.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. These relate to generalizability, validity, and self-selection bias, among other considerations. I used a sample size of 166. Although the G\*Power analysis indicated a sample size of 153, a larger sample size may better generalize findings across a larger population of Gen Z employees. External validity could be compromised if factors other than those examined in this study could explain the research findings. Self-selection bias could also have affected participants' responses. Using a crowd-sourcing platform such as SurveyMonkey may result in less representation of the sample population.

Other concerns that may pose a limitation to this study could be addressed in future studies. These include recruiting leaders as part of the sampling pool to get their perspective on followers' expectations. Getting a perspective from leaders would allow for juxtaposed views from both management and non-management, which could increase the reliability of data and findings. In addition, the sample population was from the state of Florida, in the United States, which means the findings may apply only to this region. Additionally, although the survey instruments are great for gathering opinion-based data,

there is a chance that respondents could embellish their responses, which could lead to social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010). Participants were asked to reply honestly to overcome social desirability bias.

### **Recommendations**

This study has extended the understanding of the impact of servant leadership in improving Gen Z work engagement, which has addressed a gap in the literature. Identifying the specific servant leadership characteristics that may impact their work engagement extends the knowledge of servant leadership effectiveness as an alternative to traditional leadership styles such as transactional leadership with its reward and punishment approach. Additional research is necessary to identify other factors that may improve Gen Z workplace engagement. Employee work engagement is of interest to organizational leaders because of the tremendous loss in revenue if the workplace engagement rate remains problematic.

Work engagement is a major issue in the United States and other parts of the world. Gallup's 2023 State of the Workplace report indicated that the employee engagement rate in the United States was 32%, a reduction of 2% over the previous year. The global rate was 23%, an increase of 2% from a year earlier, while best practice organizations reported an engagement level of 72%, an improvement of 2% from the previous year (Gallup, 2023). Like the definition of workplace engagement used in this study, Gallup (2023) defined employee engagement as employees' commitment and passion for their work and workplace and indicated that a highly engaged team outperforms others, which helps determine organizational success. Gallup's findings

suggest that the issue is as relevant today as it was when this study began. Therefore, a few recommendations are critical for future research.

Future researchers could use other research methodologies. A mixed-method design, including interviews and surveys, would facilitate more expansive responses to explain the importance of crucial leadership styles or characteristics that work best with the Gen Z population. Qualitative interviews could also reduce desirability bias as the interviewer could more readily recognize this. A mixed-method approach may lead to a better understanding of the impact of servant leadership variables on Gen Z workplace engagement levels. In addition, using a focus group of managers could also add to the richness of data sources.

Future researchers could explore and examine other leadership approaches, including adaptive, authentic, and charismatic styles. Researchers could also use other sampling techniques, including social media because Gen Zs are internet-driven (Lev, 2021). Using social media as a data collection technique could allow for increased generalization of results since participants were not necessarily on a platform geared towards answering research questions, as in the cases of SurveyMonkey or Amazon Mechanical Turk. Social media could also increase external validity by reducing self-selection bias and being more representative of the sample population.

Researchers could also conduct qualitative or quantitative studies using similar variables within specific industries, particularly those that employ many Gen Zs, such as business process outsourcing. Studies could also include moderating variables like trust, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence. These studies could help researchers better

understand the leadership characteristics that best engage Gen Zs. Further research is critical because by 2030, more than 50% of entry-level jobs will be occupied by Gen Z (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). The call for additional research on leadership characteristics that foster Gen Z workplace engagement is critical and urgent, as this generation may transform leadership styles.

### **Implications**

This study could contribute to the academic literature on servant leadership. The findings from this study indicated a positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and Gen Z workplace engagement in Florida. These findings were consistent with previous research that found a positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and work engagement using mediating variables (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; Zainab et al., 2022; Zeeshan et al., 2021). However, this current study identified three of the seven dimensions of servant leadership that positively impacted Gen Z workplace engagement. In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between age and workplace engagement; older Gen Z respondents had higher engagement levels, as highlighted in Table 5,  $\beta = .127, p = .020, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05, .58]$ . These findings indicate an original contribution to servant leadership literature.

The implications for positive social change are that relationships between servant leaders and followers cultivated through social exchange may result in a higher level of commitment to leaders, positively impacting organizational performance and extending to families and communities. These findings, therefore, have implications for positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, and societal and policy levels.



This study has the potential for positive social change at the individual level. Individuals in an organization may become more engaged when exposed to servant leaders. Researchers validated the importance of leaders fostering an environment of emotional healing and argued that healing is one of the key qualities of an effective leader (Jit et al., 2017; Sturnick, 1998). The findings from those researchers were confirmed in this study, as the characteristic of emotional healing exhibited by servant leaders received the highest level of significant positive relationship of all the servant leadership characteristics with Gen Z workplace engagement. These results were unsurprising because Gen Zs are known to have the highest rate of diagnosed depression. Gen Z's need for a leader who creates a work environment that fosters emotional healing is also consistent with Deloitte's (2020) research, which found that stress levels among respondents, particularly Gen Zs, remained high. A work environment in which the leader demonstrates behavior that facilitates emotional healing is beneficial for Gen Z employees.

A servant leader's conceptual skills are the ability to solve complex organizational issues and focus on helping subordinates grow and succeed through providing training and development opportunities to followers, which is critical to Gen Zs at the individual level. In this study, these two servant leadership dimensions positively impacted their work engagement. Leaders must demonstrate these leadership attributes to improve the work engagement of Gen Zs. Servant leadership could help improve the individual's attitude and commitment in the work environment, fostering positive social change at the individual level.

Positive social change could become evident across the organization as relationships between leaders, followers, and employees improve. Servant leaders help organizations create a healthy work environment where employees foster commitment and trust (Bao et al., 2018; Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). These findings corroborate this current study and support the positive social change implications of this study at the organizational level. When servant leaders focus on helping subordinates grow and succeed through training and development opportunities, they may help employees become more skilled and competent. Training and development opportunities prepare subordinates for greater opportunities to fulfill their personal needs, promoting improved performance at work and better organizational performance. Franco and Antunes (2020) found that creating opportunities for training and developing employees was a key component of servant leadership that serves well for individual and organizational success.

Similarly, Jayathilake et al. (2021) proposed that investing in Gen Z employee development may boost their dedication to their tasks, improve organizational performance, increase competitiveness, and even minimize employee turnover. The findings from this current study could advance the positive social change impact of servant leadership at the organizational level. In addition, it is instructive that hiring managers pay greater attention to recruiting leaders with servant leadership characteristics to improve organizational outcomes and impact social change positively at the organizational level. The positive social change impact experienced within the organization may translate to relationships within the family.

This study could have positive social change implications for families. When servant leadership positively impacts Gen Z workplace engagement through understanding the social exchange theory, this action could translate to better relationships at home and even extend to communities. Improved relations with the family may become evident when employees experience this within the work environment. Improved family relationships may translate to better relationships within the community and society. People may be kinder, more patient, and more understanding of each other, promoting similar behavior within families, communities, and society. These employees may be happier and healthier, want to see good things happen within their communities and society, and may even become more involved in making a difference.

This study could have positive social change implications at the societal level. Employees may fight against acts of injustice and promote the well-being of others even as their well-being is promoted in the work environment through servant leadership. Servant leaders' efforts to promote an environment that fosters employees' emotional healing, growth and development, and advancement of their goals may positively impact individuals, organizations, families, and communities. The positive social change implication may contribute to the progressive realization of the 17 Sustainable Development Global Goals of the United Nations, including (a) Goal 10, reducing inequalities; (b) Goal 11, sustainable cities and communities; and (c) Goal 13, climate action (United Nations, n.d.). Leaders who lead empathetically and prioritize employee

development may foster better relationships within the organization, families, and others, including communities and society.

The implications of this study may positively impact social change relating to the study's chosen methodology, theory, and empirical nature. The study has implications for the chosen methodology. The quantitative research methodology was appropriate for this study to examine the nature of the relationship between the predictor variable of servant leadership and the outcome variable of workplace engagement. Examining each dimension of servant leadership provided greater insight into the specific characteristics that were significant and positively correlated, increasing the understanding of the impact. It is instructive for organizational leaders as theory helps inform behavior.

This study has extended the theoretical implications of servant leadership's impact on workplace engagement theory, explained by the social exchange theory. The theoretical foundation of this study supported the study and its findings. The empirical nature of this study supports and strengthens the work of previous empirical studies conducted by servant leadership scholars. This study has extended the understanding of how servant leadership can improve workplace engagement among Gen Z employees through the social exchange between leader and follower. This study further confirmed the findings of previous studies using various sample populations. However, unlike previous studies, this study identified the specific servant leadership characteristics that significantly and positively impact Gen Z workplace engagement by testing each while controlling all other variables in the model. In the future, researchers may conduct further empirical studies using these theories.

This study has implications for practice. Gen Zs might profoundly affect the workplace across all sectors and organizational levels (Zehetner et al., 2020). The findings from this study indicate the importance of recruiting servant leaders to help the organization better engage Gen Z employees. Organizations must employ empathetic and caring leaders who exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence and prioritize the growth and development of employees. Human resources practitioners must pay close attention to hiring leaders with conceptual skills keen on problem-solving and innovation. Organizations must invest in the training and development of their Gen Z employees to get better results. However, organizations must also focus on improving the servant leadership skills of their current leaders to strengthen their leadership skills and improve their attributes.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership characteristics exhibited by organizational leaders and Gen Z employees' workplace engagement in Florida. This study confirmed the findings of previous studies using varying sample populations and mediating variables. This study verified the positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and Gen Z workplace engagement, which addressed a gap in the academic literature. The study's findings also identified three of seven servant leadership characteristics that significantly and positively impact Gen Z workplace engagement. In addition, older Gen Z members were more engaged at work. These findings will advance

the literature on servant leadership and workplace engagement specific to the Gen Z cohort.

Servant leadership is an essential style that fosters greater engagement in Gen Z employees. This study has extended the knowledge and understanding of the value of servant leaders to the challenge of Gen Z workplace engagement. Organizations' leaders must, therefore, recognize the value of the characteristics of servant leaders and invest in improving these characteristics in their current leaders. Traditional leadership style focuses on power and autonomy, prioritizing their needs over those of others. Servant leaders serve others, and in serving others, they and the organization benefit from the improved relationship between leader and follower, which fosters increased commitment to their jobs on the part of followers. The framework of this study surrounded the impact of servant leadership on Gen Z workplace engagement driven by the positive and supportive environment created by the servant leaders from which the employees benefit due to social exchange. Leaders should closely examine the findings in this study and use it as a framework to build a servant leadership culture in their organization. The immense value of this study to the field of servant leadership and workplace engagement of the Gen Z cohort cannot be overemphasized. Further qualitative or mixed-method research may give further insight into servant leadership's effectiveness in combating workplace engagement challenges.

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## Appendix A: Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9



### Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9

**PsycTESTS Citation:**

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t05561-000>

**Instrument Type:**

Rating Scale

**Test Format:**

All items are scored on a 7-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always/every day).

**Source:**

Schaufeli, Wilmar B., Bakker, Arnold B., & Salanova, Marisa. (2006). The Measurement of Work Engagement With a Short Questionnaire: A Cross-National Study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol 66(4), 701-716. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013164405282471>, © 2006 by SAGE Publications. Reproduced by Permission of SAGE Publications.

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doi: 10.1037/t05561-000

**Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9**  
**UWES-9**

Items

Never 0	Almost Never 1	Rarely 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very Often 5	Always 6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

The following statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, cross the "0" (zero) in the space after the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you felt it by crossing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy. (VI1)
4. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous. (VI2)
5. I am enthusiastic about my job. (DE2)
7. My job inspires me. (DE3)
8. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work. (VI3)
9. I feel happy when I am working intensely. (AB3)
10. I am proud of the work that I do. (DE4)
11. I am immersed in my work. (AB4)
14. I get carried away when I am working. (AB5)

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Source: Schaufeli and Bakker (2003).

Note: VI = Vigor scale; DE = Dedication scale; AB = Absorption scale.

## Appendix B: Servant Leadership Scale-7



### Servant Leadership Scale-7

**PsycTESTS Citation:**

Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Meuser, J. D., Hu, J., Wu, J., & Liao, C. (2015). Servant Leadership Scale-7 [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t41818-000>

**Instrument Type:**  
Rating Scale

**Test Format:**  
Responses for the 7 items use a 7-point "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" response scale.

**Source:**  
Liden, Robert C., Wayne, Sandy J., Meuser, Jeremy D., Hu, Jia, Wu, Junfeng, & Liao, Chenwei. (2015). Servant leadership: Validation of a short form of the SL-28. *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol 26(2), 254-269. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.12.002>, © 2015 by Elsevier. Reproduced by Permission of Elsevier.

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#### Item Number

SL-28 SL-7

9	1	My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong.
17	2	My leader makes my career development a priority.
1	3	I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem.
5	4	My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.
22	5	My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.
15	6	My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.
27	7	My leader would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.

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## Appendix C: G\*Power Analysis

