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Role of servant leadership in contemporary hospitality

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## Role of servant leadership in contemporary hospitality

**Purpose**—This study aims to determine the possible role of servant leadership (SL) in meliorating critical issues in the contemporary hospitality industry by synthesizing literature on SL, examining benefits, and deriving future research propositions.

**Design/methodology/approach**—A systematic literature review of SL in hospitality was conducted to analyze, categorize, and synthesize the state of research. A nomological framework of SL in hospitality was created, and research gaps were identified. Future directions and propositions were derived to investigate the antecedents of SL by applying the person-situation theoretical approach, and second, and to address contemporary challenges in the industry.

**Findings**—SL theory in hospitality is examined across various themes with focus on outcome effects related to firm performance, and across different cultures, with observed dominance in Asia. All analyses demonstrate the positive effects on employers and firms and thus confirm the relevance of adopting SL in hospitality. A notable gap in hospitality research is the lack of empirical investigation of SL antecedents. Such an investigation is crucial in promoting related behaviors.

**Practical implications**—This study identifies the benefits of SL, especially in addressing contemporary issues, such as sustainability, talent shortage, competition, growing demand for experience, and retention of hospitality graduates. Recommendations are elaborated for hospitality educators and industry managers to revise leadership practices.

**Originality/value**—This study is the first to review SL in hospitality and determine its role in ameliorating critical issues in the field.

**Keywords** Servant leadership, Leadership development, Human resources, Hospitality education, Hospitality industry, Contemporary issues

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

### Introduction

The rapidly growing hospitality industry is facing several challenges. Sustainability is one of the most alarming issue for every sector (Legrand *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the heightened competition resulting from the increase in sharing economies and related effects, such as congestion and overtourism, cause environmental problems and dissatisfaction of local communities (Martín *et al.*, 2018). On the demand side, customer expectations are raising, more personalized and technology-oriented services are required (Solnet *et al.*, 2016). On the supply side, retention and recruitment of talented staff have become the most crucial problem (Goh and Lee, 2018) in every hospitality sector due to the growing number of airlines, hotels, restaurants, and related services. The International Air Transport Association forecasts that jobs in the airline industry will increase to 100 million by 2037 (IATA, 2018). Moreover, labor relations, such as employee strikes caused by low job satisfaction, are frequent issues, especially in the airline industry. These issues lead to an increased need for trained and motivated future workforce, but hospitality graduates often do not pursue a career in the hospitality sector (Richardson, 2009).

The future of the industry is in the hands of Generation Y and Z graduates. Generation Y is affirmed to be different from previous cohorts by demonstrating more socially and environmentally conscious behavior, as reflected in their lifestyle choices and the higher value they place on the image of employers (Goh *et al.*, 2017). According to Park and Levy (2014), corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices could attract employees with good qualities and engage them to attain improved

performance and find meaning in their work. Chen and Choi (2008) argued that compared with previous generations, millennials in hospitality give more importance to their relationship with supervisors. In addition, Walsh and Taylor (2007) stated that Generation Y hospitality professionals pursue job opportunities where they can see growth prospects, develop skills, and acquire decision-making power. For Generation Z, Goh and Lee (2018) believed that job satisfaction and career prospects inspire hospitality graduates more than salary does. Hence, preparing new generations to the challenges faced by the industry is crucial, and HR managers must be aware of and anticipate the changing features and needs of the new potential workforce. Therefore, education and HR management play an important role in the future of the industry. Organizations need to offer hospitality not only to guests but also to employees to create a nurturing environment where they are respected, rewarded, and encouraged to grow (King, 1995). The types of leadership and policies implemented in a hospitality organization have important implications on the service delivered.

These social trends pave the way for the growing need of a leadership that promotes ethical behavior and employee appreciation. Among different leadership styles, the concept of servant leadership (SL) is strongly based on prioritizing employee needs and extending its caring vision to the community. Eva *et al.* (2019, pp. 114) recently provided the following definition of SL.

“Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community.”

This definition comprises the three key features of SL, “its motive, mode, and mindset” (Eva *et al.*, 2019). A true leader has a holistic approach to work with the primary motivation to serve others, which is then paired with the vision of a leader (Spears, 1996). The mode of SL concentrates on empowering followers, involving them in decision making, and constantly supporting their development. In principle, SL incorporates only positive values, such as trust-based relation between the leader and followers, honest and fair treatment, and values that benefit work relations and organizational life (Russell and Stone, 2002). This premise extends to a caring behavior toward the community and environment and envisions the desired ethical behavior. As a consequence of a healthy organization that is primarily concerned with employees, SL aims to provide benefits to the company, community, and society (Northouse, 2018). The notion of SL was first introduced by Greenleaf (1970) in his essay, “The Servant as Leader.” Greenleaf accumulated extensive experience in management, but his real inspiration in conceptualizing SL was the novel of Herman Hesse titled “Journey to the East.” In this story, the character Leo is a servant whose disappearance causes malfunctions in the group. When Leo returned, his caring and guiding spirit revealed that he was a leader all along.

Several theories support the concept of SL, such as social learning (Bandura, 1977), social exchange (Blau, 1964), and social identity (Tajfel, 1978). These theories assume that employees acquire and imitate the behavior of their leader, whom they perceive as a role model. Once members self-identify with the organization, they behave and deliver high-quality work in return for the treatment they receive. Greenleaf’s work gained attention from institutions and firms, which eventually incorporated the philosophy into their mission statements, guidelines, and trainings. Several scholars explored the topic from theoretical perspectives by developing frameworks and measurement tools to determine the essence and distinguishing characteristics of SL from other leadership styles (van Dierendonck, 2011). Brownell (2010) was the first to examine the topic in relation to hospitality, particularly in education, and induced a new research stream in hospitality journals. When defining SL, hospitality scholars refer to Greenleaf first then to Brownell. The topic

has received growing attention from the academia and industry by tackling relevant issues in human resource management through empirical analyses.

To obtain an improved understanding of SL in hospitality and its role in addressing contemporary challenges, the present study aims to answer the following research questions.

- (1) What is the state of SL research in hospitality literature? In particular, what sectors of hospitality are analyzed, what variables are investigated, and what measurements and methods are used?
- (2) What are the research gaps and consequently future research directions? Specifically, how can SL address contemporary issues in hospitality?

Seeking to answer these questions, this study introduces the most popular examples from the industry and provides a systematic review of published studies on the topic. Research gaps are identified and new research propositions are supported by first applying person–situation interactions as a theoretical approach. Moreover, contemporary and future challenges in hospitality (Solnet *et al.*, 2016) are addressed by review results and future research propositions. The significance of this study is twofold. First, while the attention on SL in hospitality in literature and the business world shows an increasing trend, a systematic literature review has not been conducted. By analyzing prior knowledge on the topic and identifying research gaps, this study offers important future research directions for the academia. Second, by concentrating on the effect of SL on contemporary issues, this study tackles the most important concerns of industry practitioners.

### **SL in the hospitality industry**

Hospitality is characterized by the distinct relationship between hosts and guests, which sets this industry apart from other services (Hemmington, 2007). King (1995) defined commercial hospitality in terms of this specific relationship that is based on the host's caring and pleasing behavior to fulfill guests' needs and wants, and it aims for guest satisfaction and loyalty. In this context, employees have to manage their emotions to identify with their service role. Hemmington (2007) described hospitality as a staged experience performed by hosts in a generous and hospitable setting. Hence, while numerous Fortune 100 companies claim to practice SL, its implementation in hospitality is especially desired (Brownell, 2010). The most well-known examples are the Marriott and The Ritz Carlton Hotels, Starbucks, and Southwest Airlines, all of which credit SL for their success (McGee-Cooper and Looper, 2001). Starbucks included SL in its organizational culture, which thrives on empowerment and is supported by the relationship-driven approach of the company (Behar, 2007). The widely known and established motto of The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C., is, "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen" (The Ritz-Carlton Golden Standards, 2017). Marriott Hotels abide by the motto, "Take care of the associates, the associates will take care of the guests, and the guests will come back again and again" (Gallagher, 2015). Employee-oriented leadership works well for both enterprises. Bill Marriott believes that a "happy workforce" is the key and that this practice relates to the company's lower than the industry-level turnover rate (Gallagher, 2015).

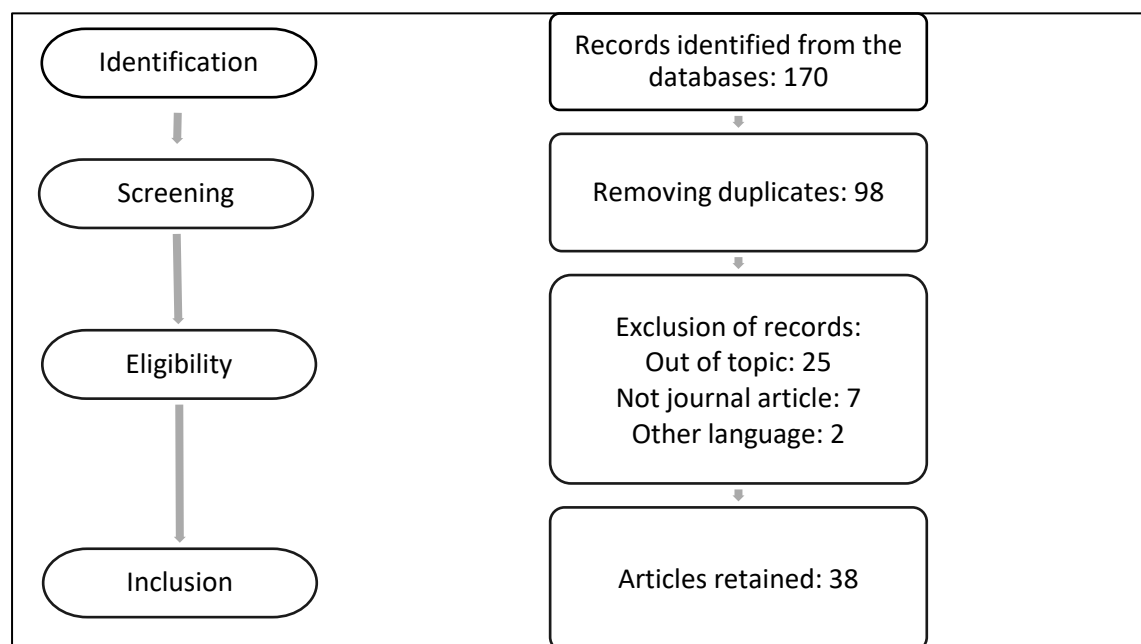
Banyan Tree Hotels emphasize employee recognition, which is also embodied by their service charge policy (Zolkifi, 2013). Moreover, the company has received several awards for their commitment to CSR. The hotel is loyal to its ethos "Embracing the environment and empowering people," which creates values and develops the communities where they operate (Banyan Tree Global Foundation, 2016). By recognizing the importance of SL in hospitality, The Cornell Hotel School introduced an online certificate program on "Practicing servant leadership" (Cornell online, 2018). The program

targets leaders and managers with service contacts. The person responsible for the course is Judi Brownell, the pioneer of SL research in hospitality.

## Review of journal publications on SL in hospitality

This review aims to provide an overview of the current state of SL research in hospitality and identify gaps for future research. In line with the indications of Yang *et al.* (2017), a search was conducted in seven journal databases to ensure comprehensiveness. The databases were EBSCO Host, Emerald, ProQuest, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science, and the process ended in February 2019. No additional time limits were experienced, and each paper was considered regardless of its year of publication. The following command allowed the researchers to identify articles focusing on SL and different hospitality-related businesses in all seven databases: ("servant leader" OR "servant leadership") AND servant AND (hotel OR hospitality OR accommodation OR airlines OR travel OR tourism OR restaurant OR catering OR event OR recreation). Figure 1 illustrates the detailed search process through different phases, which was adopted from Moher *et al.* (2009). In the first step, 170 papers were identified from the seven databases and screened to eliminate duplicates. Thereafter, the following eligibility criteria were applied: (1) the focus is on SL in a hospitality-related organization; (2) the articles are published in academic journals; and (3) the English language is used.

Figure 1. Literature search process adapted from Moher *et al.* (2009)



Finally, 38 papers published between 2010 and 2019 were included in the subsequent analysis. The increasing popularity of the topic in academia is evident (Table 1). While 17 studies appeared in management and leadership journals, the majority of the papers belonged to hospitality outlets. The *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* and *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* accounted for the largest number of publications, with 6 and 4 publications, respectively. In line with the classification of Ottenbacher *et al.* (2009), Table 1 categorizes the articles according to hospitality sectors. Most of the articles focused on the accommodation industry (n=22), followed by foodservices (n=6), including one study with a shared sample from the two sectors. None of the studies were related to attractions.

Table 1. Publication details of SL research in hospitality

			Field of hospitality							
Journal name			Lodging	Foodservice	Travel		Conventions	Leisure	Hospitality Education	Total
					Transportation	Travel services				
Academy of Management Journal				1						1
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly			3					1		4
European Research Studies			1							1
Frontiers in Psychology			1							1
Indian Journal of Public Health Research and Development			1							1
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management			5		1					6
International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Admin.				1						1
International Journal of Hospitality Management			1							1
Journal of Air Transport Management					1					1
Journal of Business Ethics			1	1						2
Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education								1		1
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management			1							1
Journal of Managerial Psychology			1	1						2
Journal of Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty			1							1
Journal of Park & Recreation Administration								1		1
Journal of Sustainable Tourism						2				2
Leadership							1			1
Leadership & Organization Development Journal			1							1
Nmims Management Review					1					1
Nonprofit Management and Leadership							1			1
Ramon Llull Journal of Applied Ethics			1							1
Social Behavior and Personality			1							1
Sport, Business and Management							1			1
The International Journal of Human Resource Management				1						1
Tourism Management			3							3
Total			21.5	5.5	3	2	3	1	2	38
Year of publication	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 until February	
Number of papers	2	1	2	3	5	6	5	9	5	

Except for Brownell's (2010) conceptual article, all papers relied on empirical analysis, with the geographical scope being concentrated in Asia, especially China, and in the USA (Table 2). The

prevalence of these geographical regions shows a particular interest in their business culture, given that the concept of SL was first introduced in the USA. Moreover, in line with Sun and Wang (2009), the appearance of SL in Chinese media and research is recurrent. Europe was analyzed only in four articles conducted in Spain. None of the studies related to lodging were conducted in the USA. In the sample, quantitative investigations accounted for the majority (n=32), while all qualitative studies (n=5) were conducted in the USA. The quantitative papers applied techniques to test the relationships among constructs mainly through structural equation modeling and hierarchical regressions. The latter was applied when relations among variables were tested on multiple levels, such as leaders, employees, and customers. Most of the articles collected the sample from only employees or supervisors and followers, and only three papers included customers.

Table 2. Samples and locations of qualitative and quantitative articles

			Number of articles
Qualitative	Country/Region	USA	5
	Sample	Employees	3
		Leader	1
		Leader and employees	1
Quantitative	Country/Region	China (Including Macao)	9
		Spain	4
		USA	4
		Taiwan	3
		Turkey	3
		Iran	2
		South Korea	2
		Vietnam	2
		India	1
		Middle-East	1
		Northern Cyprus	1
	Sample	Employees	17
		Supervisors and followers	11
		Employees and customers	2
		Leader and managers	1
		Supervisors, followers and customers	1

#### *Topics and variables under investigation*

For each sector, the outcome, mediator, and moderator (if any) variables were investigated.

#### *Lodging*

The majority of SL papers dealt with the accommodation industry (n = 22). All papers in this category relied on a quantitative analysis. The main topics analyzed were related to employee behavior toward service delivery. Among the behavioral outcomes, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was frequently investigated (Wu *et al.*, 2013; Hsiao *et al.*, 2015; Kwak and Kim, 2015; Zhao *et al.*, 2016; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2017; Qiu and Dooley, 2019; Tuan, 2019). OCB refers to the voluntary engagement of employees in work-related activities beyond their job description. OCB was studied for internal and external stakeholders, namely, coworkers and hotel guests, respectively. The effect

on extra role behavior was also observed at the group level by Linuesa-Langreo *et al.* (2017). Connected notions, such as interpersonal citizenship behavior (Bavik *et al.*, 2017) and helping behavior (Zou *et al.*, 2015), were positively influenced by SL.

Regarding follower job attitudes, the main research stream dealt with the attachment and dedication of employees to the organization and to the work itself. In this context, the investigations determined positive effects on organizational commitment and work engagement (Ling *et al.*, 2017; Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019) and negative effects on turnover intention (Zhao *et al.*, 2016; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2017) and lateness attitude (Bouzari and Karatepe, 2017). Performance-related outcome variables reflected in the overall hotel evaluation and the actual service delivered to customers were analyzed from diverse aspects. Huang *et al.* (2016) investigated firm performance in relation to SL through the moderation of competitive intensity, but it was measured using CEOs' evaluation instead of actual financial indicators.

In terms of service performance, SL positively influenced the following variables: creativity at the group level (Linuesa-Langreo *et al.*, 2016), innovative work (Topcu *et al.*, 2015), service-sales ambidexterity (Bouzari and Karatepe, 2017), service failure prevention and recovery (Ghosh and Khatri, 2017), service quality (Koyuncu *et al.*, 2014; Ling *et al.*, 2016; Qiu and Dooley, 2019), customer service performance (Linuesa-Langreo *et al.*, 2017), and work performance (Ling *et al.*, 2017; Ye *et al.* 2019). Positive relations with SL were proven significant with all of the variables but often only through the mediation of other variables. Lastly, two papers investigated the effect of SL on customers through the mediating effect of OCB. In particular, Kwak and Kim (2015) studied customer perception of service quality, and Hsiao *et al.* (2015) analyzed value co-creation by surveying customer participation and citizenship behavior.

Investigation of mediating variables is crucial in fully or partially explaining the relation between SL and the outcome variables. Mediation of organizational climate was included in six papers. Service climate was identified as an important mediator between SL and service-oriented behavior (Ling *et al.*, 2016), customer service performance (Linuesa-Langreo *et al.*, 2017), and firm performance (Huang *et al.*, 2016). The leader creates the service climate within the company by setting policies and practices shared among employees and relayed to customer service. Linuesa-Langreo *et al.* (2016) investigated empowerment climate, which refers to the work environment that emphasizes the support of followers in their actions and decision-making process. As a perceived trust in leader by followers, trust climate was proven to be stronger under SL than under authentic leadership and consequently exerted a positive effect on followers' work outcomes (Ling *et al.*, 2017). Lastly, ethical climate perception mediated innovative work in the analysis of Topcu *et al.* (2015).

Social exchanges are denoted to the relationships between leader and member or among team members. This concept was analyzed in the process of mediating OCB with the moderation of followers' sensitivity to favorable treatment by others (Wu *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, supervisor-specific avoidance and identification with supervisor mediated OCB toward coworkers and turnover intentions (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Middle-level SL mediated the relation between top-level SL and employee service quality through service climate, which suggests that leader's behavior is conveyed through direct supervisors of employees (Ling *et al.*, 2016). Followers' job-related attitude and behavior as mediators were studied through identification with the organization (Zhao *et al.*, 2016), job crafting (Bavik *et al.*, 2017), service-oriented behavior (Ling *et al.*, 2016), harmonious passion (Ye *et al.*, 2019), and positive psychological capital (PsyCap), such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (Hsiao *et al.*, 2015; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2017). SL strengthens a person's positive thinking and self-development; hence, it is positively related to PsyCap. Bouzari and Karatepe (2017) corroborated that PsyCap fully mediated the relation with intention to remain, lateness attitude, service-sales ambidexterity, and service-oriented OCB. Hsiao *et al.* (2015) delved further and linked



the mediation of PsyCap with OCB to customer value co-creation in a hierarchical model. Lastly, group social capital, which is defined by the shared resources attained through relationships among employees, positively mediated group citizenship behavior (Linuesa-Langreo *et al.*, 2018).

#### *Foodservice*

Six papers analyzed restaurant businesses in relation to SL. The overarching theme in these papers is related to employee engagement and negative intention or behavior, such as turnover and deviance. These issues are crucial for restaurant businesses, and the application of SL seems to provide solutions for these problems. The qualitative analysis of Carter and Baghurst (2014) affirmed the positive effect of SL on loyalty and commitment, with a stronger relationship toward co-workers than toward the supervisor. Liden *et al.* (2014b) investigated the effect of SL on serving culture that mediated the relationship with store performance. Secondary data from the headquarters of the restaurant chain were used to measure the effect on store performance. The data included assessment from customers and internal and external audits.

At the individual level, employee identification with the store was validated to have an additional positive effect on in-role performance, creativity, and customer service behavior and a negative effect on turnover intention. Similarly, Jang and Kandampully (2018) explored the effects on turnover intention through the full mediation of affective organizational commitment. Peng *et al.* (2016) confirmed the indirect negative effect of SL and employee deviance through the mediation of psychological contract breach. Employees' good perception of their leader suppressed their ineffective behavior when they believe that the mutual job obligations of employers and employees are fulfilled. In addition, as an independent variable, procedural justice climate that refers to the perceived fairness, was investigated in relation to deviance behavior in the same study. Particularly, they found a stronger effect of these relationships among employees, attributing causation of events to other sources than themselves due to the moderation of external causality attribution. The sample used for foodservice studies included only employees, except for Chen and Peng (2019) who additionally interviewed managers to test service performance.

#### *Travel - transportation*

Three papers reflected on the airline industry. The satisfaction of employees was the focus of these articles. According to Kurian and Muzumdar (2017), customer satisfaction in the aviation sector scored one of the lowest among US industries. In addition, the competitive environment and consequently the retention and satisfaction of employees are crucial issues for the industry. Therefore, Karatepe and Talebzadeh (2016) investigated the strengthening effect of SL on a person's positive thinking and self-development through PsyCap. The mediation was confirmed with service recovery performance and life satisfaction directly and indirectly through work engagement. Kurian and Muzumdar (2017) investigated sympathy between employer and employees and among coworkers as a mediator of job satisfaction. Ilkhanizadeh *et al.* (2018) found that the mediation of trust in organization affects job, career, and life satisfaction. These papers only interviewed employees from Iran, the USA and Turkey.

#### *Travel – travel services*

Two papers represent the tourism sector in SL research, and both are published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism. Indeed, sustainability is a primary challenge in the sector. McGhee *et al.* (2015) conducted three case studies on rural community-based tourism development under different leadership styles. The practice of SL is prevalent in one of these studies and reveals the leader's initiatives in involving the local community through craft and heritage-based tourism activities. Tuan (2018) analyzed the trickle-down effect of leader behavior to customers through data collected from tourists and tour guides. Environmentally specific SL behavior moderated between CSR and employees OCB for the environment, which further mediated the relation with tourists' citizenship

behavior for the environment. This article is the first to affirm the role of the leader's behavior in conveying CSR involvement to employees and customers.

#### *Conventions*

Three papers were published on SL and events. The qualitative analyses of Parris and Peachey (2012, 2013), in association with the National Kidney Foundation in USA, investigated how events inspired and achieved stakeholders' servant behavior. For the Surf Festival, the interviews ranged from the founder and board members to sponsors and volunteers. The findings confirmed the founder as a servant leader who motivated volunteers by creating a shared vision of helping others, establishing a caring community, and empowering volunteers with freedom and resources to practice SL themselves. The study on Transplant Games involved a longitudinal analysis of team members with different roles and analyzed the process of engaging members and creating an SL community. SL behavior was found to be especially suitable for the non-profit sector. Leveraging on social capital theory, the network of relationships can facilitate collective actions. Volunteerism and selfless acts play a crucial role in these organizations and motivate SL behavior. Megheircouni (2018) analyzed sports, cultural, and personal events in Middle East countries to determine the effect of SL on employee satisfaction. Differentiated effects were found among the event types, suggesting the applicability of SL in sports and personal events.

#### *Recreation*

Chung *et al.* (2010) explored job satisfaction among employees working in US national parks. Two dimensions of SL, namely, trust in leader and leader support, were studied on job satisfaction through the partial mediation of procedural justice. A large sample size ( $n=6,648$ ) was obtained through a nationwide data collection regarding federal employees' attitudes. The results differentiated between employees in different positions. Compared with non-supervisors, supervisors demonstrate greater trust in their leaders and perceive stronger support, consequently demonstrating greater job satisfaction.

#### *Hospitality education*

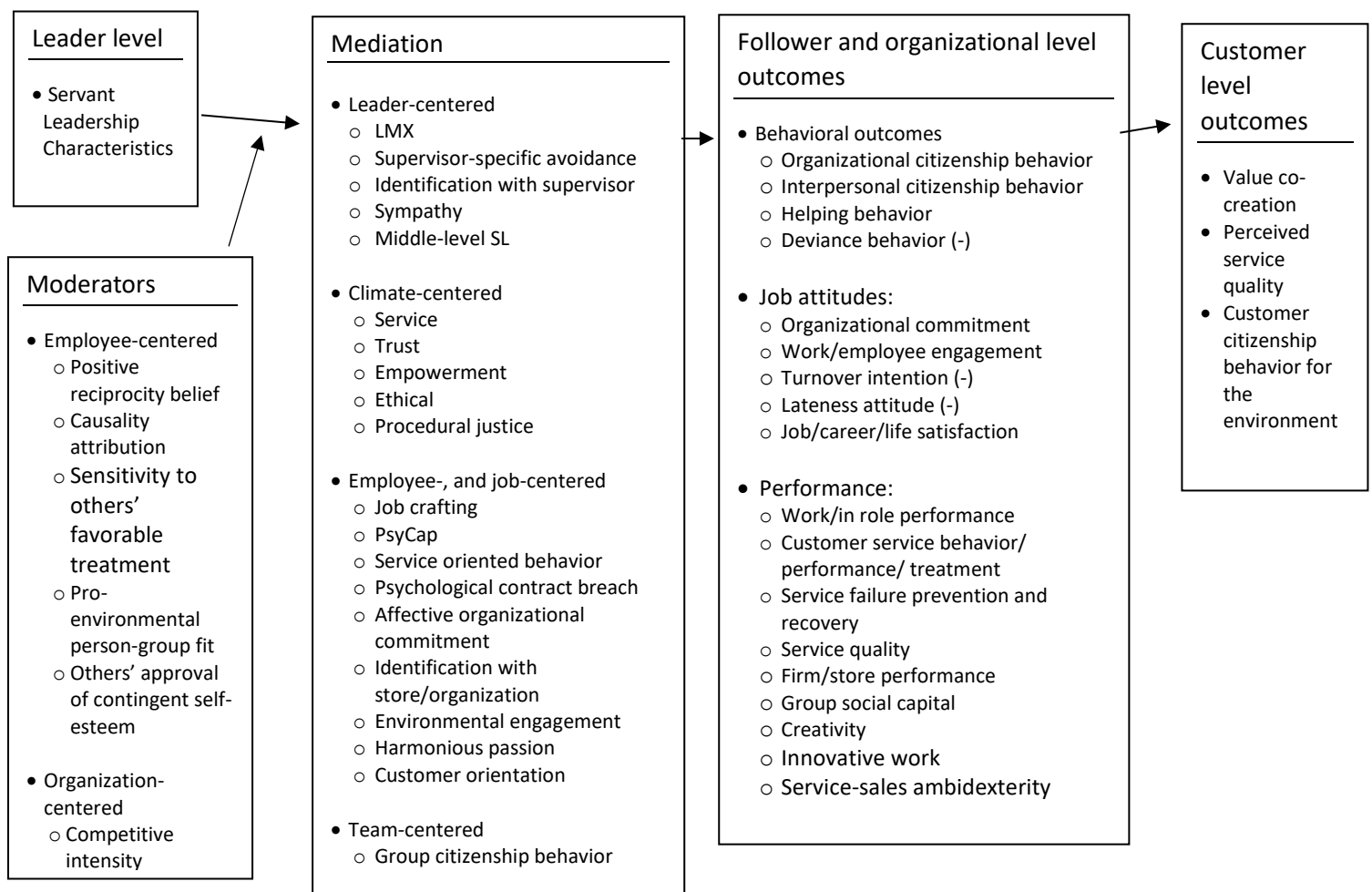
Brownell (2010) pioneered the concept of SL in hospitality by determining the role of hospitality education in enhancing SL. Her suggested steps include the admission of students with correct ethical standards, provision of opportunities for self-reflection, incorporation of service learning into the curriculum, and role modeling of academic staff. Williams *et al.* (2018) examined mentoring programs for assistant professors in hospitality schools. The phenomenological study relied on interviews with professors at different stages of their tenures. The traits of SL were revealed in effective mentorship through mentors' psychological support and shared experiences. Consequently, mentees would perform better in their teaching duties and serve effectively the students of hospitality schools.

#### *Summary of topics and variables under investigation*

Representing a new branch in hospitality, most of the analyzed articles grounded their research by referring to foundation papers developed by management scholars. These experts framed the theoretical background of the articles under investigation and provided evidence on many of the tested relations among variables outside the hospitality industry. The fundamental difference in hospitality research lies in customer orientation and consequently in the inclusion of customer interviews. Analysis of variables related to customer experience is novel in SL research and goes beyond the structure proposed by less recent reviews (van Dierendonck, 2011). Eva *et al.* (2019) included customer-oriented performance outcomes under the heading of performance outcomes in the nomological network of SL research. However, in hospitality, research outcomes are oriented toward customers, but the effects were also measured from customers. Consistent with Kwak and Kim (2015), this effect was assumed in literature but has been rarely tested. This advancement in

hospitality can be explained by the high importance devoted to customer service due to the nature of the industry. The proven trickle-down effect of SL on customers, through the mediation of follower outcomes, increases the importance of the phenomenon. Figure 2 outlines the nomological network of SL in hospitality research following the framework provided by Eva *et al.* (2019). The figure contains the results of the analyzed articles in hospitality and divided into moderators, mediators, outcome effects on followers, firm, and additionally customers. However, the figure does not include antecedent variables due to their absence in hospitality research. The negative signs in brackets explain the negative relationship between SL and the variable.

Figure 2. The nomological network of SL research in hospitality following the framework of Eva *et al.* (2019)



Few papers included moderators in the analyzed relationships. While mediating variables explain the relationship between SL and outcome effects, moderators influence the mediation between variables. Moderators can disclose the circumstances under which SL can be effective and the conditions that impact the effect of mediators. The moderators used in the studies were either centered on employees or the organization. The mediating effects between the independent variable (SL) and outcome effects were categorized into four groups, namely, Climate-, Leader-, Employee/Job-, and Team-centered. The leader initially creates a positive climate in the workplace built on trust, empowerment, and service orientation, as analyzed in the hospitality papers. Social exchanges between employees and leaders are high in quality, which motivates followers to be highly committed to the company and engaged in their job.

Table 3. SL scales applied in quantitative articles

SL scales		Dimensions	Items	SL characteristics (van Dierendonck, 2011)						Number of articles applied it
				Empowering, developing people	Humility	Authenticity	Interpersonal acceptance	Providing direction	Stewardship	
Lytle <i>et al.</i> (1998)		1	6	x	x	-	x	x	-	2
Dennis and Winston (2003)		3	23	x	x			x		1
Erhart (2004)		1	14	x	x	-	-	x	x	10
Dennis and Bocarnea (2005)		5	42	x	x	-	x	x	-	1
Liden <i>et al.</i> (2008, 2015)		7 (1)	28 (7)	x	x	-	x	x	x	5 + 5
Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011)		8	30	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
Reed <i>et al.</i> (2011)		5	25	-	x	-	x	-	x	1
Winston and Fields (2015)		1	10	-	x	x	x	-	-	1
Ling <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Top-level leadership	6	24	-	x	-	-	x	x	2
	Mid-level leadership	7	28	x	x	-	x	-	x	1
Choi (2018)		7	22	x	-	-	x	x	x	1
Qiu and Dooley (2019)		6	24	x	x	-	x	x	x	1

Several outcomes were investigated at the follower level, out of which a list of benefits of SL can also be derived. Employees are likely to help coworkers and possess OCB under SL management. As they become service oriented, they are likely to deliver improved service quality and be involved in service recovery. On the personal side, their way of thinking is influenced positively, and they feel constantly developed, which helps achieve satisfaction and reduce the intention to quit. SL eventually exerts a positive outcome on firm/store performance. The results are measurable from the customer side with a high perception of service quality, value co-creation, and customer citizenship behavior for the environment. The latter is also embodied by giving feedback to employees and promoting the company outside the organization.

#### *SL measurements in hospitality in quantitative applications*

This section provides a comparison of the scales used in the quantitative articles. All of them were designed to be filled by followers to evaluate their leader. Scales are distinguished by the characteristics and levels of SL they measure, their unidimensional or multidimensional structure, and their reliability. Scale selection depends on the purpose of the study, the length of the survey, and the type of analysis the researcher plans to undertake. A multi-dimensional scale can provide a complex understanding of the construct and can capture its latent elements. However, the length of the survey becomes significantly longer with the additional number of questions. Hence, the implementation of unidimensional scales is easier (van Dierendonck, 2011) and can help reduce respondents' fatigue; however, as a tradeoff, it offers only an approximation, and the influence of different dimensions cannot be distinguished and measured. Liden *et al.* (2015) found small and reliable scales are efficient if the focus is on measuring global SL. Six key characteristics of SL (empowering and developing people, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship) should be captured in its measurement according to van Dierendonck (2011). Table 3 provides an overview of the scales applied in hospitality research.

Regarding unidimensional scales, the scale of Ehrhart (2004) was applied by the third of the quantitative studies. This 14-item scale concentrated mainly on ethical behavior and giving priority to matters of followers. The six-item unidimensional scale of Lytle *et al.* (1998) is the oldest and shortest in the analysis and was applied in two papers. The items are related to service quality and the management's involvement in it and are restricted to measuring the care, vision, and participative elements of SL. The scale of Winston and Fields (2015), which was applied by Linuesa-Langreo *et al.* (2018), is a 10-item unidimensional scale that claims to measure the essence of SL behavior.

With regard to multilevel assessments, the scale of Liden *et al.* (2008) received the most application in hospitality (n=5). The unidimensional version of the same scale with only seven items, which were the highest loading items of each dimension of the previous scale, was equally popular (n=5). The SL assessments of Dennis and Winston (2003), Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), and Reed *et al.* (2011) relied on three, five, and five dimensions, respectively, and were utilized by one hospitality paper each. Due to the fewer dimensions, these studies captured less characteristics of SL. Reed *et al.* (2011) reasoned the exclusion of certain factors by facilitating a clear construct measurement based on the factors' presence in the measurements of other leadership styles.

While previous instruments were developed by management scholars, the three most recent scales in Table 3 were created by hospitality researchers. Ling *et al.* (2016) developed a new scale in hospitality to measure SL at top- and middle-levels. This division between levels and characteristics was criticized to be unnecessary by Qiu and Dooley (2019). The scale of Choi (2008) in Korean hotel setting lacks of a detailed explanation and does not fully cover SL characteristics. Qiu and Dooley (2019) designed the most recent scale for SL research in China.

Authenticity is the least measured characteristic of SL by these scales, whereas humility is captured by all of them. Among the main stream scales used in hospitality research, those of Liden *et al.* (2008, 2014b) and Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) are the most recommended by Eva *et al.* (2019) due to their robust psychometric validity. Among the scales developed by hospitality researchers, Ling *et al.* (2016) and Qiu and Dooley (2019) are the most comprehensive, however, they pose limitations. Several researchers have modified these scales according to the purpose of their research, although such a revision should be done with caution. While the scale can be appropriate for the research content, its validity requires reassessment.

### **New research approaches and propositions**

This section provides a comprehensive overview of future research possibilities of SL in hospitality derived from the research gaps in previous work, thereby offering useful indications for researchers who aim to further investigate the topic. The first new approach is outlined in line with Sharma and Kirkman (2017) by applying the person–situation interactions approach. Second, pertaining to contemporary issues in hospitality, prior findings and additional future research needs are demonstrated.

#### *New research line 1: Antecedents*

The antecedents of SL are under-investigated in literature (Liden *et al.*, 2014a) and nonexistent in hospitality. Eva *et al.* (2019) reviewed 285 studies and found that only 11 of them tested the antecedents of SL behavior. According to person–situation interactionist theory (Michel, 1977), individual behavior is affected by personal and situational factors. Therefore, this study argues the

importance of investigating antecedents of SL in hospitality from personal (in particular, culture and education) and situational (hospitality related) factors.

### *Culture*

Analysis of SL from a cultural perspective could produce interesting findings because the hospitality industry is characterized by multinational companies and international guests and employees. Javidan *et al.* (2006) provided the theory and empirical analysis through a GLOBE study for differences in leadership based on culture. Testa (2007) articulated that cultural proximity between leader and follower affects their work relations and customer service. Dimensions in measuring SL vary in different cultures (Mittal and Dorfman, 2012); while egalitarianism and empowerment are key features in Nordic and European cultures, empathy and humility are endorsed among Asian leaders. Chinese SL was differentiated from American by the magnitude of significance among constructs depending on cultural values (Liden, 2012). Sun and Wang (2009) adjusted the measurement of SL to the Chinese culture and claimed that the desire for and existence of SL are rooted in culture and politics. This review found that Asian, especially Chinese, dominance exists among hospitality publications. In fact, SL scale developments in hospitality were based on Asian countries.

Proposition 1: The cultural background of leaders, employees, and customers affect the delivery, outcome, and perception of SL in hospitality.

### *Education*

The direct effect of education on SL has not been proven empirically yet. Liden *et al.* (2014a) called to determine if personality or training is more influential antecedent of SL because whether leadership can be effectively taught and acquired has been a crucial issue in management studies. According to the leadership development theory of Brungradt (1997), college leadership programs positively reinforce related behavior. Moreover, several hospitality scholars (Hsiao *et al.*, 2015; Ling *et al.*, 2016) suggested to investigate the effect of training and management development programs on SL. To the authors' knowledge, only Lohrey (2016) provided evidence that SL can be successfully learned and applied through business simulation. Nevertheless, SL practices in education are present in literature in three levels, including curriculum (Brownell, 2010), teaching style (Bowman, 2005), and school administration (Crippen, 2012). The inclusion of SL as a subject in the curriculum provides knowledge on the type of leadership. Its presence in teaching style and school administration enables students to experience the benefits of this specific leadership as followers during their studies. Industry professionals give the highest importance to leadership courses in the hospitality management curriculum (Gursoy *et al.*, 2012). This study proposes to investigate the effect of hospitality education on SL from three sources, namely, organizational structure, teaching style, and curricular activities. Increasing the number of servant leaders is beneficial for employees, customers, companies, and the environment. Therefore, fostering the education of servant leaders can considerably influence how the future managers of the industry will deal with and act upon ethical issues in the work environment.

Proposition 2: Formal leadership education and leadership training in hospitality have a positive effect on SL behavior.

### *Situational factors*

Sharma and Kirkman (2017) suggested the effect of leader job stressors among situational factors. The characteristics of hospitality work (working hours, customer orientation) can increase the stress level of employees. According to O'Neill and Davis (2011), hospitality managers experience more job stressors than their employees. While stress could reduce the positive attitude of leaders toward employees, it might trigger the need to include subordinates in decision making.

Proposition 3: Situational factors related to the hospitality industry (specific job stressors) affect SL behavior.

*New research line 2: Variables in relation to contemporary and future issues in hospitality*

This study does not claim that SL can solve all current and future problems in the industry. Instead, it aims to demonstrate the role of SL in ameliorating some of the issues. Table 4 summarizes issues derived from Solnet *et al.* (2016) with the response of SL research articles in hospitality. In the last column, further research suggestions are provided for the topic. The studies corroborated that they aim to solve critical issues affecting the hospitality industry. Nevertheless, room for further research exists in each sector.

Table 4. Key challenges in hospitality

Key challenge	Answer from SL literature	Suggested future research
Sustainability	<i>Tourism sector:</i> CSR engagement of tour guides and tourists, community involvement in creating tourism products <i>Hotel sector:</i> Environmental engagement of employees	Environmental practices of SL in different sectors of hospitality, customer related effects
Growing demand for experience	<i>Hotel sector:</i> Customer value co-creation, creativity, innovative work, service delivery	Analyzing customer reviews, other customer experience related variables
Demographic changes – aging customers	<i>Hotel sector:</i> OCB towards customers	Customization in service delivery
Competition - Growth of peer-to-peer market	<i>Hotel sector:</i> firm performance, OCB towards customers	Guest loyalty
Talented staff retention and recruitment	<i>Restaurant sector:</i> Work engagement and lower turnover intention	Effects of motivational variables, incentives, promotional and monetary awards, trainings
	<i>Airline sector:</i> Employee satisfaction	
	<i>Hotel sector:</i> Org. commitment, intention to remain	
	<i>Recreation sector:</i> Job satisfaction of employees	
	<i>Event sector:</i> Job satisfaction, motivation of stakeholders to pursue SL behavior	
Hospitality graduates industry retention	<i>Hosp. education:</i> SL inclusion in curriculum and staff relations	Effects of SL at 3 levels in hospitality education on graduates industry engagement

The hospitality industry is affected by environmental issues; at the same time, it contributes to this critical problem. Therefore, sustainability initiatives must be embraced in all sectors. Thus far, only limited studies in tourism have investigated the relation of sustainability initiatives to SL. Tuan (2018) showed that leaders influence customer perception through employees' behavior. Employee training for energy-efficient behavior is required to induce customer awareness and action.

Proposition 4: SL has a positive effect on sustainable initiatives for the community and customers.

With regard to customers, the growing demand for experiences was determined as one of the key challenges by Solnet *et al.* (2016). In the hotel sector, SL was proven to have positive effects on creativity, innovative behavior, customer value co-creation, and several variables related to service delivery, which can contribute to the elevated experiences desired by customers. Further analysis of customer involvement would be interesting. Thus far, only hotel guests, tourists in guided tours, and event attendees have been interviewed. In the airline sector, involving customers would be important due to their low satisfaction reported by researchers. Moreover, guest reviews of the services delivered by companies applying SL could be confronted with those led by other leadership methods. Social media sites could provide an interesting platform to compare clients' observations, perceptions, and reactions to the service outcomes of SL. Among further challenges related to customers, demographic trends (e.g., aging customers) and the growth of peer-to-peer markets (e.g., Airbnb proliferation) were outlined by Solnet *et al.* (2016). Hospitality research on SL could address these issues through the increased OCB of employees toward customers and service experience. Guests look for empathetic and authentic experiences that can be provided by motivated and engaged employees. Further research on customized service delivery can effectively investigate these issues.

Proposition 5: SL has a positive effect on customer outcome variables (e.g., guest loyalty, customization) through the mediation of employee-related variables.

The most investigated issue through all sectors was related to talent recruitment and retention. SL is proven to have a positive effect on commitment, satisfaction and a negative effect on turnover intention. This finding is probably the most important message for the entire industry. Future studies should investigate motivational variables, incentives, and promotional and monetary awards in relation to SL together with the effects of employee training.

Proposition 6: Motivational practices act as mediators between SL and staff retention.

With regard to the issue of retaining hospitality graduates in the industry, the studies proposed the inclusion of SL in curricula and staff relations. Future research should measure the effects of including SL at three levels in hospitality education on graduates' intention.

Proposition 7: Hospitality graduates' intention to remain in the industry is positively affected by SL in hospitality education at all three levels (administration, teaching, and curricula).

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

### *Conclusions*

How can a leader motivate staff members to deliver service beyond the call of duty and increase the loyalty of talented employees? Treating them like customers is the answer of a servant leader. To elaborate this idea and investigate further positive effects of SL on the industry, this study reviewed 37 empirical articles that analyzed SL in the hospitality industry by concentrating on the followers' outcome of leadership using individual data. In customizing to hospitality the nomological network of SL research proposed by Eva *et al.* (2019), the authors extended the model with customer outcomes and included only established variables from hospitality research. The main research gap identified is the lack of research on antecedents. Therefore, new research directions were proposed, especially to analyze the unexplored effect of education on SL. Furthermore, with the aim of



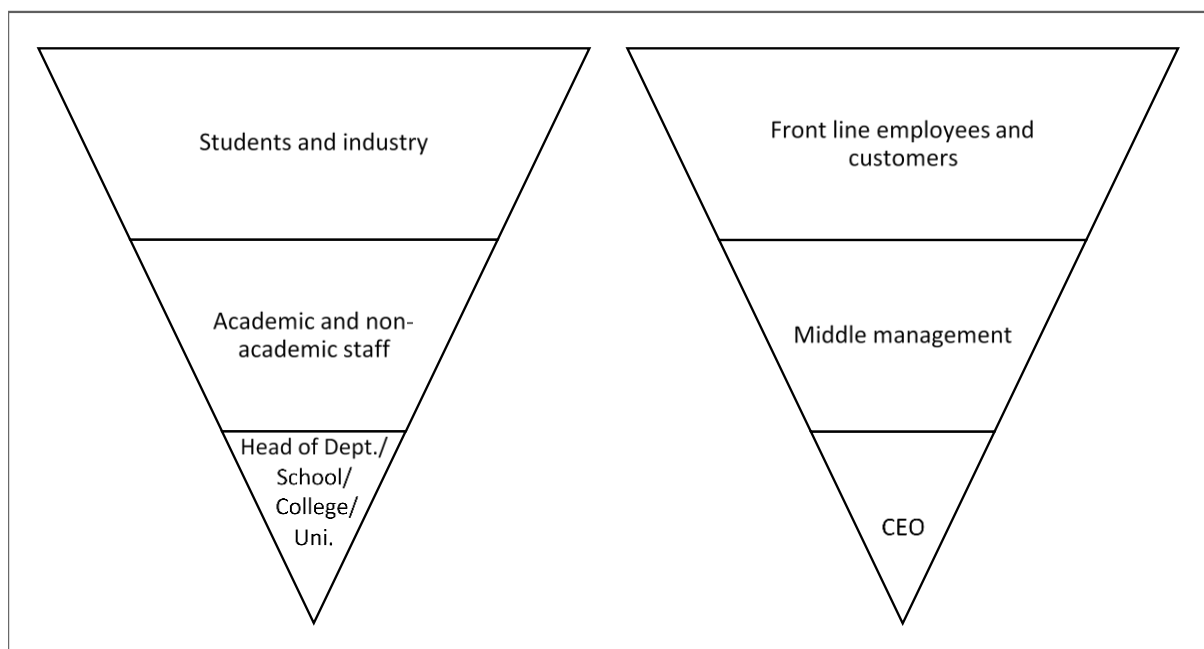
conducting impactful research for practitioners and the academia, the role of SL in ameliorating contemporary issues in hospitality should be further addressed among the new research directions.

### *Theoretical implications*

This study provides a consolidatory contribution to literature (Nicholson *et al.*, 2018). First, by conceptualizing previous work on SL in hospitality, it advances the theory of SL. This is the first systematic literature review on SL in hospitality, and it covers all papers published throughout the industry sectors to the authors' best knowledge. Second, through the analyzed outcome variables, it creates a link between SL and contemporary issues in hospitality by projecting SL as a potential solution to the issues. Third, the study identifies research gaps that lead to future research possibilities. By offering a wide array of future research directions, this study aims to guide the further advancement of the theory.

### *Practical application of SL in educational settings*

Figure 3. Mirrored SL organizational chart of the hospitality education and industry



In line with Brownell (2010) and other scholars who emphasized the importance of SL in education, SL can be implemented at three levels of hospitality education, namely, university leadership, servant teaching, and curriculum. The introduction of SL in the curriculum as part of a leadership course should be feasible to any institution. However, applying it to school administration and implementing it as a new teaching style are less straightforward. The servant-led model of an organization is represented by an inverted pyramid, where the servant leader is at the bottom of the organizational chart serving employees and customers (Servant Leadership Institute, 2019). This bottom-up instead of the traditional top-down structure characterizes servant leadership. Building on this model, this research suggests an organizational chart of an educational institution and a hospitality firm presented in a parallel approach to provide a detailed explanation of the role of SL in school administration. This mirrored organizational chart of SL in education and hospitality is an efficient way of training outstanding hospitality students and delivering service excellence in the hospitality industry. An example of an existing application of this organizational chart in educational

settings can be found at the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Every year, the Dean of the School introduces this concept to new students when they start their studies. The effectiveness of this approach can be understood by the commitment of students and faculty.

At the top of the educational organizational chart are the students (internal) and the hospitality industry (external). Students need to be served and nurtured in an educational institution, yet the changing industry needs constant exchanges with the academia. In the structure of hospitality firms, frontline employees (internal) and customers (external) are placed at the top of the system. In the parallel approach, students can be considered frontline employees and the industry as customers, placed over academic and non-academic staff whom they have direct contact with and viewed as the middle management of a company. The head of an educational institution or the CEO of a company is at the bottom of the chart, provides support to the staff, and simultaneously serves and leads. Instead of giving orders, he/she provides support to employees to engage in excellent services.

According to a practice similar at SHTM, students are welcomed by a lineup of faculty and staff at the school's main entrance on the first day of the academic year. Their greeting is equivalent to what is provided to guests in quality hotels, which students interpret as an act of humility, respect, and being welcomed to their new institution. This gesture can positively affect the relation between faculty and students and can help establish servant teaching in classrooms. A consistent leadership style from education to business can strengthen positive outcomes for the people and industry. The role models of SL and constant support from the beginning to the end of studies help increase students' passion toward the industry. This review showed that the number of issues affected by SL is abundant, and the outcomes are constantly positive for the employees and firm performance. The keywords to emphasize in this parallel analysis are trust and support. The idea behind SL is to move from control to trust and establish a support culture instead of a control culture from education to business.

#### *Practical recommendations for hospitality sectors*

This study presented the effects of SL from previous research and their connections to contemporary issues in hospitality. In line with Brownell (2010) and the results of this study, the adoption of SL in hospitality sectors is beneficial. Consistent with the six main SL characteristics (van Dierendonck, 2011), recommendations are derived from the research results and industry practices to foster SL culture in hospitality. These practical advices are valid for the entire industry, including accommodation, restaurants, airlines, events, tourism, and recreation.

1. *Empowering and developing followers.* Continuous coaching, mentoring, and training should be offered in every level within a hospitality firm. An industry example is provided by Ritz Carlton, which opened its own leadership center to deliver learning and consulting services (Ritz Carlton Leadership Center, 2017).
2. *Providing direction.* Creating motto, organizational mission statement, vision, and consequently treating and talking to employees in line with the SL principles. SL-practicing hospitality companies; Marriott, The Ritz Carlton, Starbucks, and Southwest Airlines, echo the related statements internally and externally.
3. *Humility.* Altruistic leaders establish the organizational climate by setting practices along with service orientation, trust, and empowerment. Starbucks included "openness" in its organizational culture and manifested it in forums where employees can openly ask their leaders (Behar, 2007). Leaders' helping behavior reinforces the concept of 'employees first' and increases communication between leaders and followers and employee engagement.

4. *Interpersonal acceptance.* Care for employees involves empathy, appreciation, and even forgiveness. The empowerment and involvement of frontline employees in decision making and service recovery are crucial in the hospitality industry.
5. *Authenticity.* By displaying authenticity and integrity, leaders make decisions in line with good moral values. In practice, service charges are strictly earned by employees in Banyan Tree Hotels (Zolkifi, 2013). This encourages employees to care for the good performance of the hotel.
6. *Stewardship.* Practicing CSR and ethical behavior by setting and internalizing sustainability goals. For instance, Banyan Tree encourages the environmental involvement of associates and hotel guests (Banyan Tree Global Foundation, 2016).

### *Limitations and Future Research*

This study developed several new directions, with propositions for further research that would support scholars conducting empirical research in this field. It encourages researchers to follow such directions and address relevant issues in hospitality while advancing theory. However, this study is not without limitations. A systematic review was applied to synthesize literature. Future studies could apply meta-analysis to provide statistical measures of previous findings. Due to the comparability of research designs and increasing number of quantitative papers, this approach is becoming more meaningful. Furthermore, the literature review in this study involved only academic journal articles. Several industry papers, doctoral dissertations, and academic books on the topic were not analyzed and could address the role of SL in contemporary issues in hospitality. Moreover, studies should be conducted on the extent to which SL is adoptable on a personal level in educational and industry settings. Greenleaf (1977) reflected on SL as a way of life and argued the difficulties of operationalizing it. SL is an idealistic notion to aim for, and personal efforts to embrace it might vary. In this context, several questions may arise regarding the practical implementation of SL. A cross-sectional study with leaders in both education and the industry would be useful in determining whether different discipline-specific SL characteristics exist in hospitality or how hospitality compares with other service industries in measuring SL.

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