

Servant Leadership And Frontline Employee Job Performance In Vietnam's Aviation Industry: The Mediating Roles Of Organizational Commitment And Trust In Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of servant leadership on the job performance of frontline employees within Vietnam's aviation industry, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of organizational commitment and trust in leadership. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires from a convenience sample of 389 frontline employees employed at Vietnam Airlines. The study employed a quantitative research design and utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS software to analyze the data. The analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and job performance. Furthermore, the results indicate that organizational commitment and trust in leadership serve as significant mediators, suggesting that servant leadership enhances frontline employee job performance by cultivating trust in leadership and reinforcing organizational commitment.

KEYWORDS: Aviation industry; Frontline employees; Job performance; Organizational commitment; Servant leadership; Trust in leadership

1. Introduction

The global aviation industry is undergoing a robust recovery following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With increased demand for operational efficiency and service quality amid heightened competition, airlines are under pressure to rebuild their workforces and maintain high performance standards. According to Aero Professional (2024), the aviation industry supports approximately 90 million jobs globally, including 11.3 million directly related to flight operations, such as pilots, cabin crew, and technicians. This resurgence highlights the urgent need to adopt effective leadership models and HR strategies that enhance employee engagement, trust, and long-term commitment, especially among frontline employees, who are critical to delivering safe, compliant, and customer focused services.

Frontline employees (FLEs) are particularly critical in this context, given their direct contact with passengers and their influence on customer satisfaction, service quality perception, and overall brand image. However, the increasing complexity of service roles, emotional labor, and operational pressures pose significant challenges in sustaining optimal performance levels among FLEs.

As the aviation industry evolves in complexity and customer expectations rise, traditional leadership models may fall short in motivating frontline staff. Servant leadership, a people-centered leadership approach characterized by humility, empathy, and a commitment to employee development, has emerged as a promising paradigm in enhancing employee outcomes, particularly in service-intensive sectors. Existing research suggests that servant leadership promotes positive

organizational behavior, including enhanced job performance, by fostering personal growth, trust, and commitment (Giolito et al., 2021; Rabiul et al., 2022). Despite these promising findings, the applicability and mechanisms of servant leadership in high-pressure environments such as aviation remain underexplored—especially in relation to FLEs.

Servant leadership has been linked to key organizational outcomes such as trust in leadership (Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021; Khawar et al., 2023) and organizational commitment (Vuong et al., 2020; Ekhsan & Aziz, 2021; Setyaningrum et al., 2017). Both trust and commitment are well-established mediators that influence how leadership behaviors translate into job performance. However, most existing studies have focused on corporate or public-sector employees, with limited empirical evidence available for frontline roles in the aviation industry—particularly in emerging markets like Vietnam. Furthermore, studies examining the joint mediating effects of organizational commitment and trust in leadership in the relationship between servant leadership and job performance are scarce.

In Vietnam, although the aviation sector is expanding rapidly and holds substantial economic significance, leadership research within this industry is still nascent. Prior studies on servant leadership (Vuong, 2023) have largely centered on traditional enterprises or administrative roles, overlooking the unique challenges faced by FLEs in service delivery, operational pressure, and customer interaction. As such, the lack of contextualized studies on the mediating roles of organizational commitment and trust in leadership in the Vietnamese aviation context represents a meaningful gap in the literature.

Therefore, the objective of this study is threefold: (1) to

examine the direct effect of servant leadership on the job performance of frontline employees in Vietnam's aviation industry; (2) to investigate the mediating role of trust in leadership in this relationship; and (3) to explore the mediating role of organizational commitment. By addressing a significant empirical and contextual gap, this research contributes to leadership and human resource management literature in service-intensive and emerging-market sectors. The findings provide actionable insights for aviation organizations seeking to enhance service quality, operational resilience, and competitive advantage by adopting more people-centered leadership practices. This study is particularly timely as the aviation industry redefines strategic priorities toward sustainable workforce engagement and post-pandemic recovery.

2. Literature review

2.1. Leader-member exchange theory

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory is a foundational framework in leadership studies that emphasizes the quality of dyadic relationships between leaders and subordinates (Erdogan & Liden, 2002). The theory differentiates between high-quality "ingroup" exchanges—characterized by mutual trust, respect, and discretionary effort—and lower-quality "outgroup" relationships, which tend to be formal and transactional. High-quality LMX relationships are strongly associated with enhanced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee performance.

Over time, leader-member interactions evolve based on reciprocity, trust, and mutual respect, influencing organizational outcomes such as performance and citizenship behaviors (Chan & Mak, 2012). Although LMX does not inherently emphasize altruism or personal development, it shares conceptual alignment with servant leadership, which prioritizes employee growth and empowerment (Melchar & Bosco, 2010). Empirical evidence supports LMX's positive influence across industries including healthcare, finance, and energy (Law et al., 2010; Kim & Yi, 2019; Sharifkhani et al., 2016). In Vietnam, LMX has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing employee commitment and organizational development across the commercial and cultural sectors (Đông et al., 2020; Tân, 2021), reinforcing its relevance in complex, service-intensive environments such as aviation.

2.2. Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory (SET), originally proposed by Blau (1964), provides a theoretical basis for understanding reciprocal relationships in organizations. Blau distinguished between economic exchanges, which are transactional and quantifiable, and social exchanges, which involve intangible elements such as trust, mutual respect, and long-term reciprocity. A core principle of SET is reciprocity—individuals tend to return favorable treatment, which helps build sustained, trust-based relationships (Farooq et al., 2019).

Within workplace settings, SET explains how leader support can foster employee trust, satisfaction, and performance (Stafford, 2017). Applied to leadership research, SET offers insight into the mechanisms by which servant leadership influences subordinate outcomes. Empirical studies have shown

that servant leadership behavior, such as empathy, empowerment, and trust-building—enhance perceived social exchange quality (Aryee et al., 2023; Chinomona et al., 2013; Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021). These exchanges, in turn, strengthen employees' organizational commitment and motivation, ultimately contributing to improved employee job performance.

2.3. Servant leadership

The concept of servant leadership was first introduced by Greenleaf (1970), who advocated for leadership that prioritizes service, ethical conduct, and the holistic development of followers. Unlike traditional leadership models centered on power or authority, servant leadership adopts a bottom-up approach, emphasizing humility, empathy, and stewardship.

Burns (1978) and Spears (1995) further developed the theoretical basis of servant leadership, identifying core characteristics such as listening, foresight, emotional healing, and commitment to the growth of others. Blanchard and Zigarmi (1991) highlighted its ethical and socially responsible dimensions, while Liden et al. (2014) emphasized the role of servant leadership in promoting employee empowerment and positive organizational culture.

Empirical studies affirm that servant leadership enhances organizational outcomes through its impact on employee engagement, commitment, and performance. Kaltiainen and Hakanen (2022) linked servant leadership to greater work engagement and job performance, while Aboramadan et al. (2022) found a positive association with organizational citizenship behaviors. Khan et al. (2024) and Setiadi et al. (2023) also noted servant leadership's significant role in fostering organizational commitment and improving job-related outcomes.

2.4. Trust in leadership

Trust in leadership refers to employees' willingness to rely on and accept the decisions of their leaders, particularly under conditions of uncertainty or personal risk (Knoll & Gill, 2011). Greenleaf (1970) emphasized that trust forms the foundation of all meaningful leader-follower relationships, contributing to psychological safety, collaboration, and performance.

Effective leaders build trust through transparent communication, integrity, active listening, and consistent ethical behavior (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Atkinson and Butcher (2003) distinguished between interpersonal trust in supervisors and institutional trust in organizations, asserting that trust in direct leaders has a more immediate impact on job outcomes.

Within the servant leadership paradigm, trust-building is a core component. Through their supportive and empowering behaviors, servant leaders cultivate mutual respect and psychological safety, which are essential for performance and employee engagement (Liden et al., 2008; Schwarz et al., 2016). Trust thus acts not only as an outcome of leadership style but also as a mechanism through which leadership affects job-related behaviors.

2.5. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as an employee's psychological attachment to the organization and identification with its goals and values (Porter et al., 1974). Meyer and Allen's (1997) three-component model distinguish among: affective commitment (emotional attachment), continuance commitment (cost-based loyalty), and normative commitment (perceived obligation to stay).

High levels of commitment are associated with positive outcomes such as reduced turnover, enhanced job satisfaction, and improved performance (Cohen, 2007; Robbins & Judge, 2017). Commitment plays a pivotal role in fostering organizational resilience and sustainability, especially in service sectors that rely on emotional labor and sustained customer interaction (Tolentino, 2013; Loan, 2020).

Servant leadership is particularly effective in promoting affective and normative commitment, as it aligns with employees' values and creates a supportive work environment that enhances their sense of belonging.

2.6. Job performance

Employee job performance refers to the degree to which individuals meet or exceed job expectations and contribute to organizational effectiveness (Altındağ & Köseadağ, 2015). For FLEs in the aviation sector—such as flight attendants, ticketing agents, and ground personnel—performance is directly linked to customer satisfaction, brand image, and service continuity (Jung et al., 2017).

Given their direct and high-stakes interactions with customers, FLEs are subject to emotional demands, strict protocols, and service quality pressures. Leadership styles that emphasize support, development, and psychological safety—such as servant leadership—are particularly impactful in this context. Prior research indicates that servant leadership improves FLEs job performance by enhancing motivation, commitment, and resilience under pressure.

3. Research hypotheses and conceptual model

3.1. Research hypotheses

3.1.1. Servant leadership and employee trust in leadership

Servant leadership emphasizes the development, empowerment, and well-being of employees, promoting values such as integrity, compassion, and trust (McQuade et al., 2021). Consistent with LMX theory, servant leadership fosters high-quality dyadic relationships characterized by mutual respect and trust, which in turn positively influence employee outcomes, including satisfaction, commitment, and performance.

Trust in leadership is grounded in three primary dimensions: integrity, benevolence, and competence (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior, empathy, and authentic support are more likely to cultivate trust among subordinates. This trust strengthens employees' sense of psychological safety and increases their commitment and performance (Treadway et al., 2004). Empirical studies by Chinomona et al. (2013) and Goh and Low (2014) confirm that servant leadership fosters trust in leadership, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness. Based on LMX theory and the foregoing empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is

proposed:

H1: Servant leadership is positively related to employees' trust in their leaders.

3.1.2. Servant leadership and organizational commitment

Servant leadership fosters a supportive and empowering work environment that encourages employee loyalty and engagement. By promoting employee growth and prioritizing well-being, servant leadership has been shown to increase organizational commitment, particularly affective and normative commitment (Liden et al., 2008). Through the creation of meaningful work experiences and a sense of belonging, servant leaders can mitigate stress and cultivate deeper employee attachment to the organization.

Empirical evidence supports this relationship. Sokoll (2014) and Harwiki (2013) found that servant leadership behaviors such as empathy and support are strongly associated with increased organizational commitment. These findings suggest that servant leadership plays a central role in sustaining a committed workforce. Based on the foregoing theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Servant leadership is positively related to employees' organizational commitment.

3.1.3. Servant leadership and FLEs job performance

Job performance refers to the degree to which employees fulfill their job responsibilities and contribute to organizational objectives. In the context of the aviation industry, FLEs play a pivotal role in shaping customer experience, safety, and operational continuity.

Servant leadership enhances job performance by promoting a culture of trust, empowerment, and motivation (Chinomona et al., 2013). Walumbwa et al. (2010) demonstrated that leadership characterized by support and encouragement significantly improves employee performance. Similarly, Hunter et al. (2013) and Parris and Peachey (2013) showed that servant leadership improves employee satisfaction and productivity. Additional findings by Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017) and Lee et al. (2020) further affirm servant leadership's impact on individual and organizational performance. Based on the aforementioned theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Servant leadership is positively related to frontline employee job performance.

3.1.4. Employee trust in leadership and organizational commitment

Trust in leadership is a fundamental component of effective leader-member relationships and is strongly linked to employee motivation and organizational commitment. When leaders demonstrate consistency, fairness, and integrity, employees are more likely to develop loyalty and align themselves with organizational values.

SET provides a theoretical basis for this relationship, suggesting that trust is developed through reciprocal, respectful exchanges between leaders and employees (Dirks & Ferrin,

2002; Schoorman et al., 2007). Trust functions as a social currency that encourages employees to invest emotionally and behaviorally in the organization. Chinomona et al. (2013) identified trust as a key predictor of organizational commitment, especially in leadership contexts that emphasize ethical behavior and employee care.

Given the robust empirical support for the positive relationship between trust in leadership and organizational commitment, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Employees's trust in their leaders is positively related to organizational commitment.

3.1.5. Trust in leadership and frontline employee job performance

In high-stakes service industries like aviation, trust in leadership is a critical determinant of job performance. Employees who trust their leaders are more likely to demonstrate greater initiative, resilience, and alignment with organizational goals. Trust reduces uncertainty and promotes psychological safety, thereby improving task execution and service quality.

According to SET, employees who perceive fairness and support from their leaders tend to reciprocate with higher performance levels (Ahmad, 2021). Studies by Dannhauser and Boshoff (2006), and Rezaei et al. (2012) affirm that trust in leadership enhances employee effectiveness. Moreover, Brown et al. (2015) emphasized that trust creates a competitive advantage by fostering workforce cohesion and engagement. Based on the aforementioned theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Trust in leadership is positively related to frontline employee job performance.

3.1.6. Organizational commitment and frontline employees job performance

Organizational commitment, defined as the psychological attachment an employee has toward their organization, is widely recognized as a key driver of job performance. Committed employees are more engaged, productive, and less likely to leave their organizations (Ulrich, 2000).

Research by Brown et al. (2011), Tolentino (2013), and Ahmad et al. (2014) highlights the positive correlation between organizational commitment and job performance. These studies indicate that when employees identify with organizational goals and feel emotionally invested, they are more likely to perform at high levels and contribute to organizational success. Based on this theoretical foundation and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Organizational commitment is positively related to frontline employee job performance.

3.1.7. The mediating roles of trust in leadership and organizational commitment

SET suggests that leader-member relationships are built on implicit psychological contracts based on trust and mutual obligations. When trust is violated, these exchanges are disrupted, underscoring the importance of leader integrity in

fostering a productive work environment. Servant leadership, which prioritizes employee well-being and empowerment, is particularly effective in cultivating trust (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Empirical studies confirm that trust enhances job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance (Zargar et al., 2019; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Setyaningrum et al., 2017). Drawing from the foregoing discussion, the current study therefore hypothesizes that:

H7: Trust in leadership mediates the relationship between servant leadership and frontline employee job performance.

Organizational commitment, defined as an employee's alignment with organizational goals and values, is another critical mediator in the servant leadership - job performance relationship. By prioritizing employee growth and engagement, servant leadership cultivates a strong sense of commitment, leading to higher performance levels (Setyaningrum et al., 2017; Marisi & Suwarlan, 2020; Sungu et al., 2019; Ekhsan & Aziz, 2021). In light of the aforementioned arguments, this study hypothesizes that:

H8: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between servant leadership and frontline employee job performance.

3.2. Conceptual Model

A conceptual framework was developed following a comprehensive review of the literature. In this model, servant leadership (SER) serves as the independent variable, while employee trust in leadership (TRU) and organizational commitment (COM) is proposed as mediating variables in the relationship between servant leadership and job performance (PER).

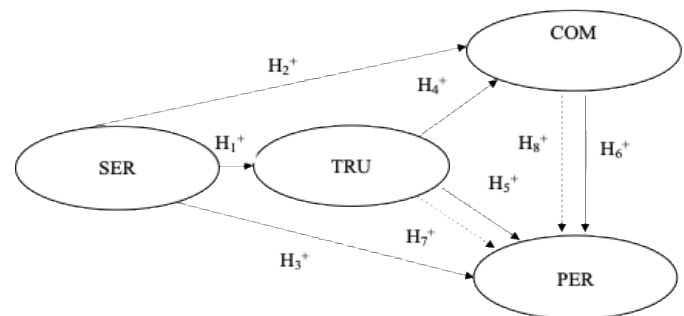


Figure 1: Conceptual model of servant leadership and frontline employee job performance

4. Research methodology

4.1. Sample and data collection

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationships among servant leadership, organizational commitment, trust in leadership, and job performance among FLEs in the aviation sector. Data were collected through self-administered structured questionnaires distributed to FLEs at Vietnam Airlines, the country's largest and most operationally complex airline. A total of 424 questionnaires were distributed using a convenience sampling

method, selected based on ease of access, availability, and voluntary participation. This approach was considered appropriate given the logistical constraints of reaching a dispersed workforce operating under strict schedules and operational demands. Additionally, frontline employees were prioritized due to their direct involvement in service delivery, making them highly relevant to the study's focus on performance and leadership dynamics. After rigorous data screening for completeness and consistency, 389 valid responses were retained for analysis, yielding a usable response rate of 91.7%. This relatively high response rate supports the reliability of the dataset while reflecting the willingness of employees to engage with the study topic.

4.2. Measurement instrument and questionnaire design

The study employed standardized and validated measurement instruments, adapted to reflect the specific operational context of the aviation industry. All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to ensure consistency and ease of interpretation across variables.

Servant leadership: Measured using a seven-item scale adapted from Liden et al. (2014), focusing on leader behaviors such as empowerment, humility, and stewardship.

Trust in leadership: Assessed via a six-item scale derived from Podsakoff et al. (1990), capturing perceptions of leader integrity, competence, and benevolence.

Organizational commitment: Measured using a six-item scale adapted from Andika and Darmanto (2020), reflecting employees' emotional attachment and loyalty to the organization.

Job performance: Evaluated using a seven-item scale developed by Liao and Chuang (2004), targeting service efficiency, reliability, and task execution in customer-facing roles.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small sample of employees to ensure clarity, reliability, and relevance before full-scale distribution.

4.3. Data analysis procedure

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling with AMOS 24.0 to test the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses. The analysis followed a two-step procedure:

1. **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** was first conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, including construct validity, convergent validity (using factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability), and discriminant validity.

2. The structural model was then tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. Model fit was assessed using common fit indices such as χ^2/df , CFI, GFI, TLI, and RMSEA.

To ensure the robustness of results, reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency (with $\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable).

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Respondent Profile

The final sample comprised 389 valid responses from frontline employees at Vietnam Airlines. Female respondents represented the majority of the sample at 58.1% ($n = 226$). In terms of age distribution, the workforce was predominantly young, with 48.8% ($n = 190$) aged between 18 and 29 years, followed by 36.8% ($n = 143$) in the 30–39 age range.

With respect to tenure, 31.1% ($n = 121$) of respondents reported 5–10 years of service, while 28.3% ($n = 110$) had between 1 and 5 years of experience. The job function breakdown showed that ground service staff constituted the largest proportion at 50.4% ($n = 196$), followed by flight attendants at 37.5% ($n = 146$). Airline ticket sales personnel made up 8.7% ($n = 34$), while other frontline roles, including support positions, accounted for 3.3% ($n = 13$).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Total		389	100.0
Gender	Male	163	41.9
	Female	226	58.1
Age	18-29	190	48.8
	30-39	143	36.8
	40-49	51	13.1
	50+	5	1.3
Experience	Less than 1 year	104	26.7
	1-5 years	121	31.1
	5-10 years	110	28.3
	10-20 years	42	10.8
	20+ years	12	3.1
Job Position	Flight Attendant	146	37.5
	Ground Service Staff	196	50.4
	Ticket Sales	34	8.7
	Other	13	3.3
Education Level	Intermediate Degree	25	6.4
	College Degree	89	22.9
	Bachelor's Degree	268	68.9
	Master's Degree or Higher	7	1.8

5.2. Reliability analysis results

The reliability analysis indicated strong internal consistency across all measurement constructs. Cronbach's alpha values for each scale exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.80, confirming high reliability (see Table 2). Furthermore, all item–total correlations surpassed 0.50, demonstrating that each item was strongly associated with its respective latent construct and contributed meaningfully to overall scale coherence.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to assess construct validity. Results indicated that one item—

TRU6 from the Trust in leadership scale—failed to meet the minimum factor loading threshold of 0.50, with a loading of 0.493 (see Table 2). Accordingly, this item was excluded from subsequent analyses. A revised EFA, conducted after the removal of TRU6, showed that all remaining items loaded strongly (above 0.50) on their respective factors, thereby confirming the construct validity of the measurement model.

These results provide robust empirical support for the reliability and dimensional integrity of the measurement instruments, validating their suitability for further statistical analysis.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha and load factor in EFA & CFA.

Dimension	Scale items	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor loadings (EFA)	Factor loadings (CFA)
Servant leadership (SER)	SER1	0.904	0.810	0.820
	SER2		0.692	0.741
	SER3		0.648	0.738
	SER4		0.805	0.746
	SER5		0.870	0.748
	SER6		0.680	0.739
	SER7		0.675	0.772
Trust in leader (TRU)	TRU1	0.909	0.803	0.823
	TRU2		0.858	0.857
	TRU3		0.855	0.844
	TRU4		0.805	0.831
	TRU5		0.865	0.853
	TRU6		0.493	
Organizational commitment (COM)	COM1	0.879	0.768	0.740
	COM2		0.670	0.664
	COM3		0.780	0.747
	COM4		0.700	0.767
	COM5		0.721	0.762
	COM6		0.766	0.767
Job performance (PER)	PER1	0.927	0.810	0.834
	PER2		0.887	0.875
	PER3		0.805	0.848
	PER4		0.822	0.806
	PER5		0.741	0.757
	PER6		0.701	0.742
	PER7		0.795	0.770

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement model. All observed variables demonstrated satisfactory factor loadings ranging from 0.664 to 0.875, exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). These results provide strong empirical support for the convergent validity of the constructs.

Model fit indices further affirmed the adequacy of the measurement model (see Figure 2). The CFA results indicated an overall excellent fit to the data, with key indices meeting established benchmarks: Chi-square significance (p-value) = 0.000 (< 0.05, indicating model significance); CMIN/df (Chi-square/df ratio) = 3.599 (acceptable if < 5.0); Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.933; Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.926 (both within the acceptable range of 0.90–1.00); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068 (within the

recommended range of 0.03–0.08)

Collectively, these results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates strong construct validity and goodness-of-fit, justifying its use in subsequent structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses.

Table 3: CFA Model fit indicators

Indices	Standard Threshold	Estimate	Conclusion
p-value	< 0.05	0.000	Significant
CMIN/df	< 3.00	1.939	Good fit
TLI	0.9 - 1.0	0.956	Good fit
CFI	0.9 - 1.0	0.960	Good fit
GFI	0.9 - 1.0	0.904	Good fit
RMSEA	0.03 - 0.08	0.049	Good fit

Table 4 presents the results of the reliability and validity assessments for the constructs included in the CFA model. The measurement model demonstrates strong psychometric properties, as evidenced by the following indicators: Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.880 to 0.928, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming high internal consistency and scale reliability. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values fall between 0.550 and 0.708, surpassing the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50, which supports the convergent validity of all constructs. Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) values are consistently lower than the corresponding AVEs for each construct, satisfying Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion for discriminant validity.

Table 4: Summarized of CR, AVE and MSV.

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR (H)	PER	SER	TRU	COM
PER	0.928	0.649	0.377	0.933	0.806			
SER	0.904	0.575	0.328	0.906	0.572***	0.758		
TRU	0.924	0.708	0.223	0.924	0.472***	0.305***	0.841	
COM	0.880	0.550	0.377	0.882	0.614***	0.568***	0.380***	0.742

Note: ***is significant at the 1% level

These findings collectively confirm that the measurement model possesses strong internal consistency, adequate convergence, and distinct construct boundaries, thereby validating its suitability for further SEM procedures.

5.3 Results of testing the hypotheses

The SEM demonstrated an overall good fit to the data, as evidenced by the fit indices presented in Figure 2.

The Chi-square/df ratio ($\chi^2/df = 1.939$) falls well within the acceptable range (≤ 3.00), suggesting a reasonable fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data. The GFI = 0.904, and the CFI = 0.960 both exceed the

recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating an excellent level of model fit. Additionally, the $TLI = 0.956$ reflects a high degree of model parsimony.

The $RMSEA = 0.049$ is below the threshold of 0.06, and the $PCLOSE$ value (0.575) exceeds 0.05, further confirming that the model's approximation to the population covariance structure is adequate. Collectively, these indices confirm that the proposed model exhibits strong goodness-of-fit, validating its structural integrity and supporting the subsequent hypothesis testing.

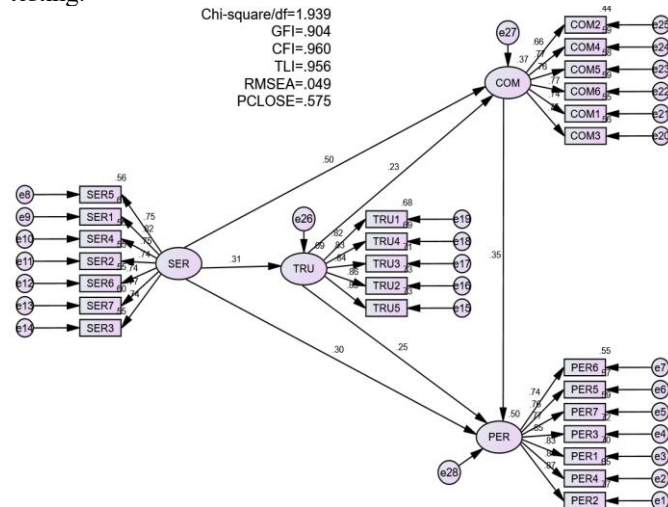


Figure 2: The hypothesized structural model

The results of the SEM, as summarized in Table 5, provide robust empirical support for all six direct effect hypotheses proposed in the conceptual framework. All path coefficients were found to be positive and statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, indicating strong alignment with the theoretical expectations.

Table 5: Hypotheses results

Hypotheses	Unstandardized Estimates				Standardized estimates	Results
	Estimate	SE	CR	Sig.		
H ₁	0.318	0.058	5.472	0.000	0.305	Supported
H ₂	0.447	0.053	8.393	0.000	0.499	Supported
H ₃	0.276	0.051	5.392	0.000	0.297	Supported
H ₄	0.196	0.044	4.441	0.000	0.228	Supported
H ₅	0.221	0.041	5.364	0.000	0.248	Supported
H ₆	0.363	0.061	5.991	0.000	0.351	Supported

H₁: The relationship between servant leadership and trust in leadership was supported, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.305 and $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant positive effect.

H₂: A strong positive relationship was found between servant leadership and organizational commitment, with a standardized coefficient of 0.499 and $p < 0.05$, confirming Hypothesis 2.

H₃: Servant leadership was positively associated with job performance, supported by a standardized coefficient of 0.297 and $p < 0.05$, validating Hypothesis 3.

H₄: The path from trust in leadership to organizational commitment yielded a standardized coefficient of 0.228 and p

< 0.05 , supporting Hypothesis 4.

H₅: Trust in leadership also demonstrated a significant positive relationship with job performance, with a standardized coefficient of 0.248 and $p < 0.05$, confirming Hypothesis 5.

H₆: The relationship between organizational commitment and job performance was significant, with a standardized coefficient of 0.351 and $p < 0.05$, supporting Hypothesis 6.

Collectively, these findings affirm the theoretical model, highlighting the pivotal role of servant leadership in shaping trust, commitment, and job performance within frontline aviation roles. The results also validate the proposed causal pathways within the leadership–commitment–performance nexus, offering a comprehensive foundation for examining indirect effects through mediation analysis.

5.4. Indirect effect results

5.4.1. Multiple indirect effect

To examine the mediating mechanisms through which servant leadership influences job performance, a SEM was employed to test the multiple indirect effects via organizational commitment and trust in leadership.

As shown in Table 6, the significance values for the indirect paths $SER \rightarrow COM \rightarrow PER$ and $SER \rightarrow TRU \rightarrow PER$ were both $p = 0.001$, indicating high statistical significance. These results suggest that both organizational commitment and trust in leadership function as effective mediators in the relationship between servant leadership and performance outcomes.

Table 6: Sig value of the test

Latent Variable	SER	TRU	COM	PER
TRU
COM	0.001
PER	0.001	0.001

The standardized total indirect effect of servant leadership on performance was 0.251 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a moderate and statistically significant indirect influence (see Table 7).

Table 7: Standardized multiple indirect effect coefficient

Latent Variable	SER	TRU	COM	PER
TRU	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
COM	0.062	0.000	0.000	0.000
PER	0.251	0.071	0.000	0.000

These findings reinforce that servant leadership indirectly enhances job performance through its effects on organizational commitment and trust in leadership, in addition to its direct impact.

5.4.2. Specific indirect effect

A more granular analysis of specific mediation paths further clarified the individual roles of organizational

commitment and trust in leadership as mediators.

As reported in Table 8, the indirect effect of $SER \rightarrow COM \rightarrow$ job performance yielded a standardized coefficient of 0.175 ($p < 0.001$), highlighting organizational commitment as the stronger mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and job performance. This path accounted for the most substantial portion of the overall indirect effect, emphasizing the importance of fostering commitment in performance enhancement.

Table 8: Specific indirect effect result

Hypotheses		Indirect Effect		
		Unstandardized Estimates	P-Value	Standardized Estimates (Beta)
H ₇	$SER \rightarrow COM \rightarrow PER$	0.163	0.000	0.175
H ₈	$SER \rightarrow TRU \rightarrow PER$	0.070	0.001	0.076

Meanwhile, the specific path $SER \rightarrow TRU \rightarrow PER$ also demonstrated a statistically significant effect, with a standardized coefficient of 0.076 ($p = 0.001$). While comparatively smaller, this still confirms that trust in leadership contributes meaningfully to performance outcomes, albeit to a lesser degree than organizational commitment.

In sum, these results provide strong support for hypotheses H₇ and H₈, affirming the mediating roles of both organizational commitment and trust in leadership in linking servant leadership to job performance. These findings offer important theoretical insights into the dual-pathway mechanism through which servant leadership fosters high performance among frontline employees.

The results of the bootstrapping analysis, presented in Table 9, offer strong support for the stability and reliability of the estimated structural model. Bootstrapping was conducted using 5,000 resamples to assess the accuracy of path coefficients and detect any potential estimation bias.

Table 9: Compare Bootstrap estimators and samples.

Path Relationship	Bootstrap estimate			Compare with sample		CR
	SE	SE-SE	Mean	Bias	SE-Bias	
$TRU \leftarrow SER$	0.081	0.002	0.301	-0.004	0.003	-1.33
$COM \leftarrow SER$	0.053	0.001	0.497	-0.002	0.002	-1.00
$COM \leftarrow TRU$	0.053	0.001	0.223	-0.005	0.002	-2.50
$PER \leftarrow SER$	0.066	0.001	0.298	0.001	0.002	-0.50
$PER \leftarrow TRU$	0.056	0.001	0.248	0.000	0.002	0.00
$PER \leftarrow COM$	0.058	0.001	0.344	-0.007	0.002	-3.50

Across all estimated paths, the bias values between the bootstrap estimates and the original sample estimates were found to be minimal, with corresponding standard errors of the bias (SE-Bias) remaining very low. The critical ratios (CR) for all relationships were below the conventional threshold of ± 1.96 , indicating that none of the observed deviations are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

These findings collectively suggest that the model

estimates are robust and statistically stable, thereby enhancing confidence in the reliability of the structural relationships derived from the sample data. The bootstrapping procedure thus confirms the internal consistency and replicability of the model under repeated sampling.

5.4.3. Discussion of research findings

The study confirms that servant leadership significantly enhances trust in leadership ($\beta = 0.305$, $p = 0.000$). Leaders who demonstrate honesty and consistent support foster stronger leader-subordinate relationships and improve employee performance (Setyaningrum et al., 2017). This supports SET, which suggests employees reciprocate positive leadership with constructive behavior. Servant leadership also strongly influences organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.499$, $p = 0.000$) and directly improves frontline employee performance ($\beta = 0.297$, $p = 0.000$), by enhancing motivation and unlocking intrinsic potential (Lee et al., 2020). Additionally, trust in leadership ($\beta = 0.076$, $p = 0.001$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.175$, $p = 0.000$) serve as mediators, reinforcing earlier findings (Setiadi et al., 2023). Trust in leadership ($\beta = 0.248$) and commitment ($\beta = 0.351$) also directly predict job performance, promoting psychological safety, intrinsic motivation, and long-term employee-organization connection. Organizational commitment contributes to stability and sustained engagement. These results align with previous research (Saleem et al., 2020; Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021), emphasizing that organizations benefit from leaders who inspire trust and employees with strong commitment, ultimately driving superior performance.

6. Implications and conclusions

6.1. Theoretical and practical implications

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by validating the relevance of servant leadership in Vietnam's aviation sector, a context traditionally dominated by hierarchical leadership. Empirical findings show strong positive links between servant leadership and trust in leadership, organizational commitment, and job performance, reinforcing SET. Employees tend to reciprocate leaders' empathy, support, and ethical behavior with higher motivation, loyalty, and productivity.

Crucially, the study also confirms the mediating roles of trust in leadership and organizational commitment, offering a nuanced view of how servant leadership translates into performance gains. This mediation effect emphasizes that the psychological climate created by servant leaders—marked by safety, integrity, and concern for employee growth—is instrumental in shaping positive behavioral outcomes. Notably, trust and commitment also emerged as independent predictors of job performance, adding conceptual depth to their dual role as both mediators and outcome drivers.

In the context of Vietnam Airlines, these insights are especially meaningful. The airline operates in a high-pressure, customer-centric industry where compliance, coordination, and service consistency are mission-critical. Given Vietnam's cultural characteristics particularly high-power distance, collectivism, and a strong emphasis on harmony and loyalty,

servant leadership aligns well with societal values while simultaneously enhancing workforce outcomes. Employees in this environment may respond more favorably to leaders who exhibit humility, reliability, and care, which directly supports trust formation and emotional commitment.

From a practical standpoint, Vietnam Airlines and similar service-driven organizations should prioritize developing servant leadership capabilities as a strategic HR initiative. Leadership development programs should focus on strengthening core servant leader behaviors such as ethical decision-making, interpersonal support, active listening, and personalized mentorship. Doing so could foster a psychologically safe work environment, reduce turnover, and improve service delivery through engaged and motivated frontline staff. Additionally, the dual mediating pathways identified in the model suggest a need for integrated interventions that not only train leaders but also support organizational systems that reinforce trust and commitment such as transparent communication, fair performance evaluations, and recognition practices aligned with collective achievement.

6.2. Conclusions

This research extends existing knowledge by empirically validating the mediating roles of trust in leadership and organizational commitment in the relationship between servant leadership and job performance among frontline employees in Vietnam's aviation sector. The structural model results confirmed that servant leadership has both direct and indirect effects on job performance, with trust and commitment functioning as key mediators.

The findings affirm that employees who perceive their leaders as ethical, supportive, and growth-oriented are more likely to develop trust and commitment—both of which significantly enhance their job performance. These results reinforce the theoretical foundation of LMX and SET and offer practical validation of servant leadership's effectiveness in high-pressure, service-oriented environments.

In conclusion, the study provides both academic and managerial insights by establishing a compelling case for the integration of servant leadership principles into human resource and leadership development strategies, particularly in industries where frontline service quality is mission-critical.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations, primarily due to its focus on frontline employees of Vietnam Airlines. As such, the findings may not adequately represent the broader dynamics of the Vietnamese aviation sector, particularly with respect to private and international carriers. To enhance the generalizability and depth of insight, future research should consider expanding the scope of the sample to encompass a more diverse range of airlines, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of the effects of servant leadership within the industry.

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