

How Servant Leadership and Organizational Justice Translate into Performance: Evidence from a Value-Fit Perspective

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Abstract

Employee performance remains a critical determinant of organizational sustainability, particularly in labor-intensive industries operating in emerging economies. This study investigates the effects of servant leadership and organizational justice on employee performance, with person–organization fit (P–O fit) serving as a mediating mechanism. Using survey data collected from employees of a distribution company in Indonesia, this research applies Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with WarpPLS 8.0. The results reveal that servant leadership has a strong and significant direct effect on employee performance, while organizational justice primarily influences performance indirectly through P–O fit. The mediation analysis confirms that value congruence between employees and the organization plays a pivotal role in translating leadership behavior and fairness perceptions into performance outcomes. This study contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by integrating leadership, justice, and fit perspectives within an emerging-economy context. Practical implications for leadership development and fairness-based human resource practices are discussed.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Organizational Justice, Person–Organization Fit, Employee Performance, PLS-SEM, Indonesia

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive and volatile business environment, employee performance has become a strategic priority for organizations seeking long-term sustainability. Performance is no longer viewed solely as the outcome of individual skills or technical competence but is increasingly understood as a function of organizational context, leadership behavior, and the quality of employment relationships (Robbins & Judge, 2017; Yukl et al., 2020). In labor-intensive industries such as distribution and logistics, where operational efficiency relies heavily on coordination and human interaction, performance outcomes are particularly sensitive to leadership practices and fairness perceptions (Hoch et al., 2018).

Leadership research has progressively shifted from command-and-control paradigms toward value-based and relational leadership approaches that emphasize meaning, ethics, and relational exchange (Gardner et al., 2021). One such approach is servant leadership, which foregrounds ethical conduct, empathy, empowerment, and prioritization of employee well-being (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011; Liden et al., 2014). Accumulating empirical evidence suggests that servant leadership fosters trust, engagement, and discretionary effort, which in turn enhance employee performance across organizational contexts (Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020).

Alongside leadership, organizational justice plays a crucial role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. Organizational justice reflects employees' perceptions of fairness regarding outcomes (distributive justice), decision-making processes (procedural justice), and

interpersonal treatment (interactional justice) (Colquitt et al., 2001). Justice perceptions function as signals of organizational legitimacy and respect, shaping employees' willingness to reciprocate through enhanced performance and positive work behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Rupp et al., 2017).

However, leadership and justice do not operate in isolation, nor do they uniformly produce performance outcomes. Their effectiveness depends on how employees interpret these organizational practices in relation to their own values. Person–organization fit (P–O fit) refers to the perceived congruence between individual values, goals, and characteristics and those embedded within the organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Cable & DeRue, 2002). High levels of P–O fit facilitate internalization of organizational norms and goals, strengthening the extent to which leadership behaviors and fairness perceptions translate into performance-relevant motivation (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on servant leadership, organizational justice, and P–O fit independently, studies integrating these constructs into a unified explanatory framework remain limited, particularly in emerging economy contexts. Cultural characteristics such as collectivism, relational orientation, and power distance may shape how leadership and justice are interpreted and enacted in daily work practices (Farh et al., 2019; Sendjaya et al., 2019). Addressing this gap, the present study examines how servant leadership and organizational justice translate into employee performance through a value-fit perspective, with person–organization fit serving as the central mediating mechanism.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Servant Leadership and Employee Performance

Servant leadership is conceptualized as a values-based leadership approach in which leaders prioritize serving followers, fostering ethical conduct, and facilitating personal growth (Greenleaf, 1977). Contemporary scholarship frames servant leadership as a multidimensional construct encompassing empowerment, humility, stewardship, interpersonal acceptance, and accountability (van Dierendonck, 2011; Liden et al., 2014). Compared with other value-based leadership styles, servant leadership places a stronger emphasis on follower-centered moral responsibility and long-term relational development (Hoch et al., 2018).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that servant leadership enhances employee performance by strengthening intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, and high-quality social exchange relationships (Panaccio et al., 2015; Eva et al., 2019). Meta-analytic findings further indicate that servant leadership is positively associated with both task performance and contextual performance across sectors and cultures (Eva et al., 2019). In collectivist contexts, servant leadership may exert particularly strong effects due to its alignment with relational harmony and moral obligation norms (Sendjaya et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020).

H1: Servant leadership positively influences employee performance

Organizational Justice and Employee Performance

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness regarding outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment (Colquitt et al., 2001). Justice perceptions shape employee behavior not only through instrumental exchange but also through relational and identity-based mechanisms (Rupp et al., 2017). Extensive empirical research demonstrates that organizational justice predicts employee performance directly and indirectly through attitudinal, motivational, and relational pathways (Colquitt et al., 2013; Lavelle et al., 2019). More recent studies suggest that fairness effects are contingent upon contextual and

psychological conditions, including employees' perceptions of organizational alignment and meaning (Farh et al., 2019; Frazier et al., 2021).

H2: Organizational justice positively influences employee performance.

Person–Organization Fit as an Explanatory Mechanism

Person organization fit refers to the compatibility between individuals and organizations based on shared values, goals, and norms (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes P–O fit as a dynamic psychological condition that shapes how employees interpret organizational signals over time (van Vianen, 2018; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). Leadership behavior and organizational justice are key antecedents of P–O fit. Leaders who consistently model organizational values reinforce perceived congruence, while fair practices legitimize organizational norms and strengthen employees' sense of belonging (Liden et al., 2014; Guan et al., 2021).

H3: Servant leadership positively influences person–organization fit.

H4: Organizational justice positively influences person–organization fit.

Mediating Role of Person–Organization Fit

P–O fit functions as a psychological conduit through which leadership and justice perceptions are translated into performance outcomes. When employees experience value congruence, leadership intentions are more likely to be interpreted as authentic, and fairness perceptions reinforce organizational identification and meaning-making processes (Weick et al., 2005).

H5: Person–organization fit mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance.

H6: Person–organization fit mediates the relationship between organizational justice and employee performance.

Methods

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory design to examine the proposed relationships among servant leadership, organizational justice, person–organization fit, and employee performance. A survey-based approach was employed, as it allows for systematic measurement of employees' perceptions regarding leadership behavior, fairness, value alignment, and performance outcomes within an organizational setting. Data were collected from employees of a distribution company operating in Indonesia. Given the relatively small size of the organization, a census sampling strategy was applied to ensure comprehensive coverage of the employee population. All employees were invited to participate in the survey, resulting in 42 valid and usable responses. Although modest in size, this sample is considered adequate for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is particularly suitable for studies with small samples and predictive research objectives (Hair et al., 2022).

All study constructs were measured reflectively using established and validated scales from prior research. Servant leadership was assessed using items adapted from Liden et al. (2014), capturing leadership behaviors oriented toward service, empowerment, and ethical conduct. Organizational justice was measured using the scale developed by Colquitt et al. (2001), encompassing distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions of fairness. Person–organization fit was operationalized based on the subjective fit scale proposed by Cable and DeRue (2002), which focuses on perceived value congruence between employees and the organization. Employee performance was measured using items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991), reflecting task-related performance behaviors. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis was conducted using WarpPLS version 8.0. The analytical procedure followed a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. Second, the structural model was examined to test the hypothesized relationships by estimating path coefficients and their statistical significance. Model explanatory power and predictive relevance were assessed using coefficients of determination (R^2) and Stone–Geisser’s Q^2 values. Mediation effects were evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure to determine the significance of indirect relationships within the proposed model.

Results and Discussion

Measurement Model Assessment

Before examining the hypothesized relationships, the adequacy of the measurement model was assessed to ensure that the constructs were measured reliably and validly. Overall, the results indicate that the measurement model meets established quality criteria. All indicators demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity, with standardized loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. Most items loaded strongly on their respective constructs, suggesting that the indicators captured the intended latent variables effectively. This provides confidence that the measurement items adequately represent servant leadership, organizational justice, person–organization fit, and employee performance.

Internal consistency reliability was also well supported. Composite reliability values for all constructs ranged from high to very high, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients further confirmed the consistency of the measurement scales. Together, these results indicate that the constructs were measured with acceptable precision and reliability. Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model evaluation, including indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach’s alpha (α), and average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Loadings range	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Servant Leadership	0.552-0.917	0.961	0.966	0.66
Organizational Justice	0.687-0.869	0.884	0.912	0.64
Person–Organization Fit	0.854-0.943	0.953	0.962	0.68
Employee Performance	0.564-0.850	0.859	0.891	0.65

As shown in Table 1, all indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, supporting convergent validity. Composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha values are above 0.70, while AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loading analysis. Each indicator loaded more strongly on its associated construct than on any other construct, indicating that the latent variables were empirically distinct from one another. This finding suggests that respondents were able to differentiate clearly between leadership behaviors, fairness perceptions, value congruence, and performance outcomes. Table 2 shows that the square roots of AVE (diagonal values) are greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity among the study constructs.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	SL	OJ	POF	EP
Servant Leadership (SL)	0.85			
Organizational Justice (OJ)	0.63	0.83		
Person–Organization Fit (POF)	0.71	0.65	0.84	

Employee Performance (EP)	0.68	0.59	0.74	0.82
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Structural Model Evaluation

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to assess the explanatory power and predictive relevance of the proposed relationships. The results reveal a structurally robust model with substantial explanatory capacity. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for employee performance was 0.796, indicating that servant leadership, organizational justice, and person–organization fit jointly explained 79.6% of the variance in employee performance. This level of explained variance can be considered strong, suggesting that the model captures key determinants of performance in the studied organizational context. Similarly, the R^2 value for person–organization fit was 0.84, indicating that a large proportion of variance in value congruence was explained by servant leadership and organizational justice. Predictive relevance was assessed using Stone–Geisser’s Q^2 values obtained through the blindfolding procedure. The Q^2 values for both employee performance and person–organization fit exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.35, providing further evidence that the model possesses strong predictive capability rather than merely fitting the sample data.

Hypothesis Testing

The path analysis results offer nuanced insights into how leadership and fairness are translated into performance outcomes. Servant leadership exhibited a strong and statistically significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.26$, $p = 0.04$). This finding indicates that leadership behaviors grounded in service, empowerment, and ethical concern are directly associated with higher levels of employee performance. In practical terms, employees appear to respond positively when leaders prioritize their development and well-being, translating such experiences into greater work effort and effectiveness. Organizational justice, by contrast, demonstrated a weaker direct relationship with employee performance ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.09$). While this effect reached marginal significance, the relatively modest coefficient suggests that fairness perceptions alone may not automatically lead to improved performance. Instead, justice appears to operate through more indirect psychological mechanisms.

Both servant leadership and organizational justice showed significant positive effects on person–organization fit. Servant leadership emerged as a particularly strong predictor of value congruence ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$), underscoring the role of leaders in shaping employees’ perceptions of alignment with organizational values. Organizational justice also contributed positively to person–organization fit ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.02$), suggesting that fair procedures and respectful treatment reinforce employees’ sense of belonging and compatibility with the organization. Table 3 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing based on path coefficients estimated using WarpPLS 8.0.

Table 3. Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Result
H1	Servant Leadership → Employee Performance	0.26	= 0.04	Supported
H2	Organizational Justice → Employee Performance	0.19	= 0.09	Partially Supported
H3	Servant Leadership → P–O Fit	0.64	< 0.01	Supported
H4	Organizational Justice → P–O Fit	0.29	= 0.02	Supported
H5	Servant Leadership → P–O Fit → Performance	0.26	< 0.05	Supported
H6	Organizational Justice → P–O Fit → Performance	0.20	< 0.05	Supported

Table 3 indicates that servant leadership has a strong direct effect on employee performance and a substantial indirect effect through person–organization fit. Organizational justice shows a weaker direct effect but exerts a meaningful indirect influence via value congruence.

Mediation Analysis

To further examine the underlying mechanisms linking leadership and justice to performance, mediation analyses were conducted. The results provide compelling evidence for the central role of person organization fit. The indirect effect of servant leadership on employee performance through person–organization fit was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that servant leadership not only enhances performance directly but also strengthens performance indirectly by fostering a sense of value alignment between employees and the organization. In other words, leadership behaviors grounded in service appear to become more performance-relevant when employees perceive that their personal values resonate with those of the organization.

Moreover, person–organization fit fully mediated the relationship between organizational justice and employee performance. Although the direct effect of organizational justice on performance was relatively weak, the indirect effect via person–organization fit was significant ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$). This pattern suggests that fairness perceptions translate into improved performance primarily when they contribute to employees’ perceived alignment with organizational values. Taken together, these findings indicate that leadership and fairness do not enhance employee performance by default. Rather, their influence becomes meaningful through the psychological mechanism of value congruence, highlighting person–organization fit as a pivotal explanatory pathway within the proposed model. Figure 1 visually depicts the hypothesized structural relationships, highlighting the central mediating role of person–organization fit in translating servant leadership and organizational justice into employee performance.

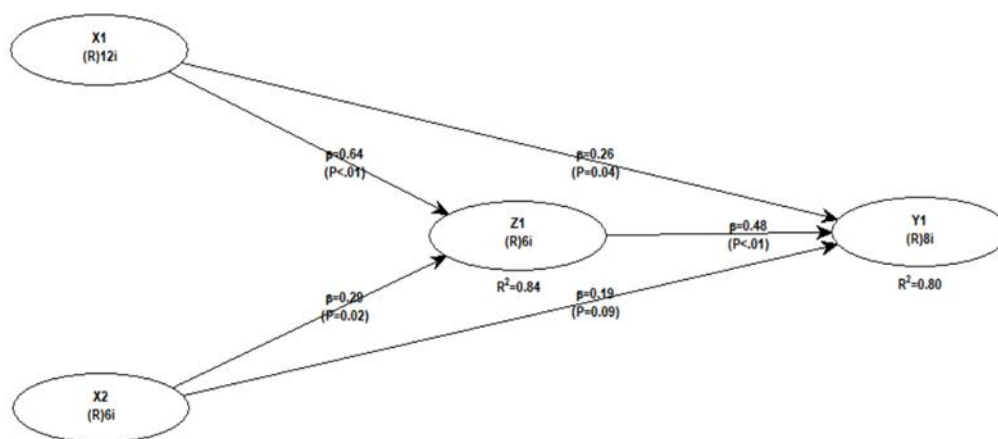


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Table 4 shows that all model fit and quality indices meet or exceed the recommended thresholds, indicating that the structural model is free from multicollinearity issues and demonstrates strong overall fit.

Table 4. Model Fit and Quality Indices (WarpPLS Output)

Fit Index	Value	Threshold
Average Path Coefficient (APC)	0.372 P=0.002	p < 0.05

Average R ² (ARS)	0.818 P=0.001	p < 0.05
Average Adjusted R ² (AARS)	0.806 P=0.001	p < 0.05
Average Variance Inflation Factor (AVIF)	2.14	≤ 5.0
Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	2.39	≤ 5.0
Tenenhaus GoF	0.738	Large
Simpson's Paradox Ratio (SPR)	1	≥ 0.70
Statistical Suppression Ratio (SSR)	1	≥ 0.70

Discussion

This study set out to explain how servant leadership and organizational justice are translated into employee performance by adopting a value-fit perspective. Rather than treating leadership and fairness as direct managerial inputs, the findings position them as relational and symbolic signals whose effectiveness depends on employees' perceived alignment with organizational values. In this respect, the results move beyond simple association-based explanations and offer a more nuanced understanding of performance formation.

Servant Leadership as a Value-Transmitting Mechanism

The strong direct and indirect effects of servant leadership on employee performance highlight its role as more than a supportive leadership style. Servant leadership appears to function as a value-transmitting mechanism through which employees interpret what the organization genuinely prioritizes. When leaders consistently demonstrate service-oriented behaviors, employees are more likely to perceive coherence between espoused organizational values and enacted practices. This alignment, in turn, strengthens both person–organization fit and performance outcomes.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding extends prior servant leadership research by emphasizing its interpretive function. While previous studies have linked servant leadership to motivation and engagement, the present results suggest that its performance-enhancing capacity is partly rooted in its ability to shape employees' sense of value congruence. In other words, servant leadership does not merely motivate employees to work harder; it clarifies “who we are as an organization,” thereby enabling employees to invest effort with greater psychological ownership.

Reconsidering the Role of Organizational Justice

The findings regarding organizational justice warrant careful interpretation. Although justice showed only a marginal direct association with employee performance, its indirect effect through person–organization fit was both substantive and significant. This pattern suggests that fairness alone may be insufficient to drive performance unless it contributes to employees' broader sense of alignment with organizational values.

This insight challenges more instrumental views of organizational justice that assume fair treatment will automatically elicit higher performance. Instead, the results align with relational and social exchange perspectives, which emphasize meaning-making processes. Fair procedures and respectful interactions appear to matter most when they reinforce employees' belief that the organization reflects values they can personally endorse. In this sense, justice serves as a legitimacy-building mechanism rather than a direct motivational trigger.

Person–Organization Fit as the Central Explanatory Link

Perhaps the most theoretically salient contribution of this study lies in identifying person–organization fit as the central mechanism through which leadership and justice become performance-relevant. The strong explanatory power of P–O fit suggests that performance outcomes are deeply embedded in employees’ perceptions of value alignment rather than solely in managerial practices themselves.

This finding resonates with fit theory by reinforcing the idea that employees do not respond uniformly to organizational practices. Instead, leadership behaviors and fairness perceptions are filtered through employees’ assessments of whether they “belong” in the organization. When such alignment is present, leadership and justice signals are interpreted as authentic and meaningful, thereby encouraging greater performance investment. When alignment is absent, even well-intentioned leadership or fair procedures may yield limited performance returns.

Contextual Implications

The organizational context examined in this study—an Indonesian distribution company—provides an important backdrop for interpreting the findings. In collectivist and relationally oriented cultures, value congruence and interpersonal harmony are particularly salient. As such, leadership and fairness practices may exert their strongest influence not through transactional exchanges but through their capacity to affirm shared values and collective identity. This contextual sensitivity underscores the relevance of adopting a value-fit perspective when examining performance mechanisms in emerging economies.

Theoretical Implications

Taken together, the findings contribute to organizational behavior literature in several ways. First, the study integrates servant leadership and organizational justice within a unified explanatory framework, demonstrating that their effects on performance converge through person–organization fit. Second, it advances fit theory by positioning P–O fit not merely as an outcome but as an active psychological condition that enables organizational practices to generate performance. Finally, the results highlight the importance of moving beyond direct-effect models toward mechanism-based explanations that capture how employees interpret and internalize organizational signals.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations seeking to enhance performance should focus not only on implementing servant leadership behaviors and fair procedures but also on ensuring that these practices consistently reflect organizational values. Leadership development initiatives should emphasize value-based consistency, while fairness systems should be designed to reinforce employees’ sense of belonging and alignment rather than merely compliance.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that servant leadership and organizational justice significantly influence employee performance, with person–organization fit serving as a pivotal mediating mechanism. By integrating leadership, justice, and fit perspectives, the study advances organizational behavior theory and provides actionable insights for leadership development in emerging economies.

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