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Research Article

Leading by Servings: Servant Leadership and Organizational Commitment in University Service-Oriented Student Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment among members of service-oriented student organizations at a private university in Manila, Philippines. Using a cross-sectional correlational design, 41 purposively sampled active members completed the 28-item Servant Leadership Scale and the 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, both rated on 7-point scales. Because responses were ordinal, we summarized the data with item medians and tested the association with Spearman's rank-order correlation. Members rated their leaders favorably on all seven servant leadership dimensions (item medians = 5–7), with the strongest ratings for creating value for the community, conceptual skills, and behaving ethically, and the weakest for proactive emotional support and decisional independence. Overall, organizational commitment was high but uneven: pride in membership received the highest rating (*Mdn* = 7), whereas members regarded the organization as relatively substitutable (reverse-scored *Mdn* = 3). Servant leadership was strongly and positively correlated with organizational commitment, $r_s(39) = .84$, 95% CI [.69, .92], $p < .001$. The findings extend the servant leadership–commitment link to voluntary, peer-led student organizations and suggest that commitment in these settings is largely affective and sensitive to leader behavior. Because the data are cross-sectional, self-reported, and drawn from a small single-institution sample, we interpret the magnitude of the association cautiously. Implications for student leadership development are discussed.

Keywords: *Higher Educations, Organizational Commitment, Servant Leadership, Student Organizations*

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Introduction

Leadership shapes how organizations function, how members experience their participation, and what outcomes groups produce (Northouse, 2021). In college and university student organizations, leadership matters more because it shapes member engagement, skill-building, and social responsibility development (Komives et al., 2013). As higher education institutions increasingly treat co-curricular involvement as a path toward holistic student development, leadership behavior's relationship to member attitudes matters both theoretically and practically.

Servant leadership has attracted sustained research interest over the past two decades. First articulated by Greenleaf (1970), servant leadership reverses the conventional authority-based model: the leader's primary task is to serve followers' needs, growth, and welfare. Researchers have operationalized the construct in several ways. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) proposed five dimensions—altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship—whereas Liden et al. (2008) identified seven: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. Unlike transactional or transformational models, which emphasize goal attainment and visionary inspiration, servant leadership centers on the relational and moral aspects of the leader–follower bond (van Dierendonck, 2011). A systematic review of 285 articles published between 1998 and 2018 (Eva et al., 2019) mapped the construct's nomological network, supported its distinctiveness from other value-based leadership styles, and documented its consistent association with positive organizational outcomes.

Organizational commitment is an equally central construct in organizational behavior. Mowday et al. (1979) defined it as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in an organization, characterized by belief in its goals, willingness to exert effort on its behalf, and a desire to remain a member. Meyer and Allen (1991) later distinguished affective (emotional attachment), continuance (perceived cost of leaving), and normative (felt obligation) components. Commitment has been linked to lower turnover intentions, stronger performance, and greater organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Tugade & Arcinas, 2023). In student organizations, commitment matters because it determines whether members actively contribute to shared goals or gradually disengage.

Empirical evidence linking servant leadership to organizational commitment has accumulated steadily, although effect sizes vary across settings. Goh and Low (2013) found that servant leadership was positively related to organizational commitment, with trust in the leader acting as a mediator. Palta (2019), in a study of 149 teachers, found a positive but weak relationship between the two, and Vrcelj et al. (2024), studying 102 employees in Serbia, found that servant leadership positively affected both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, with a stronger effect on satisfaction. At the meta-analytic level, Neubert et al. (2022) synthesized 139 studies and 23 attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes and concluded that servant leadership is associated with workplace outcomes across cultures, while cultural practices and values condition the strength of some of these associations. Bai et al. (2023), studying 931 hospital staff in China, identified psychological safety and lower job burnout as parallel partial mediators between servant leadership and affective commitment. Godbersen et al. (2024), using a large German sample, showed that servant leadership is associated with commitment to the supervisor, which in turn relates to organizational commitment. At the individual level, Chiniara and Bentein (2016) demonstrated that servant leadership enhances follower performance by satisfying the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Evidence from higher education is generally consistent but not uniform. Aboramadan et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between servant leadership and affective commitment among academics in Palestinian higher education, partly mediated by job satisfaction. Liden et al. (2008) showed that their seven servant leadership dimensions predicted organizational commitment and performance beyond transformational leadership and

leader–member exchange. Munyeka and Ngirande (2014) found that transformational leadership was positively related to affective and continuance commitment among academic staff at a South African university, underscoring the broader role of leadership style in academic commitment. In contrast, Sihombing et al. (2024) studied 111 lecturers from 12 religious universities in Eastern Indonesia and found no direct effect of servant leadership on organizational commitment; instead, organizational trust predicted commitment. These mixed results suggest that the link between servant leadership and commitment depends on context and intervening relational processes, making it important to examine settings with distinctive relational structures.

Three theoretical frameworks explain why servant leadership and commitment tend to covary. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) holds that when leaders invest in followers' welfare, followers reciprocate with loyalty, effort, and continued participation—a dynamic that may be particularly salient in voluntary organizations, where no formal incentive binds members to the group. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers a complementary account: by satisfying followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, servant leaders foster intrinsic motivation and attachment (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) adds a behavioral pathway: followers observe, internalize, and eventually reproduce the service-oriented conduct their leader models, so that servant leadership can cascade through an organization (Eva et al., 2019). Together, these frameworks imply that relational, psychological, and behavioral processes sustain the relationship rather than a single mechanism. Most empirical tests, however, test one framework at a time and focus on formal employment.

Two gaps follow. First, most studies have examined employees in corporate, school, or health care settings; student organizations—voluntary, uncompensated, and led by peers with little formal authority—have received far less attention. Second, research in Philippine private universities is scarce, although cultural values, organizational norms, and leaders' expectations may differ from those in Western or corporate settings. These features make student organizations a distinct and theoretically useful setting: if the servant leadership–commitment link holds where contracts, pay, and career incentives are absent, it is less likely to be an artifact of employment-based exchange.

This study therefore examined members' perceptions of their leaders' servant leadership, members' organizational commitment, and the relationship between the two in service-oriented student organizations at a private university in Manila, Philippines. The study treated servant leadership as the predictor and organizational commitment as the criterion in a correlational design that does not permit causal inference. Three research questions guided the study:

1. How do members of service-oriented student organizations rate the servant leadership of their organization leaders?
2. What is the level of organizational commitment among members of service-oriented student organizations?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment among members of service-oriented student organizations?

The corresponding hypotheses were H_0: No statistically significant relationship exists between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment ($\rho = 0$), and H_1: A statistically significant relationship exists between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment ($\rho \neq 0$).

Method

Research Design and Participants

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design. The study included 41 active members of service-oriented student organizations at a private university in Manila, Philippines, recruited through purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were (a) current enrollment at the university and (b) active membership in a service-oriented student organization at the time of data collection. Both general members and officers were eligible. Because the survey link was distributed through organizational channels rather than to a fixed list of individuals, we could not determine how many

members received the invitation, and therefore the response rate.

Most participants were 18 to 20 years old (n = 21, 51.2%); 17 were 21 to 23 years old (41.5%), and three were 24 years or older (7.3%). Twenty-six (63.4%) had been members for less than 1 year, 11 (26.8%) for 1 to 2 years, and four (9.8%) for 3 years or more. The sample therefore consisted mainly of traditional-age undergraduates who were relatively new to their organizations.

A sensitivity analysis (Fisher z approximation, two-tailed $\alpha = .05$) indicated that a sample of 41 provides 80% power to detect population correlations of $|\rho| \geq .43$. The study was thus adequately powered to detect large associations, but not small or moderate ones, so a nonsignificant result would not have been informative about weaker relationships.

Instruments

Servant Leadership

We measured perceived servant leadership with the 28-item Servant Leadership Scale (SL-28) developed by Liden et al. (2008). Respondents rated their organization's leader on seven dimensions, each with four items: emotional healing (e.g., "My leader cares about others' personal well-being"), creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. Items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Researchers identified the seven-factor structure through exploratory factor analysis with 298 students and confirmed it with an organizational sample of 182 employees; the dimensions predicted commitment and performance beyond transformational leadership and leader–member exchange (Liden et al., 2008).

Organizational Commitment

We measured organizational commitment with the 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ; Mowday et al., 1979), which assesses identification with, involvement in, and desire to remain in an organization. We used the same 7-point response format. Six negatively worded items (e.g., "I feel very little loyalty to this organization") were reverse-scored (8 − raw score) so that higher scores consistently indicate stronger commitment. Item wording was retained from the original instrument, with "this organization" referring to the respondent's student organization. In the original validation with 2,563 employees in nine public and private organizations, the OCQ showed coefficient alphas from .82 to .93 (median = .90; Mowday et al., 1979).

Interpretation of Scores

To describe score levels consistently across instruments, item medians (1–7 metric) were interpreted with the following descriptive bands, anchored to the response options: 6.00–7.00 = very high, 5.00–5.99 = high, 4.00–4.99 = moderate, 3.00–3.99 = low, and below 3.00 = very low. These bands are descriptive conventions adopted for this study, not normative cutoffs published with either instrument. For reverse-scored OCQ items, interpretation is based on the scored value, so that all labels express the level of commitment.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

We administered the survey online through Google Forms and distributed it through official student organization channels during a fixed data collection period. The opening page described the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the confidentiality of responses; respondents gave informed consent before proceeding. We collected no names, student numbers, or other identifying information and reported only aggregate data. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

All statistical analyses were performed using jamovi (version 2.6), an open-source statistical software (The jamovi project, 2025, https ://www.jamovi.org). Because Likert-type responses are ordinal, we report item-level results as medians (Mdn) and demographic characteristics as frequencies and percentages. For negatively worded OCQ items, both the raw median and the scored median are reported; because reverse scoring is a strictly decreasing transformation, the scored median equals 8 minus the raw median. Dimension-level results are described by the range of their item medians rather than by summing item medians, because a sum of medians is not the median of

respondents' total scores. All analyses used the full sample of 41 respondents.

To address Research Question 3, each respondent's overall servant leadership score and overall commitment score were computed as the median of that respondent's item responses (28 SL-28 items; 15 OCQ items after reverse scoring). Spearman's rank-order correlation (*r*s) between these scores was computed with a two-tailed test at $\alpha = .05$, with tied ranks assigned midranks. Spearman's coefficient assumes only a monotonic relationship and is appropriate for ordinal composite scores. We obtained the 95% confidence interval for rs using Fisher's z transformation and the standard error proposed by Bonett and Wright (2000). Effect size was interpreted against Cohen's (1988) benchmarks (.10 = small, .30 = medium, .50 = large) and against the empirically derived guidelines of Gignac and Szodorai (2016), who identified .30 as a relatively large correlation in individual-differences research.

Results

Perceived Servant Leadership

Table 1 presents the median for each SL-28 item, grouped by dimension. Across the 28 items, medians ranged from 5 (*slightly agree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); no item fell at or below the scale midpoint. Twenty-five of the 28 items (89.3%) had medians of 6 or 7 (*very high*), and the remaining three had medians of 5 (*high*), indicating that members, on the whole, perceived their leaders as consistently service oriented.

The most favorable ratings concerned the community-facing, cognitive, and ethical dimensions. In creating value for the community, two of four items reached the scale ceiling (*Mdn* = 7), particularly the leader's emphasis on giving back and interest in helping people in the community. Conceptual skills showed a similar pattern, with item medians of 6 and 7 for recognizing when something is going wrong, understanding the organization's goals, and solving problems creatively. In behaving ethically, the item on holding high ethical standards reached the ceiling (*Mdn* = 7), and the remaining three items had medians of 6.

The least favorable ratings appeared in two dimensions. Within emotional healing, the two items describing a leader's *disposition* to care—others would seek the leader's help with a personal problem, and the leader cares about others' well-being—had medians of 7, whereas the two items describing *proactive* behavior—taking time to talk on a personal level and recognizing when others feel down without being told—had medians of 5. Within empowering, giving members responsibility for important decisions had a median of 7, but the statement that members need not consult the leader before making important decisions had a median of 5. Helping subordinates grow and succeed and putting subordinates first showed uniform item medians of 6, reflecting consistent agreement short of the ceiling.

Table 1. Item Medians for Perceived Servant Leadership by Dimension

Dimension and item	*Mdn*	Interpretation
Creating value for the community	6–7	Very high
My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.	7	Very high
My leader is always interested in helping people in the community.	7	Very high
My leader is involved in community activities.	6	Very high
My leader encourages others to volunteer in the community.	6	Very high
Conceptual skills	6–7	Very high
My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong.	7	Very high
My leader can think through complex problems.	6	Very high
My leader has a thorough understanding of the organization and its goals.	7	Very high
My leader can solve work problems with new or creative ideas.	6	Very high
Behaving ethically	6–7	Very high
My leader holds high ethical standards.	7	Very high

Dimension and item	*Mdn*	Interpretation
My leader is always honest.	6	Very high
My leader would not compromise ethical principles to achieve success.	6	Very high
My leader values honesty more than results.	6	Very high
Emotional healing	5–7	High to very high
Others would seek help from my leader if they had a personal problem.	7	Very high
My leader cares about others' personal well-being.	7	Very high
My leader takes time to talk to others on a personal level.	5	High
My leader can recognize when others are feeling down without asking them.	5	High
Empowering	5–7	High to very high
My leader gives others responsibility for making important decisions about their own jobs.	7	Very high
My leader encourages others to handle important work decisions on their own.	6	Very high
My leader gives others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best.	6	Very high
If others need to make important decisions at work, they do not need to consult my leader.	5	High
Helping subordinates grow and succeed	6	Very high
My leader makes others' career development a priority.	6	Very high
My leader is interested in making sure others reach their career goals.	6	Very high
My leader provides others with work experience that enables them to develop new skills.	6	Very high
My leader wants to know about others' career goals.	6	Very high
Putting subordinates first	6	Very high
My leader cares about others' success more than their own.	6	Very high
My leader puts others' best interests above their own.	6	Very high
My leader sacrifices their own interests to meet others' needs.	6	Very high
My leader does what they can to make others' jobs easier.	6	Very high

Note. *N* = 41. Items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Dimension rows show the range of item medians within the dimension; they are not dimension composite scores. Interpretation: 6.00–7.00 = very high; 5.00–5.99 = high; 4.00–4.99 = moderate; 3.00–3.99 = low; below 3.00 = very low. Items are shown as administered (SL-28; Liden et al., 2008).

Organizational Commitment

Table 2 presents the OCQ results, with negatively worded items shown in both raw and reverse-scored form and all items ordered by scored median. After reverse scoring, nine of the 15 items fell in the very high range (scored *Mdn* ≥ 6), four in the high range, one in the moderate range, and one in the low range.

Identification-related items were the strongest. "I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization" reached the scale ceiling (*Mdn* = 7), and members strongly rejected the statement that joining had been a definite mistake (raw *Mdn* = 1; scored *Mdn* = 7). Willingness to exert extra effort, advocating for the organization, value congruence, being inspired to perform well, being glad to have chosen the organization, and caring about its fate each had a median of 6, as did disagreement with the statement that it is often difficult to agree with the organization's policies (raw *Mdn* = 2).

Items reflecting exclusivity and permanence of membership were weaker. Accepting almost any assignment to remain, regarding the organization as the best of all possible organizations, disagreeing that one feels little loyalty, and disagreeing that there is little to gain by staying indefinitely each had a scored median of 5 (high). Members were neutral on whether a small change in circumstances would lead them to leave (scored *Mdn* = 4, moderate). The weakest indicator was substitutability: members tended to agree that they could just as well belong to a different organization if the type of work were similar (raw *Mdn* = 5; scored *Mdn* = 3, low).

Table 2. Raw and Scored Item Medians for Organizational Commitment

Item	Raw *Mdn*	Scored *Mdn*	Interpretation
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.	7	7	Very high
Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part. [a]	1	7	Very high
I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond what is normally expected to help this organization succeed.	6	6	Very high
I talk up this organization to my friends as a great place to work.	6	6	Very high
I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.	6	6	Very high
This organization really inspires the very best in me when it comes to job performance.	6	6	Very high
I am extremely glad I chose this organization over the others I was considering when I joined.	6	6	Very high
I really care about this organization's future.	6	6	Very high
Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its members. [a]	2	6	Very high
I would accept almost any job assignment to keep working for this organization.	5	5	High
For me, this is the best organization I could work for.	5	5	High
I feel very little loyalty to this organization. [a]	3	5	High
There's not much to gain by sticking with this organization indefinitely. [a]	3	5	High
It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization. [a]	4	4	Moderate
I could just as well work for a different organization as long as the work was similar. [a]	5	3	Low

Note. *N* = 41. Items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and are ordered by scored median. For positively worded items, raw and scored medians are identical. Interpretation is based on the scored median: 6.00–7.00 = very high; 5.00–5.99 = high; 4.00–4.99 = moderate; 3.00–3.99 = low; below 3.00 = very low. Items are shown as administered (Mowday et al., 1979). [a]Reverse-scored item (scored value = 8 − raw value).

Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Perceived servant leadership was strongly and positively correlated with organizational commitment, $r_s(39) = .84$, 95% CI [.69, .92], $p < .001$. We therefore rejected the null hypothesis in favor of H_1. Members who rated their leaders

higher on servant leadership tended to report stronger commitment to their organization.

The coefficient exceeds Cohen's (1988) benchmark for a large correlation (.50) and is well above the .30 threshold Gignac and Szodorai (2016) identified as relatively large in individual-differences research. Squaring the coefficient (rs^2 = .70) indicates that the two sets of ranks shared about 70% of their variance. Because this is a measure of shared variance between ranks in a correlational design, it should not be read as the proportion of commitment *caused* or *explained* by servant leadership. The width of the confidence interval (.69 to .92) also shows that, with 41 respondents, the population correlation could plausibly be considerably lower than the point estimate, although even its lower bound represents a large association.

Discussion

This study examined how members of service-oriented student organizations at a private university in Manila perceive their leaders' servant leadership, how committed they are to their organizations, and how the two are related. Members rated their leaders favorably on all seven servant leadership dimensions, reported high overall commitment that varied across facets, and showed a strong positive association between the two, $rs(39) = .84$, 95% CI [.69, .92]. The following sections interpret the magnitude of this association, examine what the dimension- and item-level patterns reveal, and consider theoretical, cultural, and practical implications.

Interpreting the Strength of the Association

The observed coefficient is large by any conventional standard, and even the lower bound of its confidence interval (.69) exceeds Cohen's (1988) benchmark for a large correlation. It is also considerably stronger than some associations reported in employment settings, such as the weak relationship among teachers found by Palta (2019) and the absence of a direct effect among Indonesian lecturers reported by Sihombing et al. (2024). Two broad explanations should be weighed together. The first is methodological. Both constructs were measured through self-reports from the same respondents at the same time, a condition known to inflate correlations through common method variance, including consistency motives and a general positive (halo) evaluation of the organization and its leaders (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In a small group where members know their leaders personally, a single global impression may color responses to both questionnaires. The second explanation is substantive. Student organizations offer no salary, contract, or career incentive that binds members independently of their experience; participation is voluntary, and leaders are peers. Where these structural supports for commitment are absent, members' attachment to leaders may depend more on the quality of the relationship than in paid workplaces. The current design cannot separate these explanations, and both likely contribute. The safest conclusion is that the association is large in this sample and plausibly stronger in voluntary settings than in employment, a proposition that warrants testing with multi-source or time-lagged data.

Dimension-Level Patters

The strongest servant leadership ratings concerned creating value for the community, conceptual skills, and behaving ethically. In service-oriented organizations, the community-facing dimension carries particular weight because the organization's purpose is itself service; leaders who visibly model community involvement embody the group's reason for existing. The high conceptual-skills ratings indicate that members value leaders who understand the organization and can work through problems, supporting Liden et al.'s (2008) argument that conceptual competence is part of what distinguishes servant leadership from purely relational styles. Ethical conduct, with the item on high ethical standards at the scale ceiling, suggests that members see integrity as a defining feature of their leaders.

The weaker ratings form an instructive pattern. In emotional healing, members strongly agreed that their leaders care and could be approached with personal problems (Mdn = 7) but agreed less that leaders proactively initiate personal conversations or notice distress unprompted (Mdn = 5). This gap between disposition and enacted behavior aligns with student leaders' developmental position: they are typically the same age as their members and have

little preparation for recognizing distress or holding supportive conversations; goodwill appears to outpace skill. When interpreting empowerment, the lower median for not needing to consult the leader should be read carefully. In a student organization, consulting a leader before major decisions may reflect normal coordination and accountability rather than a lack of empowerment, and the relatively short tenure of most members (63.4% had belonged for less than a year) may also make them reluctant to act independently.

The Nature of the Commitment Observed

The commitment profile is strong but conditional. Pride in membership—the clearest indicator of identification in Mowday et al.'s (1979) framework—reached the scale ceiling, and members firmly rejected the view that joining had been a mistake. Yet they were neutral about whether a small change in circumstances would lead them to leave, and they tended to agree that they could just as well belong to another organization doing similar work. Read through Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model, this pattern points to predominantly affective commitment—members stay because they want to—rather than continuance-based commitment, since there are few costs to leaving a voluntary organization. Because the OCQ is not a three-component instrument, this reading is interpretive rather than a direct test.

The substitutability finding adds further insight. Members' attachment appears to be anchored partly in the type of work—service—rather than exclusively in their organization. For student affairs offices, this is a double-edged sword. It means commitment to service as a value is high, consistent with the organizations' mission. It also means that an individual organization's hold on its members is contingent: when leadership quality falls, or a comparable group offers a better experience, members can transfer their service commitment elsewhere at little cost. This helps explain why commitment in this setting is closely tied to leadership quality—when relational and developmental benefits are the main reasons to remain, leader behavior becomes a principal determinant of whether members stay.

Theoretical Mechanism

Three complementary frameworks help account for the strength of the observed association. From a social exchange perspective (Blau, 1964), leaders who empower members, attend to their welfare, and act ethically make relational investments that members reciprocate through loyalty and sustained participation; in the absence of formal rewards, such investments may be the main currency of exchange. From a self-determination perspective (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the empowering dimension supports autonomy, helping subordinates grow and succeed supports competence, and emotional healing and putting subordinates first support relatedness. Chiniara and Bentein (2016) showed that servant leadership affects followers through these need-satisfaction pathways; the present data are consistent with that account, as all three need-relevant dimensions were rated favorably, although need satisfaction was not measured directly. From a social learning perspective (Bandura, 1977), members who observe service-oriented leaders may internalize and later reproduce that behavior (Eva et al., 2019). Because student organizations rotate members into officer roles within 1 or 2 years, this modeling process could produce a self-reinforcing cycle of service and commitment across leadership generations. These mechanisms are offered as interpretations; the present design did not test them.

The Philippine Cultural Context

Although we did not measure cultural variables, the Philippine setting merits consideration. The Philippines is generally characterized as a collectivist society (Hofstede et al., 2010), and Filipino psychology emphasizes kapwa, a shared sense of self with others that underlies relational obligations (Enriquez, 1992). The related ideal of bayanihan, communal cooperation toward a shared goal, overlaps with servant leadership's emphasis on community, service, and putting others first. When such values are widely held, service-oriented leaders may meet cultural expectations of how good leaders behave, which could strengthen members' reciprocal commitment. This aligns with Neubert et al.'s (2022) meta-analytic finding that cultural practices and values shape the strength of

servant leadership's associations with outcomes. Cultural congruence may therefore explain the strong observed association, but future research should test this hypothesis by measuring cultural values directly.

Convergence With Prior Research

The findings converge with studies across diverse settings: trust-mediated effects of servant leadership on commitment among employees (Goh & Low, 2013), positive associations with commitment among employees in Serbia (Vrcelj et al., 2024), psychological safety and burnout as mediators among hospital staff in China (Bai et al., 2023), commitment to the supervisor as a link to organizational commitment in a German sample (Godbersen et al., 2024), and a positive association with affective commitment among Palestinian academics (Aboramadan et al., 2021). The literature is not uniform: Palta (2019) found only a weak relationship among teachers, and Sihombing et al. (2024) found that servant leadership affected lecturers' commitment only indirectly, through organizational trust. Together, these studies suggest that servant leadership is consistently associated with commitment, but the strength of the link depends on how fully followers experience their relationship with the leader. The present study adds evidence from a voluntary, peer-led, uncompensated setting, where that relationship is especially salient and where the association was strong, suggesting the link is not merely a by-product of employment-based exchange.

Contributions

The study makes four contributions. First, it extends the servant leadership–commitment evidence base to members of service-oriented student organizations in a Philippine private university, a population largely absent from prior research and provides initial evidence that the association can be strong in voluntary settings. Second, it shows that the seven-dimensional SL-28 (Liden et al., 2008) yields interpretable, differentiated profiles among peer leaders, particularly the distinction between caring dispositions and proactive supportive behavior. Third, by separating raw from reverse-scored commitment items and interpreting all items on a common commitment metric, it corrects a common source of misreading in ordinal survey data and reveals that commitment is identification-based but not exclusive to a particular organization. Fourth, it interprets the findings through social exchange, self-determination, and social learning theories together, generating testable propositions about the mechanisms involved.

Practical Implications

Universities and student affairs offices can incorporate servant leadership into officer development programs, prioritizing the behaviors rated least favorably. Training in emotional attunement—recognizing signs of distress, initiating brief check-ins, and responding supportively and referring members to campus services when needed—could close the gap between leaders' caring intentions and their proactive behavior. Role-play, peer mentoring, and basic psychological first-aid orientation are practical formats for this purpose.

Structured delegation can strengthen empowerment: explicit decision rights for committee heads, clear guidelines on which decisions require consultation, and graduated autonomy as members gain experience. Because most members had been in for less than a year, onboarding that pairs newer members with experienced ones may accelerate the trust independent action requires.

Finally, because members regarded their organization as relatively substitutable, organizations should cultivate an organization-specific identity alongside a general commitment to service—through shared traditions, visible recognition of members' contributions, and opportunities to shape the organization's direction. Brief periodic pulse surveys of perceived leadership and commitment can help advisers identify members who are being underserved before they disengage.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the sample was small (N = 41) and purposively drawn from a single university, limiting precision and generalizability; the wide confidence interval reflects this uncertainty, and correlations from small samples tend to overestimate effects. Because the

response rate could not be determined, we cannot rule out self-selection by more engaged members. Second, members self-reported all data on a single occasion, so common method variance may have inflated the association (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, the cross-sectional design cannot establish direction: committed members may rate their leaders more favorably, or unmeasured factors such as overall satisfaction with the organization may drive both variables. Fourth, we did not estimate internal consistency for the present sample; the reliability evidence cited comes from the instruments' original validation samples, and future studies should report sample-specific coefficients. Fifth, scores clustered near the top of both scales, and ceiling effects restrict the range of observable variation. Sixth, the OCQ was developed for employees, and some items refer to work and job assignments, which may not map precisely onto student organization membership. Seventh, because officers as well as general members responded, some ratings may describe fellow officers or a leadership team to which the respondent belongs, which could inflate leadership ratings. Finally, the sample consisted mainly of young, relatively new members, and results may differ for longer-tenured members.

Future research should use larger, multi-institution samples and collect data from multiple sources or at multiple time points (e.g., leadership ratings at the start of the academic year and commitment and retention at its end) to reduce common method bias and clarify temporal order. Mediation models could test the mechanisms suggested here—trust (Goh & Low, 2013), need satisfaction (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016), job or membership satisfaction (Aboramadan et al., 2021), and psychological safety (Bai et al., 2023). Moderators such as tenure, officer versus member role, and cultural values would clarify when the relationship is strongest. Using a multidimensional commitment measure would allow direct testing of affective, continuance, and normative commitment, and comparisons across Philippine and other Southeast Asian universities would show whether the proposed cultural congruence is specific to the Filipino context or common to collectivist societies.

Conclusion

Among members of service-oriented student organizations at a private university in Manila, perceived servant leadership was strongly and positively associated with organizational commitment, $rs(39) = .84$, 95% CI [.69, .92], $p < .001$. Members rated their leaders favorably on all seven servant leadership dimensions, most of all on community orientation, conceptual skill, and ethics, and least on proactive emotional support and decisional independence. Their commitment was strong and rooted in pride and identification, but it was not exclusive: members saw their service commitment as transferable to similar organizations. Taken together, the findings suggest that in voluntary, peer-led groups, leader behavior is a key reason members stay. Universities that develop servant leadership among student officers—especially proactive care, structured empowerment, and ethical conduct—are likely to strengthen the commitment and continuity of the organizations those officers' lead. Given the study's small, single-institution, cross-sectional design, these conclusions are best treated as a strong starting point for multi-source and longitudinal research.

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