



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Exploring the Role of Servant Leadership in Human Resource Development: A Case Study of the Leadership Performance at Talenta Sejahtera Bersama Cooperative

Eka Putri Prinanda Nitte <sup>1\*</sup> | | Tri Andjarwati <sup>2</sup> | Dewa Ketut Raka Ardiana <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*,2,3</sup> Master of Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya., Surabaya City, East Java Province, Indonesia.

## Correspondence

<sup>1</sup> Master of Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya., Surabaya City, East Java Province, Indonesia.

Email: ekanitte09@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>  
triandjarwati@untag-sby.ac.id<sup>2</sup>  
ardiana@untag-sby.ac.id<sup>3</sup>

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Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya.

## Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of servant leadership in the human resource development (HRD) process and its implications for leadership performance at the Talenta Sejahtera Bersama Cooperative in Kota Kupang. The research focuses on how the application of servant leadership values supports sustainable HR development strategies and contributes to improved organizational performance. A qualitative approach using a case study method was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including the general manager, HR manager, branch managers, senior and junior employees, and cooperative members from both the central and branch offices. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns related to three main aspects: (1) the implementation of servant leadership by cooperative leaders, (2) the management of human resource development, and (3) the contribution of servant leadership to employees' work experiences and motivation. The findings indicate that the application of servant leadership fosters an inclusive and supportive work environment grounded in service-oriented values. Leaders who practice servant leadership demonstrate a strong commitment to listening, nurturing, and empowering employees. HR management is carried out in a participatory manner and focuses on competency development, ultimately contributing to increased performance and employee loyalty. These findings affirm that servant leadership is not only an ethical leadership model but also a strategic approach to achieving sustainable organizational performance.

## Keywords

Human Resource Development; Servant Leadership; Leadership Performance; Cooperative; Leadership; Qualitative.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Model servant leadership is an increasingly relevant approach to managing modern organizations, including in the context of cooperatives. This concept was first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, who emphasized that true leaders are those who prioritize service before leading (Pears, 2022). This rationale rests on humanitarian values, individual growth, and community well-being, which align with the basic principles of cooperatives such as love, humility, and selfless service (Eadership *et al.*). In practice, this model has gained widespread acceptance in cooperative circles because it is able to address the need for inclusive and ethical leadership. However, the implementation of servant leadership Cooperatives are inseparable from various challenges, particularly in the complex and dynamic context of cooperative management. In Kupang City, cooperative leaders are faced with increasing member expectations, sociocultural changes, and pressures on organizational effectiveness amidst limited resources and technological access. This demands a leadership model that not only manages the organization structurally but also empowers human resources (HR) sustainably. Research (Eva *et al.*, 2019).

Identify ten key characteristics servant leadership Such as empathy, awareness, persuasion, and commitment to the growth of others, serve as an important framework for assessing leadership effectiveness in a cooperative environment. In cooperative organizations, leadership quality significantly impacts the human resource management process, encompassing not only performance aspects but also the personal and professional well-being of its members. Furthermore, in Kupang City, a multicultural city, cooperative leaders are required to possess emotional intelligence, social sensitivity, and the ability to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of society (Lepeyko *et al.*, 2022; Hadley, 2024). This challenge makes the cooperative approach servant leadership as an urgent need to create a healthy, collaborative, and empowering work environment. Limitations in the personal and professional development of cooperative leaders can even lead to a decline in the quality of organizational management and increase the risk of emotional exhaustion (Amir *et al.*, 2021; Dewi, 2024).

Based on this context, this research is directed to explore in depth how the implementation of servant leadership conducted by the leadership of the Talenta Sejahtera Bersama Cooperative in Kupang City in carrying out organizational management tasks, as well as their strategies for managing human resource development as part of their leadership role. Furthermore, this study also aims to develop a model for human resource development based on servant leadership which can contribute to employee work experience and engagement in cooperative organizations. Academically, this research expands the body of knowledge in the field of leadership, particularly servant leadership, in the context of cooperatives, where empirical studies are still limited. Practically, the results of this study provide strategic recommendations for cooperative organizations in developing a more participatory, contextual, and sustainable leadership style by optimizing the potential of their human resources.

## 2 | BACKGROUND THEORY

### Servant Leadership in Cooperative Organizations

Servant leadership is a leadership paradigm first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, which emphasizes that a true leader is an individual who has the drive to serve first before leading. In this approach, leaders are not oriented towards power, but rather towards sincere service to others, and prioritize the needs, growth, and welfare of organizational members above personal or institutional interests. Wase *et al.*, (2020) in a systematic review of 285 scientific articles, defines servant leadership as an approach that focuses on improving the welfare of followers through empowerment, personal development, and inclusive and humanistic organizational management. In contrast to conventional leadership styles that emphasize targets and results, servant leadership places interpersonal relationships and the creation of shared values as the main foundation in building an empowered and sustainable organizational community.

In the context of cooperative organizations, the implementation of a servant leadership policy is highly relevant because it aligns with the principles of collectivity, togetherness, and member-centeredness. Lepeyko *et al.* (2022) stated that servant leadership can improve the quality of cooperative management while strengthening relationships among members. In Indonesia, this approach is reflected in local values such as mutual cooperation, empathy, and selfless service, making it a form of leadership based on cultural wisdom (Apryanti *et al.*, 2021). From this perspective, servant leadership is understood not only as a managerial strategy but also as an ethical and moral paradigm that encourages cooperative organizations to be more inclusive, transformative, and human-centered (Bhavani, 2024).

The main characteristics of servant leadership include six aspects, namely individual empowerment and development, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing clear direction, and the ability to manage organizations with moral values (Eva *et al.*, 2019). In Indonesia, cultural values such as social empathy and solidarity strengthen the servant leadership dimension in cooperatives. Characteristics such as trust, caring, and a commitment to

personal growth are important indicators in creating a psychologically safe work environment and supporting active member participation (Amir *et al.*, 2021). In the long term, this approach is believed to strengthen the moral identity of cooperative organizations and foster a leadership culture oriented toward community empowerment (Roxas, 2020).

However, implementing a servant policy is not without challenges. Modern organizational cultures, which emphasize efficiency, short-term results, and high productivity, often conflict with the fundamental principles of servant leadership, which prioritize service and human relationships (Roxas, 2020). Other challenges include high emotional pressure on leaders, the risk of burnout, structural organizational barriers, and limited resources within cooperatives (Ginting *et al.*, 2024; Hurt & Nolan, 2024; Funga *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, because this approach demands high interpersonal skills and emotional competencies, not all leaders have the personal readiness to carry out this role effectively (Pakpahan *et al.*, 2021).

Nevertheless, servant leadership still offers significant opportunities for shaping more humane, inclusive, and sustainable organizations. This approach can improve interpersonal relationships, build a sense of belonging, and foster a healthy work climate that supports life balance (Ludwikowska, 2023; Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). In the long term, servant leadership contributes to increased employee engagement, talent retention, and the legitimacy of cooperative social organizations in the eyes of the public and community members (Gedvilienė & Supranavičienė, 2023). This approach also encourages the emergence of future leaders with a servant character and high integrity, capable of leading cooperatives toward change oriented toward social values (Taylor & Durholz, 2024).

### Human Resource Management Theory

To support the effectiveness of servant leadership, developing human resource management competencies is a fundamental element in cooperative organizations. Human resource competencies encompass knowledge, skills, and behaviors that enable individuals to optimally carry out their roles and responsibilities. These competencies encompass not only technical dimensions but also behavioral aspects and moral values that reflect professionalism and commitment to organizational goals (Armstrong & Stephen, 2010). In the context of modern organizational dynamics, human resource competency development must be carried out in a planned, systematic, and sustainable manner as part of the organization's strategy to strengthen its adaptive and innovative capacity (Suhartono, 2024; Setiawan *et al.*, 2022). Learning and development strategies (Learning and Development Armstrong's definition of L&D encompasses three main pillars: training and development to address skills; organizational development to improve work structures, processes, and culture; and career development to support professional growth and leadership regeneration (Armstrong & Stephen, 2010). These three aspects interact to form a learning ecosystem that supports the overall improvement of human resource quality.

The urgency of competency development in HR management is also reflected in five interrelated strategic objectives. First, enhancing organizational capabilities in achieving long-term goals. Second, improving individual performance and collaborative team performance. Third, ensuring the retention of key talent within the organization. Fourth, creating job satisfaction and employee engagement. Fifth, preparing future leaders capable of assuming strategic responsibilities (Rachmawati *et al.*, 2023). In relation to servant leadership, HR development is a crucial pillar in ensuring that service values can be effectively implemented through individuals with strong technical capacity and ethical character.

Types of HR competency development in organizations include behavioral-based competencies (behavioral competencies) and technical-based competencies (technical competencies). Behavioral competencies relate to attitudes, ethics, communication, and the ability to build productive work relationships. Values such as integrity, empathy, and emotional intelligence are part of these competencies (Wirawan & Firmani, 2024; Zuraidaning Tyas *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, technical competencies refer to the mastery of practical skills and professional knowledge that support work efficiency and include quality standards and regulations (Sumiati & Prawira, 2024; Rosmayati, 2022). In facing the demands of industry and digital transformation, the development of these two competency aspects is crucial to creating human resources who are not only technically competent, but also able to lead with a service approach and human values (Zebua, 2024).

Thus, the integration of servant leadership and competency-oriented human resource management serves as a strategic foundation for strengthening the competitiveness of cooperative organizations. Through this approach, organizations can develop leaders who are not only adaptive to change but also possess an authentic spirit of service in building inclusive and sustainable organizational communities.

## 3 | METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory design that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of values. Servant leadership in cooperative organizations in Kupang City. This approach was chosen because it can reveal the meaning, values, and dynamics of leadership from the subjective perspective of organizational actors. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and participant

observation of selected informants, which were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques based on the Miles *et al.* (2020) model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by filtering and grouping information from interviews, field notes, and relevant documents into important themes such as practices. Servant leadership, human resource development strategies, and employee experiences in a cooperative environment.

The reduced data is then presented systematically in the form of descriptive narratives, informant categorization tables, and direct quotations, to identify patterns and trends emerging from the field. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn by deeply exploring the meaning of the informants' experiences to develop a human resource development approach based on servant leadership values that is appropriate to the local cooperative context. The research subjects consisted of nine informants selected using the purposive sampling based on the relevance of roles, experience, and involvement in cooperative leadership, including Cooperative Treasurer, Cooperative Supervisor, General Manager, Head Office HR Manager, Branch Office Manager, Senior Employees, Junior Employees, and Cooperative Members.

The selection of informants considered comprehensive representation from various levels of the organization to obtain diverse perspectives on leadership practices. Informants from the leadership ranks, such as Treasurers and General Managers, have authority in strategic decision-making and the implementation of leadership values, while HR Managers and Branch Managers provide insights into HR management and leadership practices at the operational level. Meanwhile, Senior and Junior Employees provide longitudinal perspectives and prior experience in organizational leadership, while Cooperative Members represent the voices of those directly beneficiaries of the cooperative's services. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for an open exploration of informants' experiences and perspectives, while remaining within the framework of the research theme. Purposive sampling used to ensure that informants have relevant and in-depth information regarding the research focus. The number of informants is determined based on the principle data saturation or data saturation, which occurs when the information obtained no longer yields significant new findings. The primary focus of this research is not on the quantity of respondents, but rather on the depth of information that can enrich understanding of the phenomenon of servant leadership in cooperative human resource development.

## 4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 Servant Leadership as the Foundation of Human Resource Development

The research findings show that servant leadership has become the primary foundation of human resource management at KSP Talenta Sejahtera Bersama. Cooperative leaders consistently position themselves as servants to employees and members, prioritizing empathy, attention to personal needs, and individual empowerment. This approach creates a harmonious, participatory, and conducive work climate for shared growth. It focuses not only on achieving institutional targets but also emphasizes the development of individual character and potential within the organization. Servant leadership values have been proven to foster a healthy and sustainable work culture, transforming the cooperative into a space for humanistic and inclusive growth.

#### 4.1.2 The Active Role of Leaders in Learning and Empowerment

The study also found that leaders at KSP Talenta Sejahtera Bersama play an active role in facilitating employee learning and empowerment. Through strategies such as direct mentoring, internal training, regular coaching, and assigning real-life responsibilities, leaders encourage the development of both technical competencies and soft skills in employees. The experiential learning model is consistently implemented, ensuring that the learning process is not only based on theory but also on challenging and meaningful hands-on experiences. This approach provides space for employees, especially new ones, to lead, make decisions, and build confidence in a supportive work environment. This demonstrates that empowering leadership can foster sustainable human resource growth.

#### 4.1.3 Employee Experiences in a Servant Leadership Climate

Research findings reveal that employee work experiences in cooperative environments are significantly influenced by servant leadership practices. Employees feel valued, listened to, and supported in a variety of situations, including when navigating personal circumstances such as pregnancy or the initial adjustment period. Empathetic and open leadership strengthens loyalty, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of belonging to the organization. In this context, servant leadership has successfully fostered working relationships that are not only functional, but also emotional and social. An inclusive and caring work culture makes cooperatives a platform where employees can grow holistically as individuals and professionals.

#### 4.1.4 The Impact of Servant Leadership on Organizational Performance

The research findings demonstrate that servant leadership significantly contributes to improving cooperative performance, both in terms of service and finances. Leadership, which not only provides instructions but also provides role models, provides space for dialogue, and provides emotional support, successfully fosters a collective work spirit among employees. Employees become more disciplined, innovative, and responsible because they feel trusted and empowered. Furthermore, this approach also strengthens member loyalty, particularly through empathetic actions during challenging times such as the pandemic. Respect for the humanity and needs of members creates strong emotional bonds and maintains the continuity of the community. This demonstrates that servant leadership not only strengthens the internal organization but also enhances the long-term resilience of cooperatives.

#### 4.1.5 Research Findings

Responsible leadership is the primary foundation for human resource development at KSP Talenta Sejahtera Bersama. Cooperative leaders prioritize the values of service, empowerment, and personal attention to each individual within the organization. This leadership style creates a humanistic, participatory work environment that supports both professional and personal employee growth. Leaders not only target organizational performance but also prioritize capacity building and employee well-being as partners. Branch headquarter leaders actively participate in employee learning and empowerment. Strategy development is implemented through direct mentoring, tiered training based on competency needs, regular coaching, and empowering employees to develop leadership potential. The application of experiential learning principles encourages active learning through real-world work experiences. This model fosters self-confidence, broadens professional horizons, and enhances employee leadership skills. Employees feel emotional and professional support from leaders, especially when facing personal challenges or adapting to new tasks. Empathetic and open leadership fosters loyalty, increases work motivation, and strengthens the emotional connection between employees and the organization. A humanizing work environment fosters a sense of appreciation and trust, fostering higher morale.

The servant leadership-based human resource development model consists of three core components. The first component is leadership, which serves as the foundation of organizational culture, where leaders act as servants who support individual growth. The second component is experiential empowerment learning, which includes mentoring, training, coaching, and the assignment of responsibility as a means of development. The third component is the creation of a supportive and empathetic work environment that pays attention to the physical and psychological well-being of employees. This model strengthens the quality of human resources, encourages a collaborative work culture, and supports the overall goals of the organization.



Figure 1. Proposed Human Resource Development Model

## 4.2 Discussion

The study shows that the implementation of servant leadership at Talenta Sejahtera Bersama Cooperative has a significant impact on human resource development (HRD) and organizational performance. These findings align with several studies highlighting the importance of servant leadership in fostering better relationships between leaders and employees, as well as supporting growth and collective work spirit (Eva *et al.*, 2019; Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). One of the key findings is that servant leadership serves as the foundation for HR management at the cooperative. Leaders position themselves as servants to employees and members, prioritizing individual empowerment, personal needs, and growth. In this way, a harmonious and supportive work environment is created. This aligns with Greenleaf's (1970) principle that true leaders serve before leading, focusing on others' needs and group interests rather than personal or institutional concerns (Bhavani, 2024).

Leaders at the cooperative play an active role in developing employees' skills through activities such as mentoring, internal training, and challenging assignments. The research reveals that empowerment through experiential learning has significant benefits in developing both technical competencies and soft skills in employees. This is consistent with studies that show that direct involvement in work processes and active learning strengthens employee ownership of the organization (Armstrong & Stephen, 2010; Eva *et al.*, 2019). By giving employees opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility, leaders at the cooperative build strong self-confidence among team members.

The study reveals that employees' work experiences are greatly influenced by the servant leadership style. Employees feel valued, heard, and supported, especially when facing personal challenges. Empathetic and open leadership

enhances loyalty and intrinsic motivation to perform better. This is in line with research by Wase *et al.* (2020), which found that servant leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing job satisfaction and strengthening interpersonal relationships at work, thus supporting better performance and overall well-being of employees. Employees who feel valued and supported are more committed to organizational goals (Funga *et al.*, 2023; Dewi, 2024).

Servant leadership also contributes to improved organizational performance, both in terms of member service and financial outcomes. Leaders who lead by example, create opportunities for dialogue, and provide emotional support successfully foster a collective work spirit. These findings are consistent with studies by Ginting *et al.* (2024), which show that servant leadership builds a positive work climate that supports organizational success. Furthermore, the empathetic actions of the cooperative's leaders during difficult times, such as the pandemic, demonstrate how servant leadership helps maintain organizational stability and enhance member loyalty (Hadley, 2024; Roxas, 2020).

Based on the study findings, a servant leadership-based HR development model is proposed. This model consists of three key components: first, leadership that serves as the foundation for organizational culture, focusing on empowerment and individual growth; second, experiential learning through mentoring, training, and real responsibilities as means for employee development; and third, the creation of a supportive and empathetic work environment that attends to employees' physical and psychological well-being. This model is in line with HRD concepts that integrate both technical skills and behavioral competencies, such as empathy and emotional intelligence, to create a safe and productive work climate (Eva *et al.*, 2019; Armstrong & Stephen, 2010). By applying this model, Talenta Sejahtera Bersama Cooperative can not only enhance the quality of its human resources but also strengthen a collaborative work culture that is oriented toward achieving collective goals. This model provides a strategic foundation for the cooperative to maximize human resource potential, create servant-hearted future leaders, and lead the organization toward long-term success (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Pakpahan *et al.*, 2021).

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The overall results of this study indicate that the implementation of servant leadership by the leadership of the Talenta Sejahtera Bersama Cooperative in Kupang City is not only a managerial role, but has become the foundation of an organizational culture that emphasizes the values of humanity, service, and collaboration. Servant leadership is manifested in the form of empathy for the needs of members and employees, active involvement of leaders in addressing social dynamics, and the creation of an inclusive and supportive work climate. In the aspect of human resource development, a participatory approach implemented through mentoring, tiered training, coaching, and involvement in real projects has been proven to be able to increase employee confidence, responsibility, and ownership of the organization. The applied experiential learning model has integrated the strengthening of professional competencies with humanistic leadership values. This directly contributes to the formation of intrinsic motivation, long-term loyalty, and active involvement in the organization. These findings confirm that servant leadership not only strengthens the institutional structure of the cooperative but also forms a healthy, adaptive work ecosystem oriented towards the growth of the whole person in a dynamic local socio-economic context.

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