

## MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT IN THE EFFECT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP PERCEPTION ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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### ABSTRACT

*Knowledge has become an important asset for today's organizations. In order for organizations to benefit from knowledge, it is of great importance that knowledge be shared among employees. The aim of this study was to determine the mediating role of perceived organizational support in the effect of servant leadership on knowledge sharing. The research was carried out in Istanbul, Türkiye, between 29 April 2022 and 16 September 2022. Collection of the research data was done via the online survey method with individuals who were employed at private hospitals operating in the city of Istanbul. The obtained results revealed that servant leadership positively affected perceived organizational support. Servant leadership and perceived organizational support had a positive effect on knowledge sharing. Finally, perceived organizational support had a mediating role in the effect of servant leadership on knowledge sharing. This study shows that servant leadership and perceived organizational support are determinants of knowledge sharing.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Knowledge Sharing, Servant Leadership, Perceived Organizational Support.

**Jel Codes:** M10, M12, M19.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Intense competition and globalization have greatly changed the operations and priorities of organizations. Having qualified human resources and knowledge has become more important for today's organizations than physical assets (Alioğulları, 2021). Knowledge, which has become a source of strategic power for organizations, has critical importance for organizations' efficiency, sustainability, and success as well as their ability to gain competitive advantages (Düger, 2021; Le and Lei, 2019). The effective utilization of knowledge by organizations greatly depends on their employees. By sharing their knowledge with other employees, employees can make significant contributions to organizations' ability to benefit from knowledge (Düger, 2021). Knowledge sharing (KS) includes employees' conscious sharing of the organization or work-related knowledge, opinions, suggestions, and experiences with

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#### Makale Geçmiři/Article History

Başvuru Tarihi / Date of Application : 3 Ekim / October 2023

Düzeltilme Tarihi / Revision Date : 24 Ocak / January 2024

Kabul Tarihi / Acceptance Date : 12 Şubat / February 2024

Arařtırma Makalesi/Research Article

other employees (Bartol and Srivastava, 2002; Kutanis and Mercan, 2015). KS has been considered as a critical factor for organizations to develop and for employees to improve (Hameed et al., 2019). KS of employees is affected by many individual, organizational, and technological factors (Demirel and Seçkin, 2008).

It is a factor that affects employees' knowledge sharing in servant leadership (SL) (Nuchso, Tuntivivat and Klayklung, 2016). SL is a leadership style based on the idea of the leader serving his or her followers or subordinates in organization (Aksoy Kürü, 2022). Servant leaders are leaders who focus primarily on serving subordinates and place the needs and interests of subordinates ahead of their own (Yılmaz, 2021). Servant leaders respect the dignity and positions of their subordinates, attach importance to their subordinates' personal development and progress, and enable their subordinates to maximize their capacity (Beshlideh, Sharifi, Hashemi and Naami, 2018). Servant leaders play a major role in organizations gaining competitive advantages and maintaining their existence (Eren and Yalçıntaş, 2017).

Another factor affecting knowledge sharing is perceived organizational support (POS) (Yang, van Rijn and Sanders, 2020). POS refers to employees' perceptions that "the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa, 1986, p.501). Organizational support is a concept based on the perceptions of employees, and the POS levels of employees who encounter the same actions and activities in organization may differ (Kerse and Karabey, 2017). Various factors such as manager support, leader-member exchanges, rewards, working conditions, and characteristics of employees affect employees' perceptions of organizational support (Ercan İştin and Taner, 2021). Employees who think that they are supported by their organization display positive attitudes and behaviors toward their organization. They are work more willingly so that the organization can achieve its goals (Alat and Filizöz, 2021). The aim of this study was to determine the mediating role of perceived organizational support in the effect of servant leadership on knowledge sharing.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Servant Leadership (SL)**

The importance of the concept of leadership, which dates back to ancient times, has increased steadily and many styles of leadership have emerged over time. One of these leadership styles is SL, which focuses on employees and is based on the idea of serving them (Eren and Yalçıntaş, 2017). SL is a leadership style whereby the leader thinks of followers or subordinates before himself or herself, serves them, has positive relationships with them, pays attention to their needs, cares about their improvement, empowers them, and involves them in decision making (Aminah, Lin, Susita, Helexandra and Moslehpour, 2022; Celepli Sütbaş and Atilla, 2020; Kadarusman and Bunyamin, 2021). Servant leaders, who are very beneficial for both the organization and their subordinates, have no expectations for

themselves. What matters to a servant leader is the well-being and happiness of his or her followers or subordinates (Çalışal and Yücel, 2019). Servant leaders serve their subordinates by helping them improve their abilities, eliminating barriers, encouraging and empowering them, and involving them in decision-making processes (Kılıç and Aydın, 2016; Ürü Sanı, Çalışkan, Atan and Yozgat, 2013).

SL is a style of leadership that is completely dependent on the personal characteristics of the leader; it is not obtained through authority power, position power, or legal mechanisms (Çalışal and Yücel, 2019; Jackson, 2008). Servant leaders are people who are honest, modest, understanding, helpful, sensitive, sincere, patient, and compassionate (Aksoy Kürü, 2022; Bakan and Doğan, 2012). Servant leaders treat their followers or subordinates consistently, they do not deceive their subordinates, they do not distort knowledge, they never make promises they cannot keep, and they reassure (Baykal, Zehir and Köle, 2018). These attitudes and behaviors of servant leaders increase the trust that subordinates have in them. Subordinates who trust their leaders begin to perceive their leaders as servant leaders over time (Ürü Sanı et al., 2013). SL influences both subordinates and organizations in many aspects. SL increases the positive attitudes and behaviors of subordinates and contributes to the reduction of negative attitudes and behaviors. In addition, SL positively affects the profitability and success of organizations (Celepli Sütbaş and Atilla, 2020; Coetzer, Bussin and Geldenhuys, 2017). SL is an effective style of leadership for the health sector (Yasir and Jam, 2023), and servant leaders have significant roles in providing quality health services (Farrington and Lillah, 2019). Servant leaders contribute to the delivery of accurate and timely health care by providing the resources needed in the delivery of health services, empowering health professionals, and enabling them to take initiative (Uğurluoğlu, Köse and Köse, 2015).

## **2.2. Knowledge Sharing (KS)**

Lin (2006, p. 29) defined KS as “a social interaction culture, involving the exchange of employee knowledge, experiences, and skills through the whole department or organization”. KS encompasses the attitudes and behaviors for employees to share their knowledge, expertise, and skills with other employees (Aminah et al., 2022). It is an activity based on a conscious, collaborative and willingness among employees (Sezgin, Uçar and Duygulu, 2015). Although KS has many beneficial consequences for organizations, most employees are unwilling to share knowledge (Shateri and Hayat, 2020). In order for KS to be effective and successful, the employee sharing knowledge must be freely willing to do so, and the employee receiving the knowledge must be willing to receive and use that knowledge (Türe Yılmaz and Yıldırım, 2018).

KS in organizations can take place formally and informally. Formal knowledge sharing is the sharing of knowledge overseen by the organization and realized among employees under certain conditions and particularly by means of technology. Formal knowledge sharing is easier to control and assess as it takes place under the control of the organization. Informal knowledge sharing is knowledge

sharing that occurs spontaneously between employees during conversations or personal interactions without being subject to specific conditions. Informal knowledge sharing may occur during face-to-face interactions as well as via e-mail or other means of communication, and it is difficult for organizations to control (Demirel, 2007; King, 2001). KS has many benefits for organizations; for example, it improves the communication between employees, and it ensures that employees help each other, that job performance increases, and that work is completed better, faster, and in a more efficient way (Kadarusman and Bunyamin, 2021). KS also encourages creativity and innovation (Lee and Austin, 2012), increases product and service quality, reduces costs, and improves organizational performance (Rehman, Ilyas and Asghar, 2015).

There are many factors affecting the KS of employees, including knowledge-related factors (type and value of the knowledge, etc.), individual factors (employee's demographic characteristics, personal traits, concerns, self-expression abilities, etc.), and organizational factors (organizational culture, organizational structure, reward system, technological infrastructure, organizational trust, etc.) (Işık, 2018; Karaaslan, Özler and Kulaklıoğlu, 2009). KS is important for health services, as well. KS among health professionals has an important role in ensuring best practices and continuity in the delivery of health services (Assem and Pabbi, 2016). Inadequate sharing of knowledge among health professionals negatively affects both health institutions and health services. Therefore, the elimination of obstacles to KS in health institutions makes important contributions to both the continuity and quality of health services and the improvement of patient satisfaction (Kuşun and Sevinç, 2016).

### **2.3. Perceived Organizational Support (POS)**

POS refers to employees' perceptions that they are supported, appreciated, and cared for by their organizations (Doğan and Yeloğlu, 2021; Solmaztürk and Doğan, 2021). POS reflects the perceptions of employees that the organization appreciates employees' efforts, respects them, values their contributions, cares for their well-being and happiness, and helps them in difficult situations (Alat and Filizöz, 2021; Özgül, Erkmen and Karaaslan, 2020). POS is a subjective situation based on the perceptions of employees (Sökmen and Benk, 2019). Employees in the same work environment may perceive the organization's same support at different levels (Doğan and Yeloğlu, 2021). The level of organizational support perceived by employees is affected by various factors that include fair treatment, supervisor support, organizational rewards, working conditions, organizational norms, policies, practices, and activities, and the employees' personal traits and demographic characteristics (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Tamer and Bozaykut Bük, 2020).

When employees' emotions, opinions, and happiness are given importance and are valued and the employees are made to feel that they contribute to the organization, their perceptions of organizational support increase (Keskin and Aytemiz Seymen, 2020). Employees' perceptions that they are supported by their organizations ensure that they feel more comfortable in the workplace, have

positive attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, exhibit work behaviors that are desirable and valuable for the organization, and make extra efforts to see the organization succeed (Erkal, 2021; Gupta, Agarwal and Khatri, 2016; Muneer, Iqbal, Khan and Long, 2014). POS provides similar consequences for health professionals. In addition, high levels of organizational support perceived by health professionals positively affect the quality of health services, patient satisfaction, and the success of health institutions (Çankaya, 2020; Saadeh and Suifan, 2020).

#### **2.4. Research Hypotheses**

The attitudes and behaviors of the managers or leaders of an organization toward their employees are of great importance in shaping the perception of organizational support among employees (Solmaztürk and Doğan, 2021). Hence, the expressions, policies, practices, and messages of managers or leaders have significant effects on POS (İplik, İplik and Efeoğlu, 2014). Servant leaders who guide, help, and dedicate themselves to serving employees (Bakan and Doğan, 2012) are also thought to have significant impacts on perceptions of organizational support. The results reported in some studies in the literature revealed that SL exhibited a positive effect on POS (Kim, You and Hong, 2021; Rai and Prakash, 2016). The research hypothesis developed within the framework of the results of those previous studies is as follows:

*H1: SL has a positive effect on POS.*

Servant leaders support employees in helping each other and sharing their knowledge (Sheikh, Ishaq and Inam, 2019). According to Ng (2022), SL positively affects the KS tendency of employees. According to Bou Reslan, Garanti and Emeagwali (2021), SL positively affects KS behaviors, and Kadarusman and Bunyamin (2021) similarly reported that SL positively affects KS. Based on these studies, it was assumed that SL increases KS among employees. The research hypothesis developed within this scope is as follows:

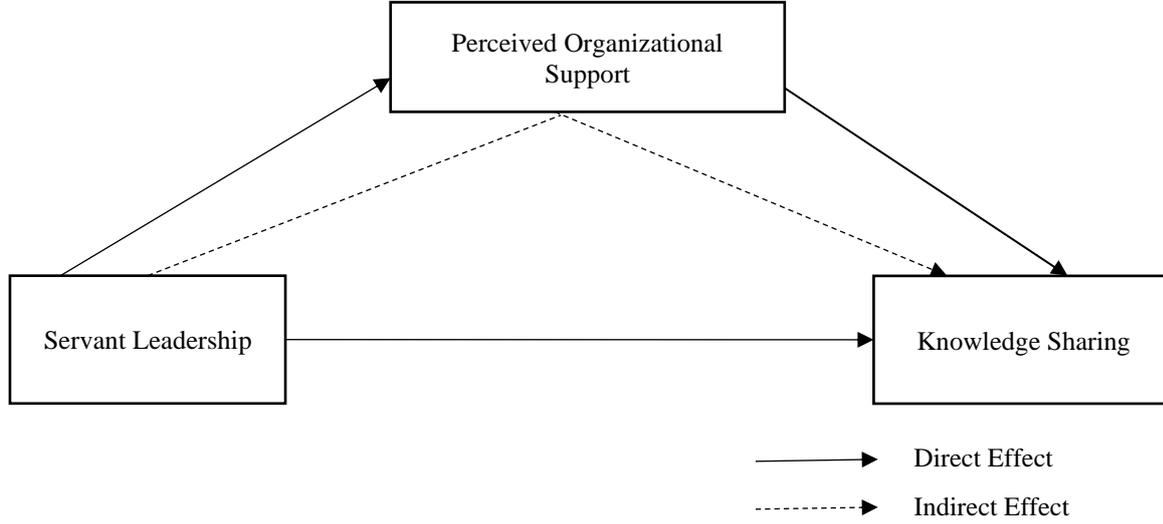
*H2: SL has a positive effect on KS.*

It is very important to create a suitable environment in an organization and eliminate organizational obstacles so that employees share their knowledge. Expecting employees to make such efforts and share their knowledge may be a serious mistake in organizations that do not provide appropriate environments. The provision of organizational support and the employees' perceptions of that support are important elements in providing suitable organizational environments and eliminating obstacles (Akgül and Yavuz, 2021). According to Jeung, Yoon and Choi (2017), POS positively affects the intentions of employees to share knowledge. According to Islam, Khan and Asad (2019), POS positively affects the KS behaviors of employees. Thus, based on those results, it was assumed that POS increases employees' KS. It is also thought that POS indirectly increases the effect of SL on KS. The research hypotheses developed within this scope are as follows:

*H3: POS has a positive effect on KS.*

*H4: POS has a mediating role in the effect of SL on KS.*

**Figure 1. Research Model**



### 3. METHODS

The current research was carried out in Istanbul, Türkiye, between 29 April 2022 and 16 September 2022. Collection of the research data was done via the online survey method with individuals who were employed at private hospitals operating in Istanbul. Within the scope of this research, 320 questionnaires were completed and collected.

The participants in this research comprised 33.8% (n=108) males and 66.3% (n=212) females, with a mean age of 28.66±8.08 years. Of the research participants, 30.9% (n=99) had high school degrees, while 31.9% (n=102) had associate degrees, 29.7% (n=95) had undergraduate degrees, and 7.5% (n=24) had graduate degrees. Of the participants, 23.8% (n=76) were administrative staff (employed in units such as patient admission, accounting, finance, etc.), 60.3% (n=193) were health staff (physicians, nurses, midwives, etc.), and 15.9% (n=51) were other staff (technical staff, cleaning staff, security staff, etc.). Moreover, 80.6% (n=258) had an employment history of 1-5 years in their organizations, while 19.4% (n=62) had 6 years or more.

#### 3.1. Measurement Scales

The first part of the survey form used to collect the research data included questions that aimed at determining the participants' demographic characteristics. Additionally, in the other parts of the questionnaire, the following scales were used:

- *Servant Leadership Scale*: The scale was developed by Liden, Wayne, Liao and Meuser (2014). Validity and reliability of the scale in Turkish was established by Kılıç and Aydın (2016). The scale comprises a single dimension and 7 statements. Based on the analyses made, the scale is reliable for this research ( $\alpha=0.755$ ).
- *Perceived Organizational Support Scale*: The scale adapted by Giray and Şahin (2012) from the scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) was used to determine the perceived organizational support levels of the participants. The scale consists of a single dimension and 12 statements. Based on the analyses made, the scale is reliable for this research ( $\alpha=0.845$ ).
- *Knowledge Sharing Scale*: The scale was developed by Öneren, Çiftçi and Harman (2016). It consists of 18 statements and 3 dimensions. These dimensions are knowledge sharing between employees (10 statements), knowledge sharing from an individual perspective (3 statements), and knowledge sharing from an institutional perspective (5 statements). Based on the analyses made, the scale is reliable for this research ( $\alpha = 0.920$ ).

The scale statements are answered with 5-Point Likert-type responses (“1=Totally disagree”, “5=Totally agree”).

### **3.2. Statistical Analysis**

SPSS 22.0 and Process Macro v3.5 statistical software were used in the analyses of the data. The descriptive statistics were first calculated, and then correlation and effect analyses were conducted in data analyses. Evaluation of the obtained research results was done at 95% confidence intervals with significance set at 5%.

### **3.3. Ethical Approval**

Approval was obtained from the Yalova University Human Research Ethics Committee that the research was ethically appropriate (Protocol No: 2022/14, Date: 16.03.2022).

## **4. RESULTS**

According to the results, there was a positive correlation between SL and POS ( $r=0.671$ ). In addition, there was a positive correlation between SL and KS ( $r=0.556$ ) and between POS and KS ( $r=0.642$ ) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Correlation Analysis**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2
1. SL	4.026	0.467		
2. POS	3.798	0.496	0.671*	
3. KS	4.206	0.462	0.556*	0.642*

\*p<0.001, SD: Standard Deviation

According to the results, SL had a positive effect on POS ( $\beta=0.713$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). SL ( $\beta=0.226$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and POS ( $\beta=0.455$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) had positive effects on KS. The results supported hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 (Table 2).

**Table 2. Effect Analyses**

Effect	$\beta$	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.929	0.179	5.191	0.000	0.577	1.281
SL → POS	0.713	0.044	16.132	0.000	0.626	0.799
Constant	1.571	0.175	8.957	0.000	1.226	1.916
SL → KS	0.226	0.056	4.025	0.000	0.115	0.336
POS → KS	0.455	0.053	8.622	0.000	0.351	0.559

POS was found to mediate the effect that SL had on KS ( $\beta = 0.324$ ) and increased the positive effect that SL had on KS even further ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), which supported hypothesis H4 (Table 3).

**Table 3. Mediating Effect**

Effect		$\beta$	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effect	SL→KS	0.226	0.056	4.025	0.000	0.115	0.336
Indirect Effect	SL→POS→KS	0.324	0.045			0.236	0.413
Total Effect	SL→KS	0.550	0.046	11.924	0.000	0.459	0.640

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the present study revealed that SL positively affected POS. This result was also supported by similar results reported in the current literature (Beshlideh et al., 2018; DeConinck, Moss and Deconinck, 2018; Huning, Hurt and Frieder, 2020; Zhou and Miao, 2014). These results show that SL increases the perceptions of organizational support among employees. Servant leaders have an important place in shaping the perception that an organization cares about employees, supports them, and values them. Therefore, SL has an important effect on the formation of organizational support perceptions of employees.

According to another result of the present study, SL positively affected KS. This result was also supported by similar results reported in the current literature (Aminah et al., 2022; Sheikh et al., 2019; Tripathi, Priyadarshi, Kumar and Kumar, 2021). Leaders within an organization have significant influence on employees. Leaders' attitudes and behaviors influence employees' attitudes and behaviors toward both the organization and their jobs. Leaders also influence employees' KS (Taheri and İrge, 2021). Servant leaders encourage and support employees, thus enabling them to share their knowledge with each other. According to this result of the present study, it can be stated that SL affects and increases the KS of employees.

Another result of the present study is that POS positively affected KS. This result was also supported by similar results reported in the current literature (Cugueró-Escofet, Ficapal-Cusí and Torrent-Sellens, 2019; Shateri and Hayat, 2020; Winarno, Prasetyo, Dudija, Pratami and Liu, 2021). The attitudes and behaviors of the top management, which have major roles in forming organizational support perceptions, also have significant roles in the success of KS. The support of the top management facilitates KS and encourages employees to share their knowledge (Lee, Shiue and Chen, 2016). If the attitude of the top management develops in such a way as to support KS, the strategic value of KS increases, KS processes become more effective, technical infrastructure improves, trust in the organization increases, and working relationships change positively (Top and Dilek, 2013). According to this result of the present study, it is possible to state that the organizational support perceptions of employees increase their KS. Finally, the results of this study showed that POS was found to mediate the effect that SL had on KS. The perception of SL among employees contributes to the formation of perceptions of organizational support. The organizational support perceived by employees provides an indirect increase of the positive effect of SL on KS.

The delivery of health services requires intensive KS. In particular, high levels of specialization and the intensity of the medical technology used highlight the necessity of KS among health professionals. KS has an important place for health professionals becoming more aware of rapidly advancing technology and scientific advancements and correctly diagnosing and treating patients (Köseoğlu, Gider and Ocak, 2011). If there is effective KS between health professionals, the quality and efficiency of the health services offered will increase. It also makes a significant contribution to the success and cost reductions of the health institution and helps institutions gain competitive advantages (Asemahagn, 2014). Given the benefits of KS for both patients and hospitals, the KS of employees should be increased. Based on results in this study, perceptions of SL and organizational support must be created among employees in order to increase their sharing of knowledge.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that SL and POS are determinants of KS. Within the framework of these results, some suggestions can be made to hospital administrators to create perceptions of SL and organizational

support among employees and to increase KS. In order to create perceptions of SL and organizational support, hospital administrators and leaders should care about employees, give them responsibility, empower them, involve them in decision-making, supporting their development, care about their interests, solve their problems, and ensure their well-being and happiness in the workplace. In order to increase the KS of employees, hospital administrators and leaders should care about KS and make it a part of the organizational culture. A work environment must be created where employees can share knowledge and collaboration must be ensured between employees. The negativities and obstacles that may hinder KS must be eliminated. Employees must be supported, encouraged, and rewarded for sharing knowledge. Employees should be involved in decision-making processes and given responsibility. Organizational activities and events should be organized where employees can exchange knowledge.

### **6.1. Limitations**

The fact that the number of employees who participated in this research was not high and that the study was conducted in only one province of Türkiye are limitations of the study. Another limitation of the study is that it included only employees working in private hospitals.

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**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

**Finansal Destek:** Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

**Teşekkür:** -

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

**Grant Support:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Acknowledgement:** -

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