



**Scientific Research on Servant
Leadership: Initial Results and
Directions for Future Research**
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Overview

- Servant leadership introduction
- Scientific research
- Scale development
- Findings of scientific studies at individual, team, and organizational levels
- Overview of studies in progress
- Practical Implications
- Recommended future directions

Creation of Servant Leadership by Robert Greenleaf

- Following a successful career at AT&T, Greenleaf wrote a seminal essay introducing servant leadership (SL).
- According to Greenleaf (1970, 1977), a servant leader:
 - is selflessly focused on serving others.
 - follows this “service orientation” extending beyond the workplace to the home and the community.
 - inspires followers to become servant leaders.

Scientific Research on Servant Leadership

- Despite acclaim for Greenleaf's essay among practitioners, scientific research did not begin in earnest until research by Mark Ehrhart was published in 2004.
- What makes research scientific?
 - Strong theoretical basis; theory used to develop hypotheses
 - Reliable and valid measures
 - Control of extraneous variables
 - Tests of alternative hypotheses
 - Control of sampling and data collection
- Journals vary in terms to the strength of the research designs used to test hypotheses. Focus here is on SL research published in the top scientific journals.

Scientific Research on Servant Leadership

- For SL research to be sustained, a sound measure was needed. The first rigorously developed SL measure appeared in 2008.

Servant Leadership Measure

Liden, Wayne, Zhou, & Henderson, 2008, LQ

- Exploratory factor analysis using student data followed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) based on employee data supported the emergence of 7 distinguishable factors:
 - **Creating Value for the Community**
 - **Conceptual Skills**
 - **Emotional Healing**
 - **Empowering**
 - **Helping Followers Grow and Succeed**
 - **Putting Followers First**
 - **Behaving Ethically**

Servant Leadership Measure

Hu & Liden, 2011, *JAP*

- Higher order CFA demonstrated that the 7 dimensions fall under a global servant leadership factor
- Most researchers have used a global servant leadership factor in their research.

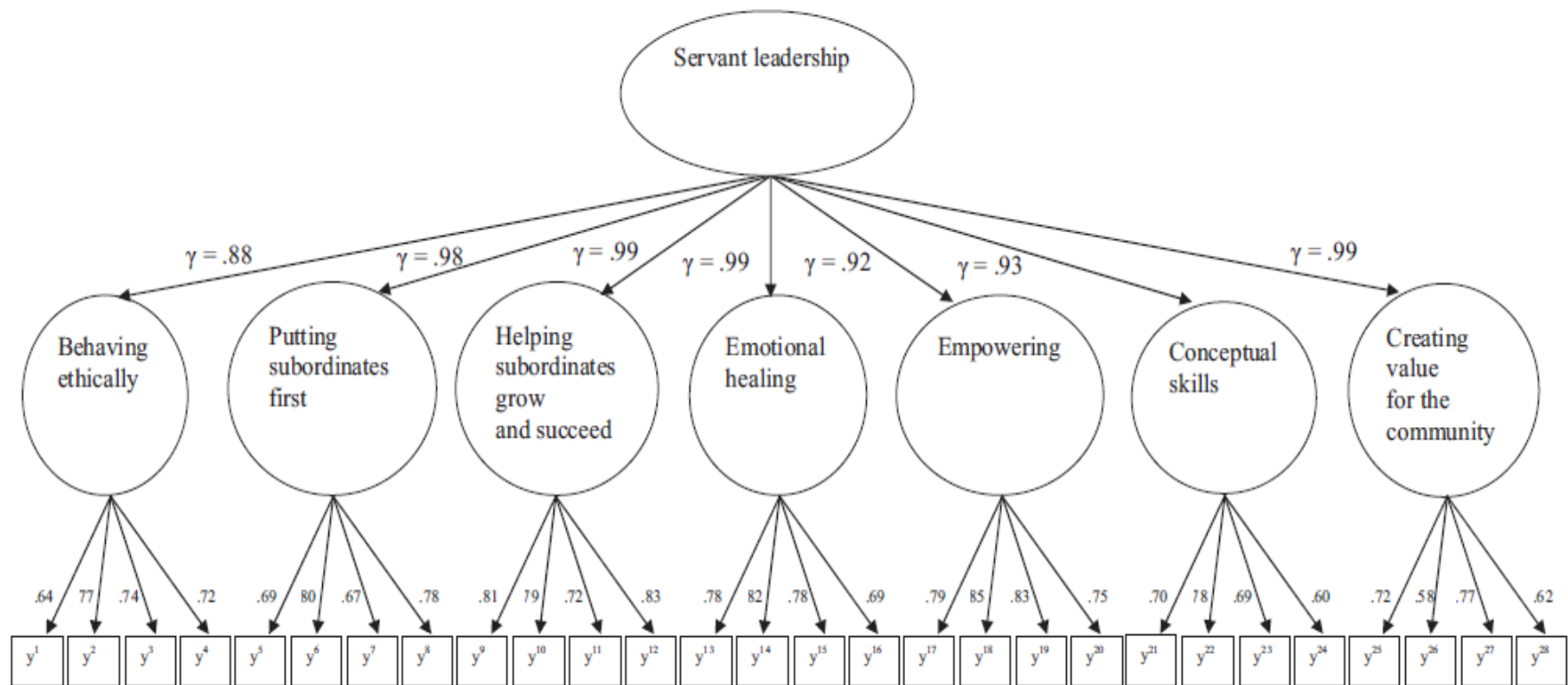


Figure 2. Results of second-order confirmatory factor analysis results for servant leadership. $\chi^2(343) = 465$, normed fit index = .95, comparative fit index = .99, root-mean-square error of approximation = .07, standardized root-mean-square residual = .03. ys represent items reflecting first-order factors; the numbers below the first-order factors represent factor loadings for the items.

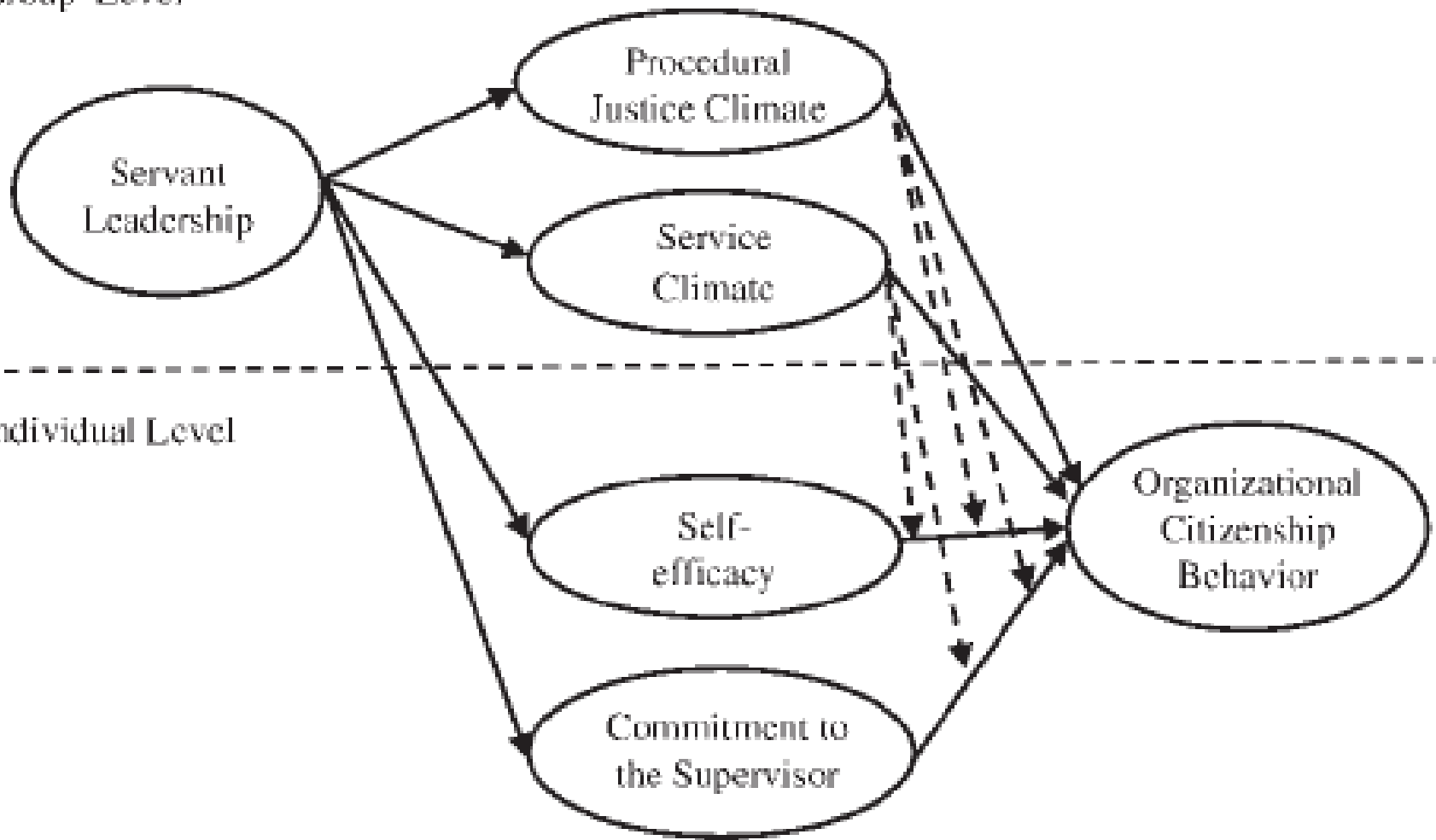
Individual-Level Results (Liden et al. 2008, LQ): 182 U.S. Manufacturing & Distribution Employees

- Controlling LMX and transformational leadership, SL was found to explain significant variance in:
 - job performance
 - commitment
 - community service behaviors
- Through what processes do these relationships occur?

Individual/Group-Level Results (Walumbwa et al. 2010): 815 Employees in 7 Diverse Organizations in Kenya

- Group-level SL found to be positively related to employee (individual) organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs)
- This relationship was found to be mediated by:
 - Procedural justice climate (group level)
 - Service climate (group level)
 - Self-efficacy
 - Commitment to the leader
- That is, SL was related to each of these variables, which in turn were related to OCBs

Group Level

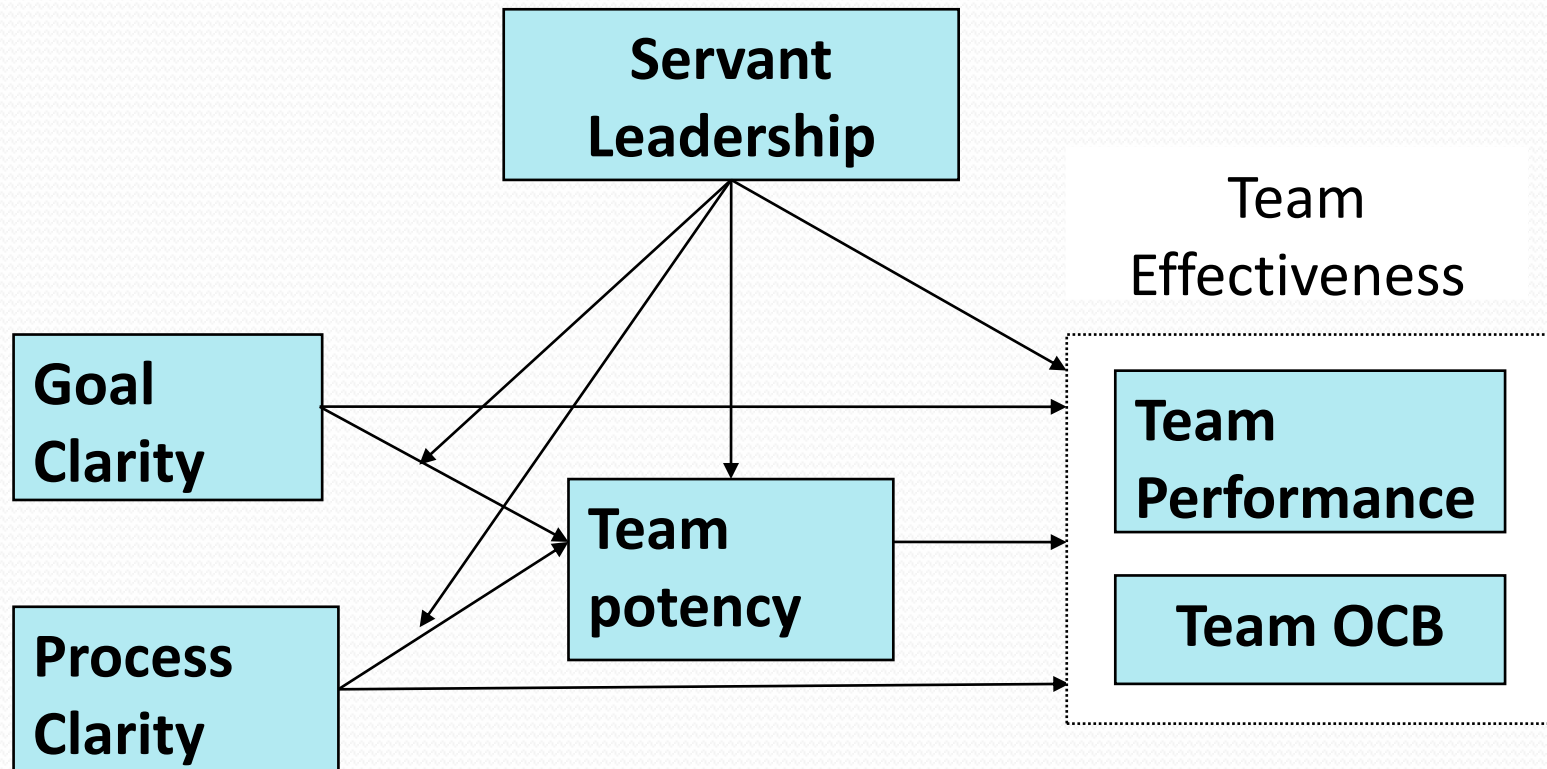


Individual Level

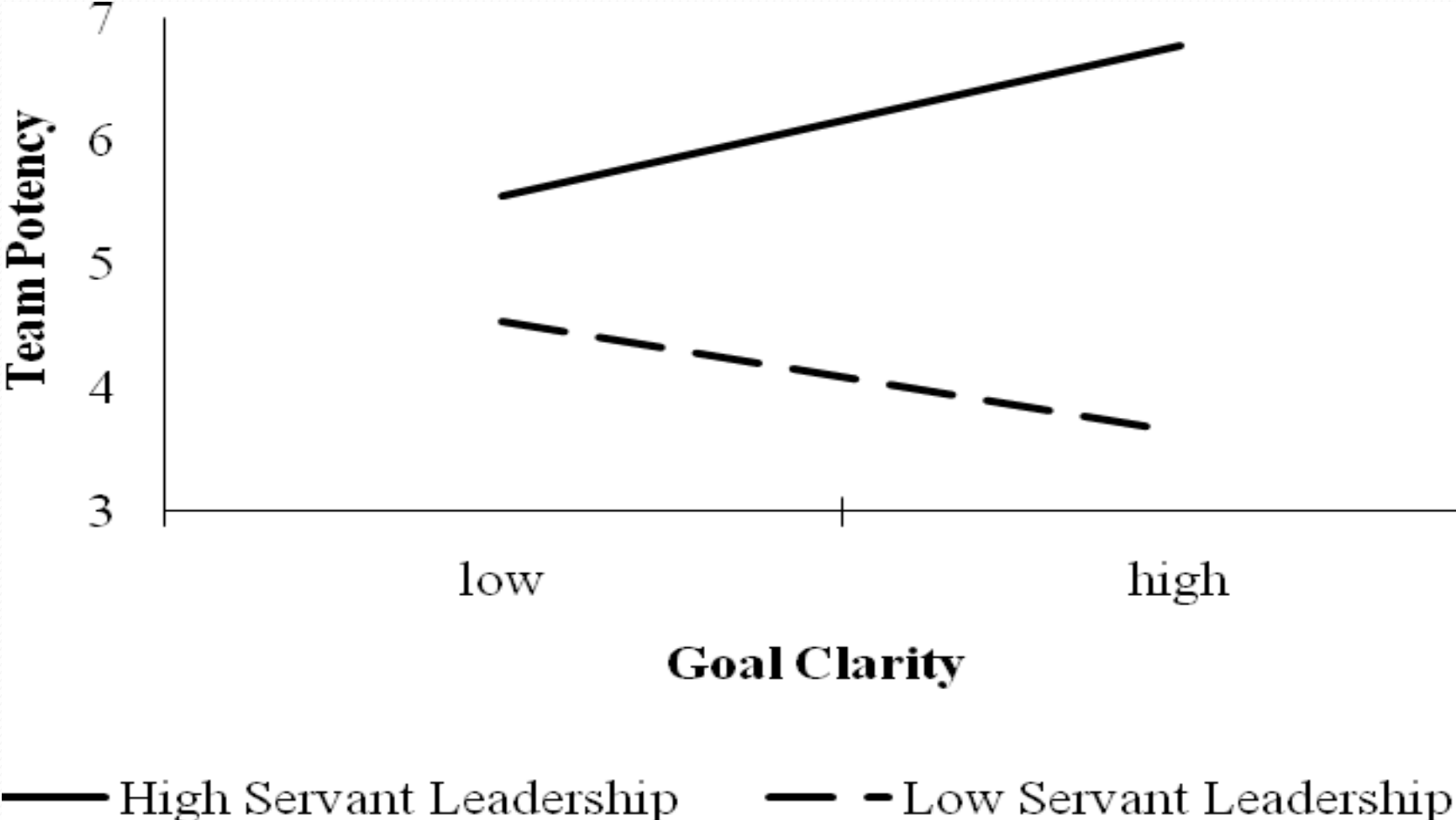
**Group-Level Results (Hu & Liden, 2011, *JAP*):
304 Employees in 71 groups in 5 P.R. China Banks**

- Group-level SL found to be positively related to team potency.
- Group-level SL also moderated relationships between group & process clarity and both team performance and OCBs...

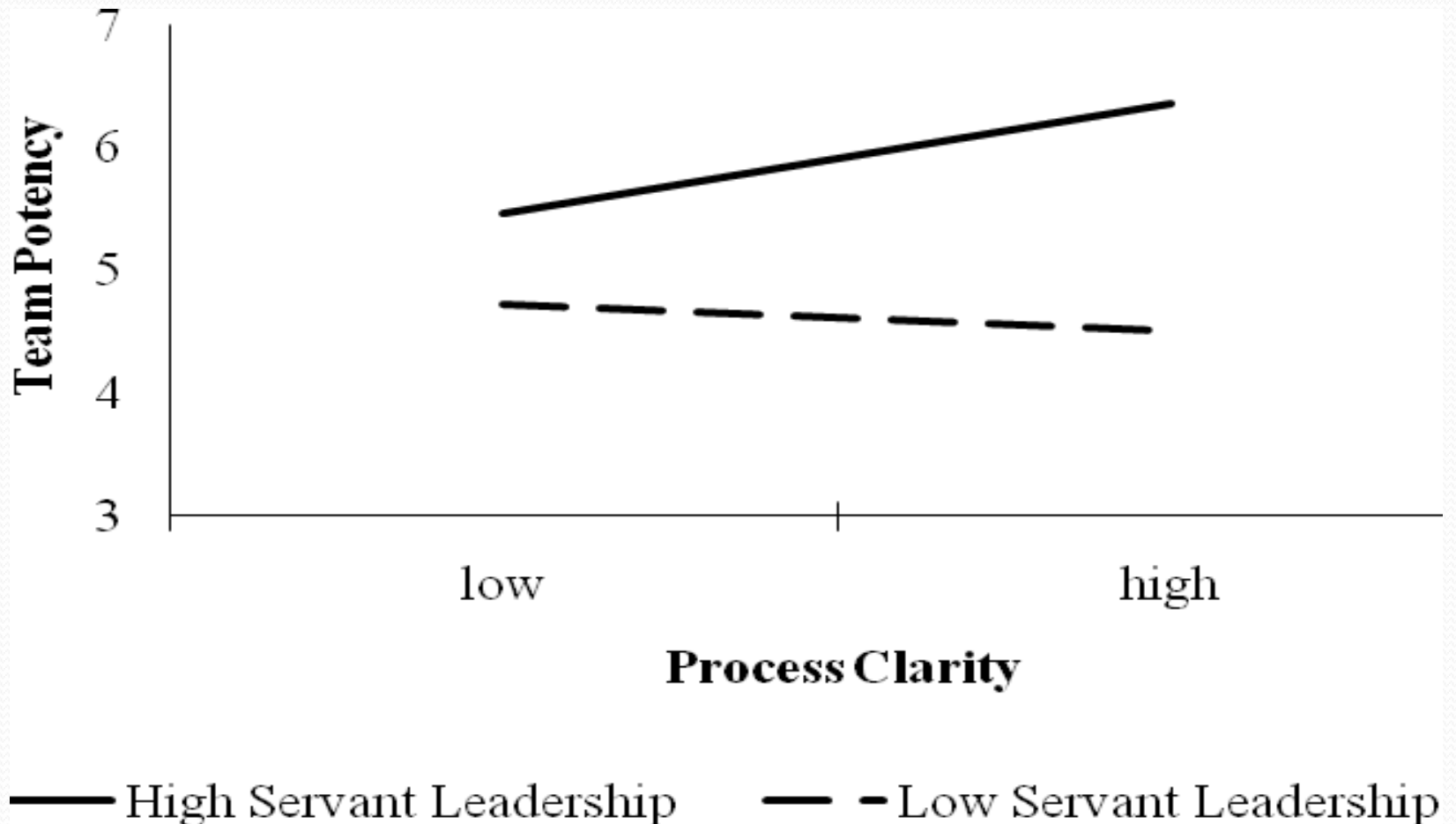
Hu & Liden (2011) findings



Interaction Between Goal Clarity and Servant Leadership on Team Potency

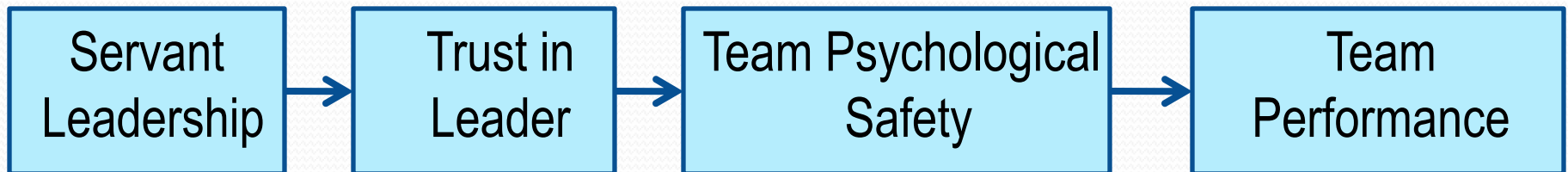


Interaction Between Process Clarity and Servant Leadership on Team Potency



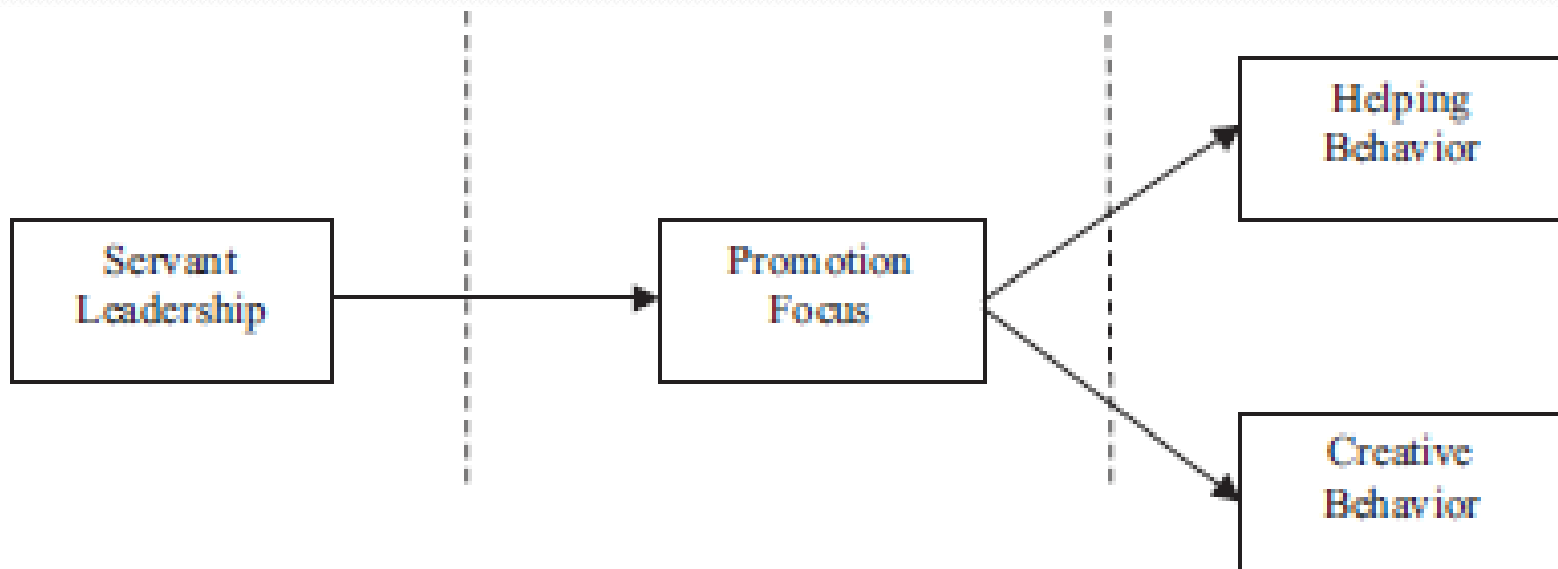
**Group-Level Results (Schaubroeck et al., 2011, *JAP*):
999 Employees in 191 groups in Hong Kong & U.S. Banks**

- Group-level SL explained an additional 10% of the variance in team performance after controlling transformational leadership.
- SL was shown to affect team performance through trust and psychological safety:



(Neubert et al., 2008, *JAP*):
250 employees national U.S. sample

- Servant Leadership found to be positively related to employee helping behavior and creativity.
- This relationship operated through promotion focus:



Organization-Level Results (Peterson et al., in press, *PPsych*): 126 CEOs of U.S. Software/Hardware Organizations

- Positive relationship found between CEO SL and firm performance measured as return on assets, even after controlling for transformational leadership.
- CEOs who were the founders of their organizations and those low in narcissism most likely to be servant leaders....

Desire for Servant Leadership: Leader Prototypes

- Bob Lord and colleagues in a program of research extending several decades have discovered that followers differ in their preferences for leadership styles.
- Mauer and Lord (1991) found that leader power and influence are negatively related to the gap between follower leader prototypes and leader behavior.

Leader Prototypes

Meuser, Liden, Wayne, Henderson, Hu, & Panaccio, 2011

- Based on Lord and colleagues' work, we proposed that followers form perceptions of their desire for having a servant leader.
- Measured SL prototypes in a sample of 118 U.S. manufacturing employees.

SL Prototype Measure

- SL Prototype: 7 item measure created for this study; items asking to rate extent to which ideal leader:
 - 1) Has extensive work-related knowledge.
 - 2) Empowers subordinates to make decisions, such as when and how to complete tasks.
 - 3) Has a genuine concern for subordinates' career growth.
 - 4) Puts subordinates' needs before his/her own needs.
 - 5) Is honest.
 - 6) Provides emotional support and guidance for subordinates' personal problems.
 - 7) Has a genuine concern for helping the community.
- Scale shows good reliability ($\alpha = .84$).

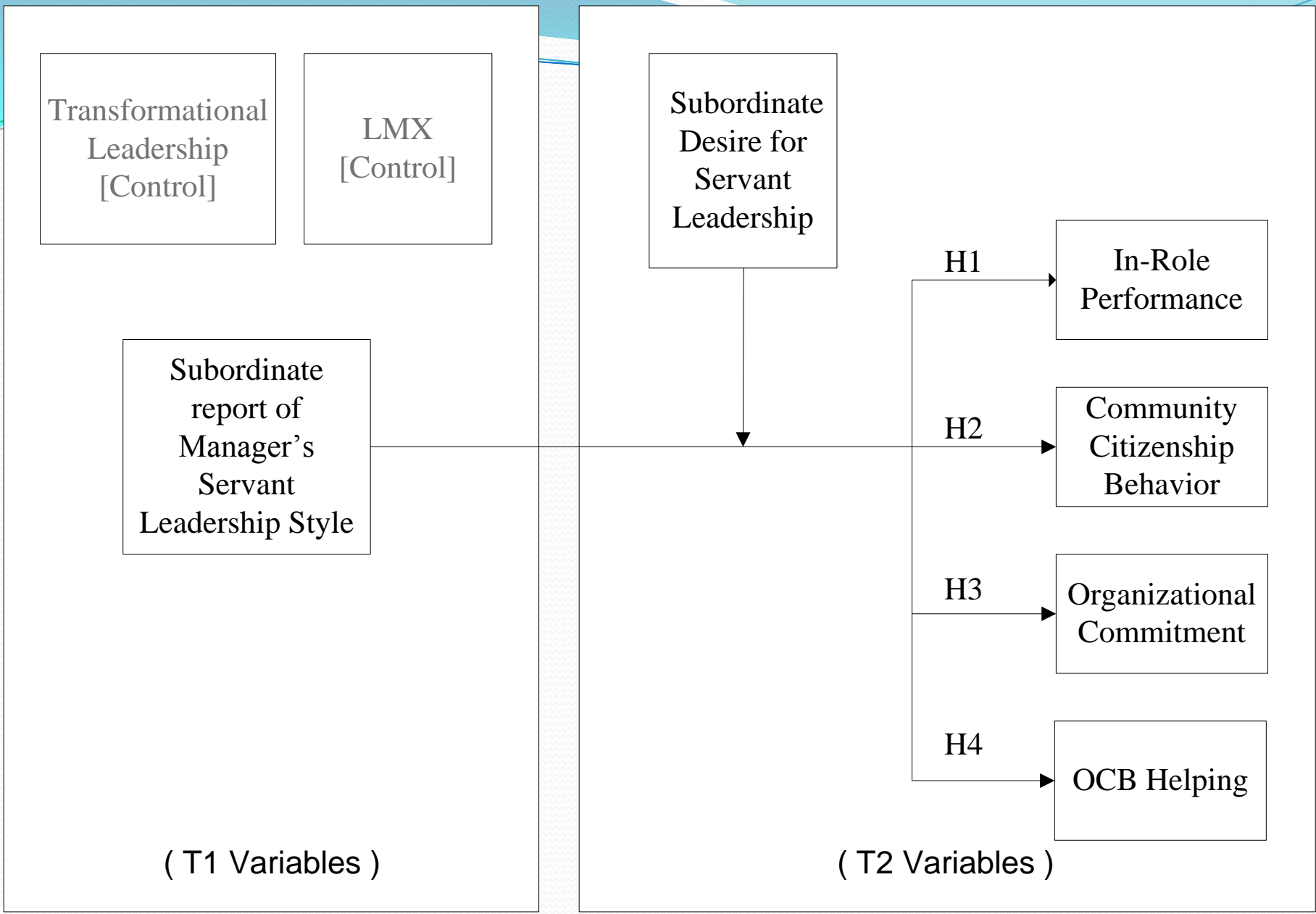
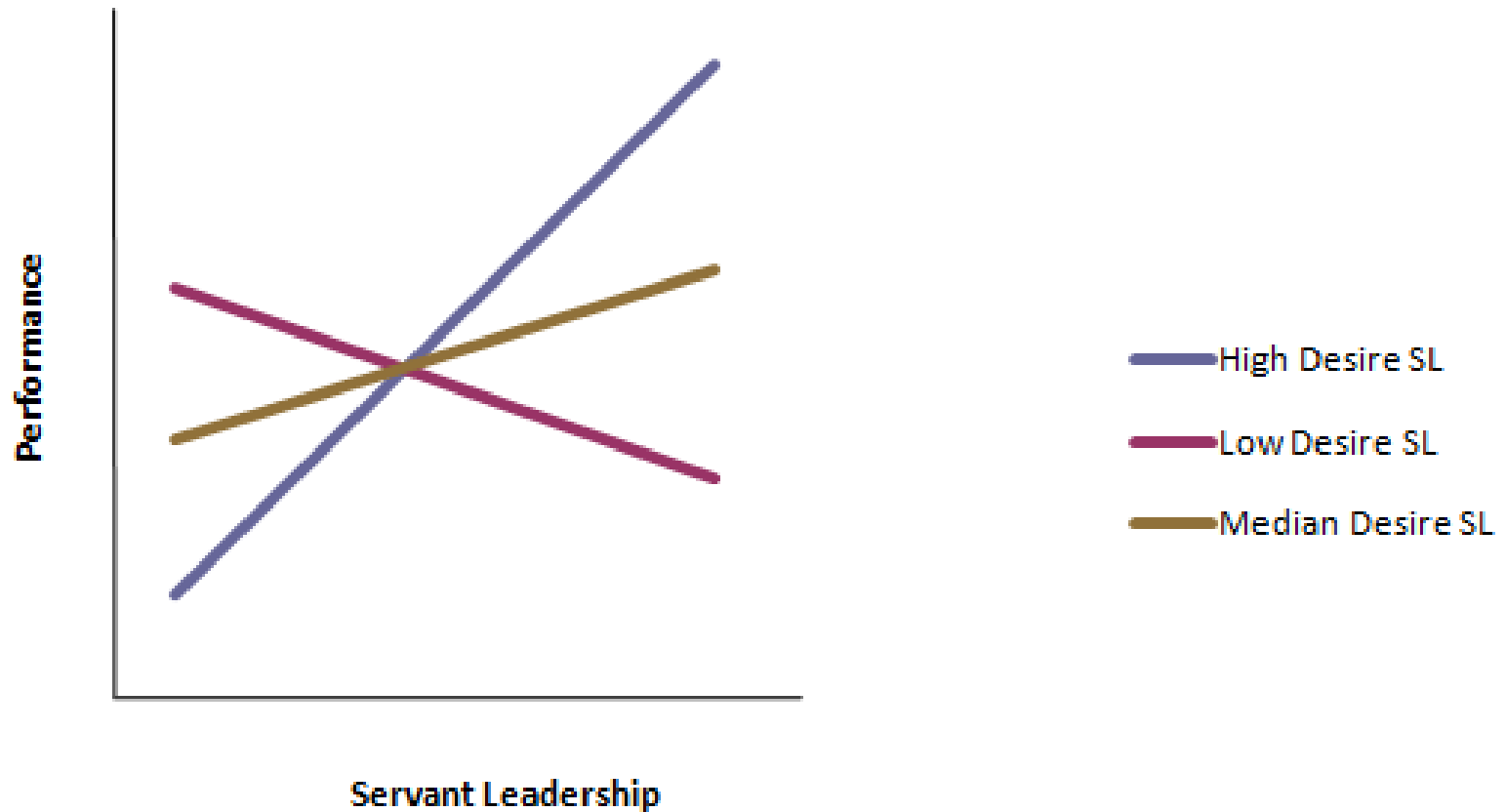
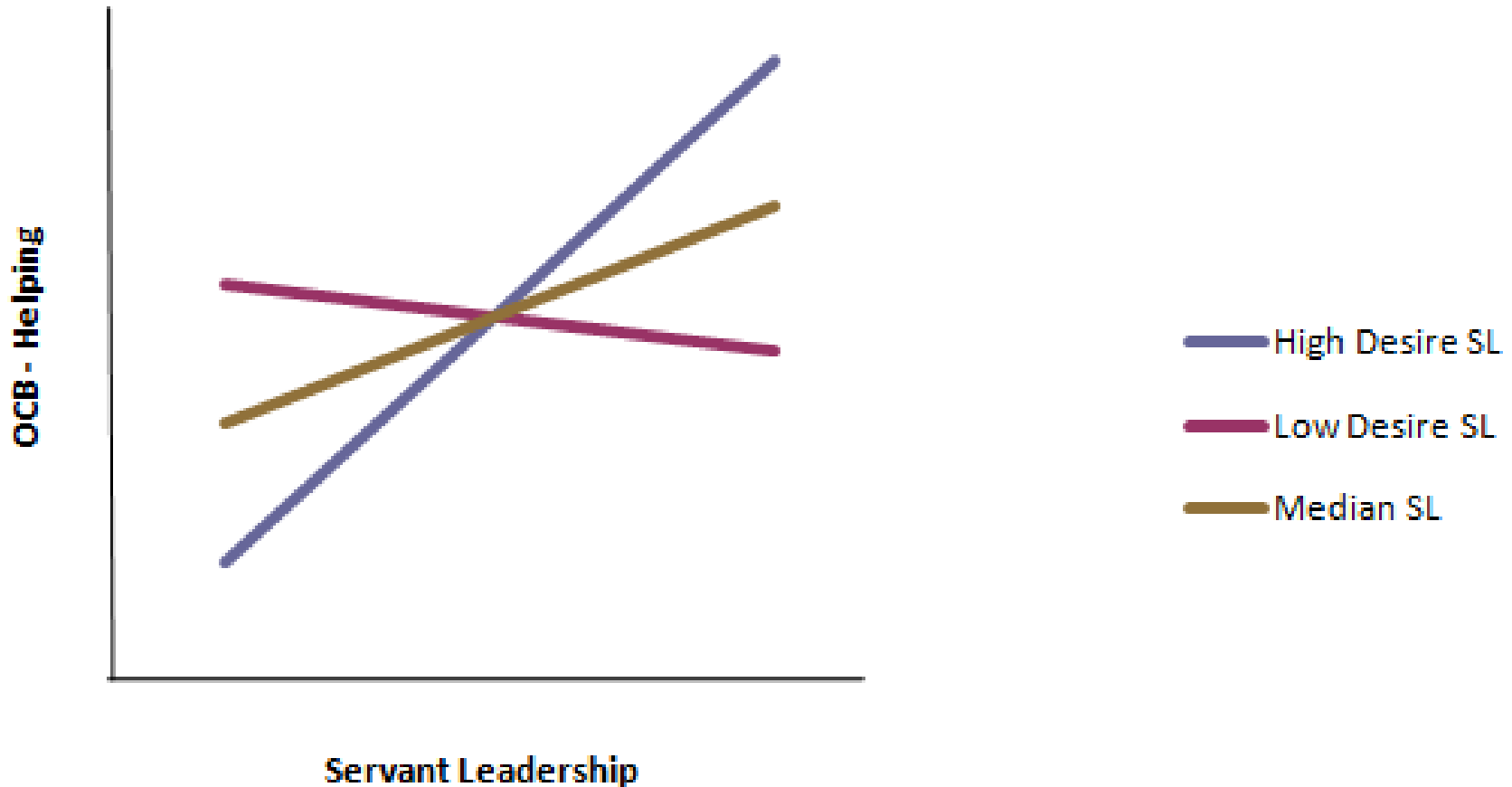


Figure 1: Proposed Model

Results: H1: In-Role Performance



Results: H4: Organizational Citizenship Behavior



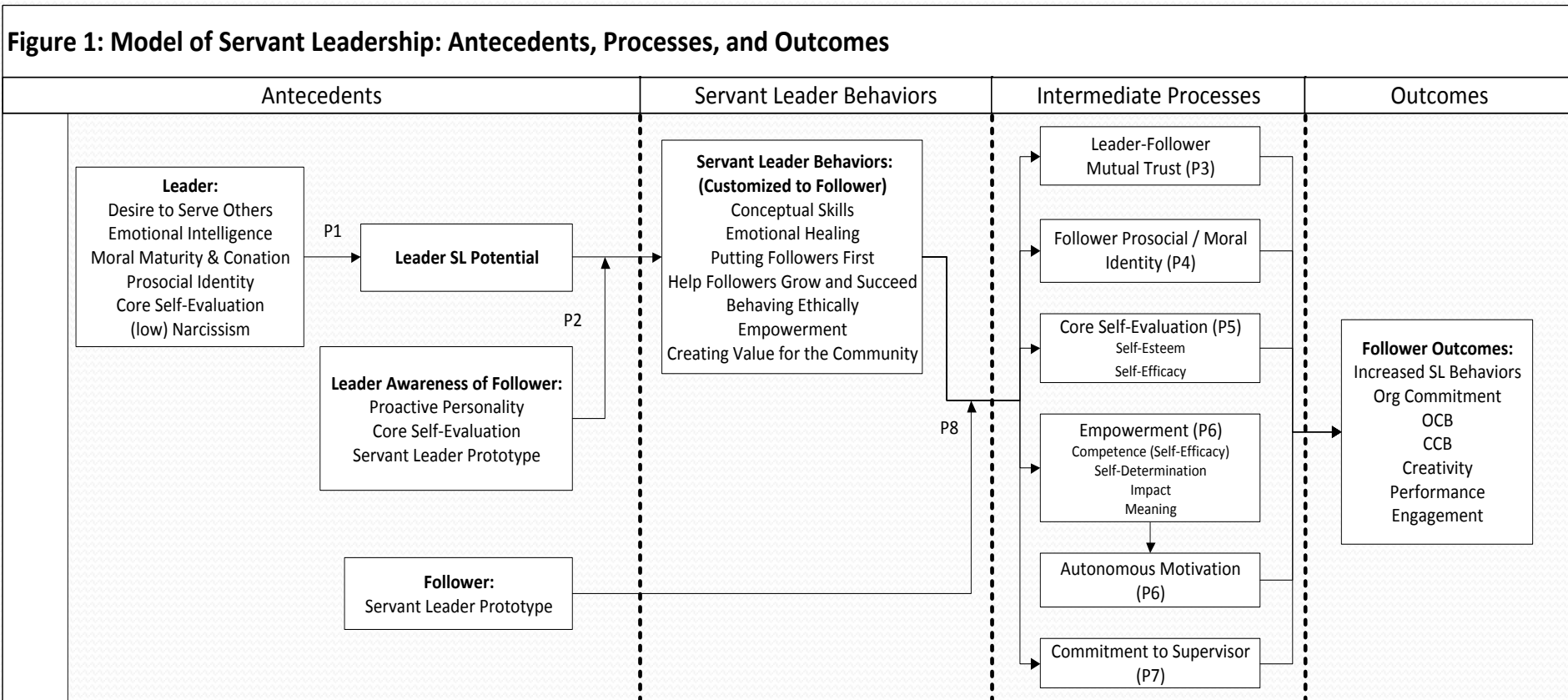
Summary of Main Findings

- SL is positively related to performance, and OCBs at the individual and team levels, and to organizational performance.
- SL enhances team potency and strengthens relationships between goal clarity, potency, and both team performance and team OCBs
- SL enhances employee trust and psychological safety.
- There is variability in employee desire for SL.

Main Practical Implications

- SL benefits performance at the individual, team, and organizational levels. So, it makes good business sense to engage in servant leadership.
- SL enhances employee trust and psychological safety, making it especially useful in encouraging employees to be creative.
- Servant leaders need to be aware that there is variability in employee desire for SL, making it important to develop unique relationships with each follower.

Future Research



From: Liden, R.C., Panaccio, A., Meuser, J.D., Hu, J., & Wayne, S.J. (forthcoming). Servant leadership: Antecedents, processes and outcomes. In Day, D.V. (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Future Research

- Antecedents of SL, such as leader and follower personality and emotional intelligence.
- Need to explore the process through which employees model the helping behaviors of their leader
- Investigating how SL culture develops
- How can individuals with low desire for SL change attitudes about SL?
- Need to examine each SL dimension separately
- Need to explore cultural differences in SL and relationships between SL and outcomes; paradox in Asia due to high collectivism but also high power distance.
- Is role conflict and related burnout a concern for servant leaders?

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