

# ENTREPRENEURIAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP (ESL): A PROPOSED LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (COOPERATIVE)

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**Abstract**— Leadership and its impact on the organization's performance is a popular research topic among researchers. However, lack of leadership studies in social entrepreneurship (SE) focuses on cooperative organization. This study is a concept paper to explore SE in a leadership context. It is proposed to discuss possible significant impact of servant leadership attributes on cooperative performance mediated by entrepreneurial orientation (EO). It was reported that ineffective cooperative governance (managerial issues) has occurred among cooperatives around the world and that contributed to low or failure of cooperative performance. Leader is the key persons who are responsible to navigate organization's success must identify the suitable and required roles as leaders to enhance organizational performance. Thus, this paper focused to one of the possible leadership styles to best fit with cooperative leader. For this purpose, servant leadership seems congruence to align with the cooperative principles and values. This paper attempts to construct a framework of Entrepreneurial Servant Leadership (ESL) and its relationship on cooperative's performance. Future work can develop and design the instrument of ESL for prevalent and practiced to measure the impact on cooperative performance.

**Index Terms**— Servant leadership, social enterprise, cooperative organization, Entrepreneurial Servant Leadership (ESL).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Outperforming, staying ahead of the competition and to sustain in today's business presents can be the biggest leadership challenges. Although many perspectives and empirical findings of leadership impact on business performance, few were observed and measure leadership in the context of social entrepreneurship. Most of the scholars were interested to study leadership in Small Medium Business (SME's), Government Links Companies (GLC's) or Multinational company type. Thus to fill this gap, the main purpose of this study is to explore social entrepreneurship in the context of leadership purposely for cooperative organization. Cooperative is one form of social organization as clarified by [26] and [20]. They mentioned social entrepreneurial organizations may exist in any legal form – societies, associations, clubs, teams, cooperatives or agencies. According to [82] and [98] cooperative started more than 150 years ago. Nevertheless, lack of academic and public attention<sup>1</sup> to cooperative enterprise rather than the investor owned corporation in late years. Cooperative is special purpose social organizations that have unique attributes compared to other forms of enterprise. They are autonomous, member-owned and democratically governed businesses, created by equity financed by members who invest in order to benefit through their business. Cooperatives are built on a "collective identity and shared destiny" [94]. Why SE is important and need further research? It is clear to see that SE is important when researchers summarized that the context of SE have permeated and giving an impact to different facets of societal life. For example, i) in politics, SE has inspired of proposing proactive legislative to address socio-economic issues in the countries [43], [72] and [55], ii) in business, SE has stimulated thinking of new business models to enhance low income populations in the developing countries as their primary aim is to attain social mission in empowering specific disadvantaged communities or target groups [45], [15], [56], [55] and [21], iii) in finance, SE has reflecting social stock markets and socially-responsible investing [55] and finally iv) in the field of philanthropy SE has witnessed a dramatic shift towards strategic and impact orientation [55]. The importance of social entrepreneurs was also stressed by [85] that the opportunity in business is to satisfy some unmet need that the state welfare system will not or cannot meet, thus the entrepreneurs gather the necessary resources and use to 'make a difference' to the stakeholders.

## 2. THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The quality of good cooperative governance being argued when mismanagement, financial scandals and bankruptcy of democracy reported occurs in cooperative management [46] and [47]. This scenario supported in [6] study, which mentioned cooperatives have always faced complex issues and the absence of sound corporate governance. As literature revealed, many cooperative worldwide such as United States, Canada, Malaysia and South Africa faced governance issues. The problems can be categorized such as i) leadership problems [38],[4],[67], [62] and [31], ii) financial issues [25], [31], [14], [4], [81] and [24], iv) management or administrative case [90], [10], [57], [63], [67], [34], [91], [92] and [9]. Cooperative failure will result to poor financial performance, members lost confidence and trust in their management and the cooperative turn down towards failure [6] and [38]. As a unique purpose of organization which concern to social benefits, cooperative needs better governance concerning more to members and their stakeholders through effective leadership to enhance cooperative performance. This study seeks to propose conceptual framework of ESL as social enterprise (cooperative) leadership model and the possible impact on their performance. This paper first, scrutinized the literature of servant leadership and cooperative organization to find the similarities of both. Then, propose the EO as the mediating variable to enhance the 'entrepreneur' effect to measure the impact on their performance through an ESL model framework.

## 3. SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (COOPERATIVE): LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

### A. The definition – servant leadership and cooperative

In order to interrelate the servant leadership and cooperative similarities, definition summaries of both were clarified. Father of servant leadership, [28] define servant leadership is person who servants first, place the needs of others above their own self interest and seek to produce more. [90], [79] and [36] also mentioned this leader place the needs and well-being of followers above their own desires in a meaningful way. They create opportunity to influence others' through emotional and spiritual healing [52]. [37] added servant leader employ stewardship, openness and persuasion rather than control others. To make people feel appreciated they create open environment and everyone has a voice to work cooperatively [41] and that makes positive culture for subordinates [81]. [8] concluded servant leadership is a unique leadership ideology which flows against the grain of self-interest human behavior. Most scholars defined servant leadership as a leader who concern to others needs rather than their own interest. Can the definition of servant leadership being used to fit to cooperative objectives? According to [87] cooperative is a voluntary contractual organization of persons having a mutual ownership interest in providing themselves needed service(s) on a non-profit basis and democratically controlled by its members on the basis of their status as member-users and not as investors in the capital structure of the cooperative and this can fit with [41] and [37] statement that servant leadership offer open environment and people has voice to work cooperatively rather than controlled them. [33] defines cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. They are part of the social economy [11] and the members develop, set the goal to 'meet their common economic, social and cultural needs'. Indeed, in the future, helping to provide a better way of life – cultural, intellectual and spiritual – may become one of the most important ways in which the cooperatives can benefit their members and contribute to their communities [16, [40] and [68]. The main aim of cooperatives is not much to achieve the highest return on capital investment, but to satisfy a common pre-existing requirement or need, in order to give members a greater advantage or saving than would otherwise have been possible separately [2]. It can be generalized that cooperative needs a person who can guide and serve the members with the values of concern to the well-being of the members because servant leaders serve the needs of others above their own self interest and seek to produce more [28] using emotional touch and spiritual healing [52]. Servant leader is suitable for cooperative because they can work for the people, while power is not priority as their aim and satisfaction is to develop others.

### B. The attributes of servant leadership and cooperative criteria, principles and values

More specific attributes of servant leadership were reviewed from literature to best fit to cooperative principles and values. They are:

- i) Emotional healing, listening, love, caring commitment to the growth of people, developing people. [80], [5]; [48], [54], [19], [69], [12] and [44].
- ii) Building community, creating value for community, stewardship. [80], [44], [74], [7], [48], [5], [54] and [89].
- iii) Empowerment, openness, egalitarianism, shared decision making, respectfulness. [69], [70], [75], [19], [48], [89], [12], [7] and [74].
- iv) Accountability, authenticity, integrity, responsible morality, behave ethically, trust, honest. [89], [44], [78], [69], [75], [48], [19] [70], [7], [74], [23] and [27].
- v) Service, putting subordinate first, implementation role, altruism, humility. ([23], [75], [70], [48], [78], [74], [5], [54], [69], [7], [19], [12] and [89].
- vi) Vision, conceptual skills, foresight, goal setting. [23], [75], [70], [7], [19], [69], [80] and [48].

The above attributes that match with cooperative can be summarized referred to [33] which stated cooperative are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

The members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. In addition, [88] clarified cooperative always to improve good member-patron relations, providing honest and helpful service. [35] highlighted the two aspects of cooperative personal values are i) attitude (personal integrity, determination, courage, understands people, humility and openness) ii) skills (thinking and planning ahead, making things happen, calculated risk taking, decision making, initiative, creativity and experimental, conceptualizing, listening and questioning, team playing, monitoring and evaluating). [76] added they must have integrity, resist pressure, able to work with people, knowledgeable, progressive, loyal, constructive and energetic. Moreover, [17] posits the cooperative leader must show mutual help, sharing and reduces the social cleavages.

**C. The congruence elements of servant leadership and cooperative**

As conclusion to align both servant leadership and cooperative similarities, authors summarized the congruence elements in the context of servant leader in cooperative organization as shown in table I.

**TABLE I : THE CONGRUENCE BETWEEN SERVANT LEADER AND COOPERATIVE ELEMENTS**

Context	Servant Leader	Cooperative
Role of leader	To serve followers	Responsibility, mutual help, openness, ethical, caring for others
Role of followers	To become wiser, freer, more autonomous	Democracy, equality, openness
Individual level	Desire to serve	Self-help
Interpersonal level	Leaders serve follower	Caring for others
Group level	Leader serve group to meet members need	Mutual help, solidarity
Organizational level	Leader prepares cooperative to serve community	Social responsibility
Outcome expected	Leader leave positive legacy for betterment of society	Social responsibility

(Source: Adapted the context from [5])

**4. SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION PERFORMANCE**

Scholars agree that leadership is a real phenomenon that is important for the effectiveness of organizations [50], [49], [97], [3] and [30]. Furthermore, the study of servant leadership and the impact towards business performance have been scientifically done by researchers. In the organization performance context, servant leadership has shown a positive relationship:

- i) Followers job satisfaction, [58].
- ii) Followers as organization's top priority, [48] and [89].
- iii) Team member trust and build long term relationships, [48].
- iv) Employees are more creative than those working with leaders who scored lower on servant leadership, [66].
- v) Encourage organizational citizenship behaviors, [93].
- vi) Affect-based trust, which was shown to provide psychological safety to team members, [77].
- vii) Goal clarity and team potency, [32].
- viii) Financial - return on assets, was higher in companies led by CEO's who engaged in servant leadership, [71].

Further study of servant leadership practice can be tested to determine the possible impact on cooperative's performance.

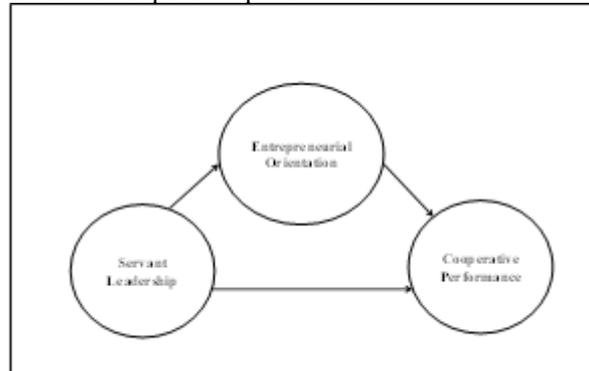
**5. THE MEDIATOR – ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION**

Empirical studies done by [3], [49] and [50] have demonstrated that there are links between leadership and performance. While others scholars such as [13], [83], [95], [39], [64], [73] and [18] have looked at entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and performance. However, there are few studies that have been conducted to examine the relationships between these three variables (leadership, EO and firms' performance) simultaneously as stated by [86] and [96]. Studies done by [1] and [42] have examined that EO as mediating role have significant influenced on business performance and growth. EO is the concept used to refer to the processes and endeavors of organizations that engage in entrepreneurial behaviors and activities [51]. Most of cooperatives run business activities to generate income for the benefits of their members. Thus, entrepreneurial elements and concepts must be related to cooperative as they practice business activities. Although previous studies have shown that EO is directly related to firm performance, but in this study EO is test to be mediating effect on servant leadership practice toward cooperative performance. The EO dimensions are related to risk taking, innovativeness and pro activeness as claimed by [60], [61], [13], [59], and [65]. Business organizations that have high EO expose willingness to innovate, to take risks, to try out new and uncertain products and services, and to be more proactive than competitors toward opportunities in the marketplaces as stated by [13] and [95]. Thus, it is proposed to test EO mediating the servant leadership attributes to enhance cooperative performance.

## 6. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework constructed after reviewing and analyzed the literature which illustrated in Figure 1. According to the conceptual framework, the servant leadership attributes practice by management as leader of cooperative is the main attitude of servant-hood in cooperative that may influence the cooperative performance. In addition, EO as mediator probably enhanced the servant leadership practices towards cooperative performance. Hypotheses developed from this model are:

- i) (H1) The greater presence of servant leadership attributes the higher cooperative performance.
- ii) (H2) The greater presence of servant leadership attributes mediated by entrepreneurial orientation positively affects the cooperative performance.
- iii) (H3) The EO is positively related to cooperative performance.



**Fig. 1. The Conceptual Framework of Entrepreneurial Servant Leadership (ESL) and the impact on Cooperative Organization**

## 7. CONCLUSION

Through extensive literature review on servant leadership and cooperative, it can be proposed ESL as social leadership model to enhance social enterprise (cooperative) performance. Cooperative is a unique business entity owned by members whereby servant leadership function is to serve the members in the organization. Servant leadership can have significant impact on cooperative performance through the attributes that fit them, especially with the principles and values of the cooperative. However, in order to confirm the relationship of servant leadership practice in cooperative organization has an impact on the performance, a questionnaire needs to be designed to get the responses. The construct have to be developed and measured accordingly for further empirical study. Analysis of the responses will reveal the relationship of the variables in the model which is more prevalent and practiced in cooperative.

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