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Servant leadership and well-being: A scoping review of positive organisational outcomes

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Orientation: Servant leadership is an important human resource management strategy, given its positive well-being outcomes.

Research purpose: The aim of this study was to provide a set of research studies on servant leadership that indicate direct relationships with positive psychological well-being outcomes in organisations.

Motivation for the study: Servant leadership may lead to positive psychological well-being outcomes for organisations.

Research approach/design and method: A scoping review provided evidence of research on servant leadership and positive psychological well-being. The literature was searched using computerised databases from January 2015 to November 2021. Data were extracted through content analysis from 14 scientific articles.

Main findings: Servant leadership inspire employees to reciprocate the positivity they experience by demonstrating positive feelings and attitudes towards the organisation. This approach also foster group flourishing and enhance adaptation to the work environment, resulting in increased levels of hope, happiness and engagement.

Practical/managerial implications: Human resource strategies and interventions should focus on developing servant leadership among managers and followers within organisations.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributed to the advancement of knowledge on servant leadership and positive psychological well-being within organisations.

Keywords: positive organisational psychology; positive psychology; positive psychological well-being; servant leadership; scoping review; well-being, workplace; work context.

Introduction

Human resource management strategies can serve as a system to shape employee attitudes and behaviours - motivating their employees to assist the organisation in gaining a competitive advantage. In this regard, the implementation of servant leadership strategies proves to increase overall employee well-being and employee satisfaction – leading to positive organisational outcomes (Malik et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). Satena et al. (2024), after establishing a strong positive relationship between servant leadership (SL) and performance, argued that managers should adopt SL as the choice of leadership in order to create a positive growth environment that influences positive outcomes and organisational effectiveness.

In addition, Ludwikowska (2023) also emphasises the importance of an employee-orientated culture that can emerge from a human resource management strategy to create positive employee experiences. The author further indicates that SL ultimately enhances overall job performance. In addition, Canavesi and Minelli (2022) are of the opinion that servant leaders contribute to employee well-being and organisational commitment. Servant leadership has proven to be one of the promising leadership approaches that emerged and developed in response to the prevalence of moral breaches and management in organisations (Adiguzel et al., 2020). It is described as leadership that focusses on the follower's personal growth and development (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022).

A servant leader manages organisational challenges by placing positive organisational outcomes above their personal interests (Zou et al., 2015). Servant leadership is a prosocial leadership behaviour that allows the leader to proactively support and invest in the follower (Stollberger et al., 2019). Leadership styles that are associated with caring behaviours, such as SL, are positively

associated with positive organisational psychology (POP) outcomes and are becoming more relevant for organisations to gain a competitive edge (Thompson et al., 2020). Van Zyl et al. (2024) drew upon the work of Luthans and Youssef (2020) and Donaldson and Ko (2010) to conceptualise POP as the scientific investigation of positive outcomes, processes, attributes, states, traits, behaviours, experiences and quality of organisation experiences. Maziriri et al. (2019) argued that positive outcomes can also be regarded as a combination of positive affective states such as happiness. Servant leadership can be beneficial for relationships at work, help employees cope with challenges in organisations and foster a positive psychological culture.

After the initial studies on SL and its benefits to the organisational context, some review studies have emerged according to a review by the authors, of which Coetzer et al. (2017), Dutta and Khatri (2017) and Eva et al. (2019) are the most comprehensive SL reviews. Coetzer et al. (2017) provided a comprehensive overview of the correlations and links between SL and the organisational context. Dutta and Khatri (2017) added to the SL outcomes and stated that SL is focussed on the employee and can therefore lead to more positive organisational behaviours. The systematic review of Eva et al. (2019) emphasised the organisational outcomes and antecedents of SL, and the conclusion was that SL was beneficial for organisational citizenship behaviour.

Although Eva et al.'s (2019) final review of SL provided a comprehensive framework of different angles of research on SL, a more specific scope is needed to indicate SL and its direct relationships with POP outcomes in organisational settings. Furthermore, it is important for a review to also include studies that have emerged since 2015. Although there is a relationship between SL and POP, there is no recent integrated synthesis of research studies on SL and POP outcomes within organisation settings. Investigation of research studies on SL and POP outcomes would benefit from a scoping review. In contrast to a systematic review that aims to answer a specific question or a series of research questions using a rigid detailed protocol (Peters et al., 2015), a scoping review aims to map key concepts that underpin a specific research area (Pham et al., 2014).

The purpose of this scoping review reported in this article was to investigate what types of SL and POP outcomes have been reported within organisational settings. The research also aimed to create a synthesis of research on SL and POP outcomes in the organisational context, including authors, year of publication, country, work and/or organisational and/or occupational population, method and POP outcomes.

Theoretical perspective

Servant leadership and positive organisational psychology

The concept of SL was pioneered by Greenleaf (1970), who conceptualised it as a natural feeling to serve that results in an aspiration to lead. Servant leadership was later refined by many scholars, such as Lee et al. (2019), who stated that SL involves a holistic approach to leadership in which it engages followers in multiple behaviours such as ethical, relational, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Zhang et al. (2021) refer to the work of Liden et al. (2008) that continued to build on the theory by suggesting seven dimensions of SL and named them *encouraging, emotional healing, creating value for the group, communicating conceptual skills, empowering followers, helping followers grow and succeed, putting followers first and behaving ethically*. Servant leadership, furthermore, has an impact on individual, team and organisational outcomes, such as organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour, job performance and job satisfaction (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022).

Martin-del-Rio et al. (2021) defined POP outcomes as:

> The positive experiences, strengths, and psychological resources of people, groups, and institutions to achieve optimal development and functioning. As a result, the main research topics addressed by PP are orientated towards subjective well-being (happiness); positive moods and emotions; sensory, intellectual, and aesthetic pleasures; strengths and virtues; healthy practices such as optimism, gratitude, meditation, physical exercise, or artistic expression; interests, skills, and achievements; positive personal relationships; positive institutions (educational, labour, political); or transcendence and the meaning of life, among others. (p. 1)

In addition, it can be regarded that the positive aspects of one's experience in life are not necessarily the opposite of distress and disorder (Ciarrochi et al., 2013). Positive organisational psychology outcomes have been utilised in this study as an umbrella term to include positive psychological well-being, positive well-being or health and positive pathways or effects that SL has for the organisation. It includes positive thoughts and emotions that people use to evaluate their lives differently (Kubzansky et al., 2018). Farrington (2017, p. 47) describes it as the 'perception of engaging with the existential challenges of life'. It also includes a combination of positive effective states such as happiness and optimal efficacy in an individual's life and social life (Maziriri et al., 2019). Positive organisational psychology emphasises strength, values, well-being, happiness and a positive subjective experience (Jaser et al., 2019).

Servant leaders' empowering and helping behaviours may help followers determine when and how to complete their job-related tasks and encourage followers to solve their problems autonomously (Wang et al., 2022b). In organisations where leaders show a level of concern and care for their employees and help them grow and give them support, it is experienced as a valuable resource by employees and contributes to generating employees' psychological safety (Wang et al., 2022a). The possible link between SL and POP outcomes has been argued by Zainab et al. (2020) who indicated that SL can foster employees who become more encouraged and dedicated. Terblanche (2016) pointed out that SL can lead to the development of employees. Servant leadership can lead to employees feeling empowered and motivated (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

The purpose of the study

The aim of this scoping review was to outline the relationship between SL and POP outcomes as reported within organisational settings. Additionally, the research also aimed to create a conceptual map of past studies included in the scoping review, the POP outcomes in the organisational context, including authors, year of publication, country, work or organisational or occupational population, method, POP themes and key findings. The following research questions were formulated:

Research questions

1. *What is the content of a conceptual map of research on SL and POP outcomes in the organisational context, inclusive but not limited to authors, year of publication, country, work or organisational or occupational population, POP themes and key findings?*
2. *What types of SL with POP outcomes have been reported within organisation settings?*

Method

Research design

The methodological framework of the present scoping review was supported by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Reviewers manual – Methodology for JBI Scoping Reviews. This adds to the framework introduced by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and consists of further improvements by Levac et al. (2010). The guidelines by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) are known to be the basis on which scoping reviews should be conducted. In their nature, scoping reviews are known to take on a broad approach to research, generally aiming to map out available literature and address broad research questions (Peters et al., 2015). They aim to chart the nature, range and extent of the literature that is related to a specific topic or research area.

Scoping reviews have proven to be useful when the research-based literature has not been comprehensively reviewed (Terkelsen et al., 2019). This scoping review followed modifications by Levac et al. (2010) to the original scoping review framework as a means to assist in replication studies. The framework includes the following steps: (1) Identify the research question by clarifying and linking the purpose and research question; (2) Identify relevant studies by balancing feasibility with breadth and comprehensiveness; (3) Select studies using an iterative team approach to study selection and data extraction; (4) Chart the data incorporating numerical summary and qualitative thematic analysis; (5) Collate, summarise and report the results, including the implications for policy, practice or research and (6) Consultation exercise, which is an optional step and can be adopted as a required component of a scoping review. Taking into account the aim of this scoping review, a prior review protocol had been established before the review could be undertaken to ensure that the review was undertaken to pre-define the objectives, methods and plans of the review.

To avoid bias, the researchers searched for relevant studies that included published and unpublished studies without limiting outcome terms. This is also in accordance with Pollock et al.'s (2021) scoping review strategies to include published and unpublished evidence in order to obtain a broad scope of evidence. The search strategy was informed by keywords that included servant leadership, positive psychological well-being, servant leader, psychological well-being, organisational context, workplace, company, business, well-being, work environment and positive psychology. Alternative spelling for organisations (i.e. organizations) was included. Empirical, quantitative and mixed methods studies were also included. For this study, it was important to take note of other keywords that stem from POP and SL. To achieve the main objective of the scoping review, only results that indicated a direct pathway from SL to POP were included. Correlational, antecedent, mediation or moderation findings were excluded. Articles were therefore included if any direct pathway results between SL and the positive outcome were evident.

Research procedure

The review process started by identifying the computerised databases (e.g. Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insights, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Scopus and Web of Science).

Studies were not included if they did not meet the following criteria: full text and published in the English language between 2015 and 2021. Studies had to have a sample that was based on organisation or work settings. The majority of studies not included in the final scope aimed to advance the knowledge and theory of SL and POP and did not yield any organisational outcomes. Articles were excluded if they were not in English and did not consist of a study population that was in an organisational environment. Articles published before 2015 and after December 2021 were excluded. This restriction on publication date was because the researchers found that the prevalence of servant leadership and POP research dated back to 2015 with the work of Panaccio et al. (2015a) on Servant Leadership and well-being. The end date was selected as this was the next closest date for extracting data. Review studies are considerably time and labour-intensive and a well-designed review may take more than 12 months to complete (The Cochrane Collaboration, 2011). Against this background of the team consisting of two reviewers and the intensiveness of labour in scoping reviews, the end date of 2021 was selected.

Data extraction and analysis

This study used the content analysis phases of Vaismoradi et al. (2016). As a start, both authors repeatedly perused the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the literature. The first author then conducted a comprehensive synopsis of each article (according to a template provided by the JBI in Table 1 that was reviewed by the second author. The template was adapted in accordance with the specific needs and research questions of the study. This was carried out in

TABLE 1: Summary of studies included.

Code_Authors_Year	Title and source	Country	Data collection method, sample size, description of participants and objective of the research	POP as a result of SL
A1_ Ozylmaz and Cicek (2015)	How does servant leadership affect employee attitudes, behaviours and psychological climates in a for-profit organisational context? *Journal of Management & Organisations*	Turkey	This study investigated the effects of SL on employee attitudes and behaviours and psychological climates. Study 1 surveyed 306 full-time employees of 12 companies that consisted of the following industries: banking, iron/steel, railroads and dairy located in Iskenderun, a region that is known to be heavily industrialised in Turkey. A total of 286 questionnaires were collected and the response rate was 86%. Sixty-three per cent of the sample were men and 37% were women. Most of the sample (46%) was between the ages of 40 and 49 years and 34% reported being unmarried. Most of the sample (46%) was between the ages of 40 and 49 years and 70% reported having worked with their supervisor for less than 5 years, while 51% worked for the company for less than 5 years. In Study 2, 325 employees were chosen to be part of the study and came from a variety of industries, including textiles, banking, petroleum and brick manufacturing. A total of 310 survey questionnaires were completed and could be used. The response rate was 95%. The sample consisted of 85% men and 15% women. Of all, 66% were married and 21% were unmarried. Most of the sample was between the ages of 30 and 39. Fifty-six per cent reported having worked with their supervisor for less than 5 years, while 39% worked for the company for less than 5 years. A survey was given to the participants	Organisational citizenship behaviour; Job satisfaction; Psychological Climate
A2_ Panaccio et al. (2015b)	Towards an understanding of when and why servant leadership accounts for employee extra-role behaviours *Journal of Business and Psychology*	United States	This study aimed to examine whether SL was related to extra-role behaviours in a production and distribution company in the Midwest US. Written surveys were sent to employees during work hours. Supervisors and subordinates completed the questionnaires in separate rooms, and a researcher was present to assist the employees with any challenges. At time one (T1), there were 164 subordinates who were asked to complete the survey. The response rate was 56.9% for subordinates and 86.2% for supervisors. At time two (T2), the researcher did not limit who could participate in the study and all organisational members were invited to participate in the study. The response rate was 67.3% from subordinates and 86.7% for supervisors	Psychological Contract (Follower needs); Interpersonal Helping; Individual Initiative
A3_ Chiniara and Bentein (2016)	Linking servant leadership to individual performance: Differentiating the mediating role of autonomy, competence and relatedness need satisfaction *The Leadership Quarterly*	Canada	This study was conducted in a large company based in Canada that specialises in designing and producing high-tech products and has more than 3000 employees. The study aimed to advance the knowledge of servant leadership and examine how servant leadership could influence performance in the workplace. The surveys were sent by email to 2508 first-level employees and 287 supervisors. The response rate for first-level employees was 33% and the response rate of 55% for supervisors. The study sample for first-level employees was 96.5% Caucasian people, 3.3% Asian people, 70.7% male and the average age was 41.8 years. The study sample for the supervisors was 97% Caucasian people, 85% male and an average age of 44.5 years	Autonomy growth and relatedness; Feeling cared for and caring for others
A4_ Coetzer et al. (2017)	Servant leadership and work-related well-being in a construction company *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*	South Africa	This study aimed to explore the interrelationships between servant leadership, job demands, job resources, work participation and burnout in a construction company. The surveys were distributed through an electronic survey tool named Survey Monkey in a construction company. Participants received the surveys and were requested to complete four surveys on two different occasions during a 6-month period. A total of 186 direct reports completed a set of four surveys. The surveys were completed before and after their managers had attended a leadership development programme. The participants completed a total of 224 sets of pre- and post-test surveys. The sample consisted of 81% of men, of whom 35% spoke Afrikaans and 27% spoke English as their home language. The sample ranged between the ages of 26 and 35 years. The sample consisted of 53 white employees, 38% black employees, 4% were Indian employees and 5% were mixed-race employees, and 1% of the sample was from another race type	Organisational Support; Growth and Development; Support and Trust
A5_ Hoch et al. (2018)	Do ethical, authentic and servant leadership explain variance above and beyond transformational leadership? A meta-analysis *Journal of Management*	United States	The study compared three merging forms of positive leadership styles, mainly authentic leadership, ethical leadership and servant leadership, with the transformational leadership style. Several search methods were included, such as ABI-Inform, Dissertation Abstracts, PsychINFO, ISIS Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar. Keywords included but were not limited to authentic leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership, charismatic leadership and servant leader. This study analysed the study characteristics of four leadership forms. The total number of studies was 41 for servant leadership, 96 for ethical leadership, 41 for authentic leadership and 155 for transformational leadership. The average year of publication for authentic leadership, ethical leadership and servant leadership was 2011. The average year of publication for transformational leadership was 2006. Forty-two per cent of the Authentic leadership included studies were non-US samples, 47% of the ethical leadership studies were non-US samples, 49% of the servant leadership studies were non-US samples and 45% of the transformational leadership studies were non-US samples	Organisational citizenship behaviour; Engagement; Job satisfaction; Commitment; Trust
A6_ Kiker et al. (2019)	Exploring the boundaries of Servant leadership: A meta-analysis of the main and moderating effects of servant leadership on behavioural and affective outcomes *Journal of Managerial Issues*	United States	For this study, a systematic approach was followed in the search for primary studies. The study aimed to synthesise, clarify and extend empirical research on servant leadership. A search was conducted for reviews of the published literature to be included in the study. Possible articles to be included in the meta-analysis were identified, and a computer search was carried out through the relevant databases. The keywords included but were not limited to, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership, satisfaction, effort, commitment and task performance. Forty-four per cent different meta-analyses were performed to examine the hypothesis. The study showed that the leadership of the servant had a positive impact on the attitudes related to work	Job performance; Job satisfaction; Commitment; Trust
A7_ Maziriri et al. (2019)	Antecedents of psychological well-being among workers within small and medium enterprises *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*	South Africa	This study investigated the influence of organisational support, career goal development and empowering leadership on the psychological well-being of employees. The sample consisted of a total of 1945 small businesses in Gauteng province that were accessed through the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA). The resulting sample size was 321 SME workers. The response rate was 77.8%. Most of the respondents were between the ages of 50 and 59 years and 36.7% had a diploma in education.	Positive State/ Happiness
A8_ Pathak and Dey (2019)	The effects of leadership on psychological well-being of employees: A descriptive study of a MSME automation company *Journal of the Xian University of Architecture & Technology*	India	This study investigated whether there is a relationship between servant leadership and the psychological well-being of employees in an organisation. Surveys were sent to employees who worked in micro, small and medium manufacturing enterprises located in India. The servant leader questionnaire that was developed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) was used to measure servant leadership, and psychological well-being was measured with the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. The study participants were 80% female and 20% male. The average age of the respondents was 33 years	Life satisfaction; Positive Affect; Happiness

Table 1 continues on the next page →

TABLE 1 (Continues...): Summary of studies included.

Code_Authors_Year	Title and source	Country	Data collection method, sample size, description of participants and objective of the research	POP as a result of SL
A9_Fatima et al. (2020)	Impact of servant leadership on meaningful work with participation culture as a moderator *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*	Pakistan	This study aimed to create an understanding of the changing nature of the business world and what this means for managers and employees and how to deal with these changes A total of 1100 questionnaires were sent to professionals in the manufacturing and service sectors in Pakistan. Demographics consisted of 56% male respondents and 45% female respondents. The average age response was between 25 and 35 years	Meaningful Work
A10_Clarence et al. (2021)	The effect of servant leadership on ad hoc schoolteachers affective commitment and psychological well-being: The mediating role of psychological capital *International Review of Education*	India	This study aimed to find the extent to which being led by school principals who embodied the practice and management style of Servant leadership affected the affective commitment and psychological well-being of teachers. Questionnaires in the English language were sent to 1500 ad hoc teachers. The response rate was 74% and the final sample consisted of 1120 para schoolteachers from rural Jharkhand. The average age response was between the ages of 31 and 40 years, and the average tenure was between 1 and 5 years. The gender statistics were 25% men and 75% women. In that sample, 70% were married and 30% were single	Affective commitment Psychological Well-being Growth Psychological Capital
A11_Giolito et al. (2021)	Servant Leadership Influencing Store-Level Profit: The mediating effect of employee flourishing *Journal of Business Ethics*	France	This study tested a multilevel model in which Servant leadership is positively related to business unit performance measured by profit growth. Paper and pencil questionnaires were administered to employees during work hours. The objective and purpose of the study were clearly explained before the questionnaire was administered This study was carried out in a single company, within a retail chain in a major metropolitan area of France, and all stores reported directly to the manager. The sample consisted of 485 employees with more than a year of tenure working with their managers in their specific jobs. The demographics of gender were 78.6% males and the rest were females. The average tenure working with the store leader was 4.08 years, and the average tenure working in the store was 6.72 years. Seventy-nine per cent of the respondents had high school degrees or lower.	Flourishing
A12_Thelen and Yue (2021)	Servant Leadership and Employee Advocacy: The mediating role of psychological empowerment and investment in perceived relations *International Journal of Communication*	United States	This study conducted a quantitative online survey of 357 full-time employees working in various industries in Chile. The study examined how servant leadership was related to employee advocacy through a mediating role of psychological empowerment and perceived investment in relationships. The sample consisted of 54.3% women and 45.4% men. A total of 65.4% of the participants did not hold managerial positions. In management positions, 18.8% were in mid-level management, 9.8% were in lower-level management and 5.9% were in top management. Most of the employees had worked in the current organisation for at least 4 years and 56.3% had a bachelor's degree	Psychological empowerment Perceived Relationship Investment
A13_Wang et al. (2021)	Servant leadership, team reflexivity, coworker support climate and employee creativity: A multilevel perspective *Journal of Leadership and Organisational Studies*	China	This study aimed to develop a research model that showed the influence of the supportive environment of colleagues on cross-level process links such as servant leadership, team reflexivity and employee creativity. Questionnaires were sent to 600 employees. The sample consisted of 442 employees from 92 teams from 15 Chinese companies operating in various industries such as education, services and telecommunications. The response rate was 87.33%. The gender demographics were 52.49% male and 22.62% tenure over 10 years. Out of all, 46.83% of the respondents had bachelor's degrees	Team Reflexivity
A14_Zhang et al. (2021)	A meta-analytic review of consequences of servant leadership: The moderating roles of cultural factors *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*	China	This study used a meta-analysis to examine whether Servant leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment, organisational commitment, service quality, leader effectiveness and group service performance. A meta-analytical review was conducted, and literature from seven databases (Web of Science Social Sciences Citation Index, EBSCO, ABI/INFORM, ERIC, PsyInfo, Google Scholar and Scopus) was retrieved. The title, keywords and abstracts were searched for references to servant leadership or the authenticity of leaders The included studies were published and came mainly from Asia (25%) and the United States (42.5%). The demographics of gender were 57.5% male and 42.5% female The average age of the authors ranged between 30 and 60 years, with most of the authors between 30 and 50 years	Psychological empowerment Organisational commitment Engagement Trust Creativity Job satisfaction Work Support

order to develop a framework synthesis that guided the data analysis in the next steps. The researchers kept careful records to ensure that references were easily accessible and that source tracking was possible. The synopsis as presented in Table 1 included the following: *authors and year of publication, title and source, country of publication, data collection method, sample size, description of participants, objectives of the research and key findings*. The articles were especially studied to chart the POP outcomes in the next phase of the scoping review.

To answer the second research question, the data presented in the results and discussion of the articles were screened for the essence of the relationships and the POP outcomes in relation to SL. Parts that seemed to capture the essence of this were highlighted and transferred to the data extraction table. In another column, the summary provided in the first column was cleaned so that only information regarding the outcomes of POP was captured. The researchers read the articles again to put the results in context and by studying the results presented. Notes on this were made in a separate column named 'notes and theory'. In a follow-up, the POP outcomes and notes were studied to also include synonyms and variants of POP outcomes that resulted in a list of POP-coded outcomes. The POP results were classified and renamed according to the emerging codes. This process was

repeated until both authors reached an agreement on the final list of categories. The resulting codes and categories were defined and explained based on the original included studies.

Results
Description of studies reviewed

Table 1 details the scope consisting of the 14 studies included in the scoping review and is visually presented as a concept map in Figure 1. Most of the studies took a quantitative approach in collecting and analysing data, and some took a meta-analytic analysis review approach in which they applied meta-regressions in their studies (providing scientific evidence of direct pathways). These studies were carefully considered, and after much consideration and review, they were included in the final sample. Among these 14 articles, four were conducted in the United States (US), one in France, one in Turkey, one in Canada, two in South Africa, two in India, one in Pakistan and two in China. The studies were published between 2015 and 2021. Most of the studies were published in 2021 (28.57%). The first year of publication was the study by Ozyilmaz and Cicek (2015) who investigated the effects of SL on employee attitudes, behaviours and psychological climates. Most of the journals focussed on management, business, leadership and industrial psychology
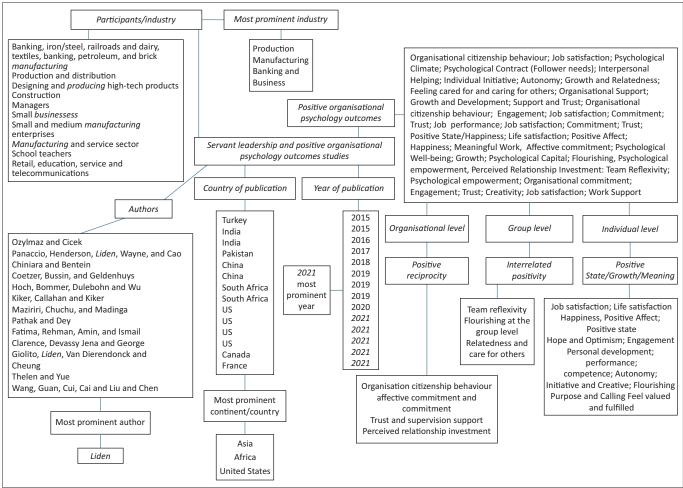

FIGURE 1: Concept map for scoping review.

fields. The studies had samples that were in different and vast industries, such as banking, construction, technology, education, retail and telecommunications. Most studies included both women and men in their study samples, and the ethnicity of the participants differed according to the country and context of the study. Surveys and questionnaires were the data collection methods that were used the most, and consent was requested for participation in all studies.

Trustworthiness of the scoping review and ethical considerations

The researchers acknowledged their own biases in selecting the studies and their involvement in the research process. They followed the comprehensive guide as set out in Shaheen et al. (2023) to ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of systematic reviews, of which the scoping review is a part. The most prominent guidelines are to clearly define the research question and to design a high-quality search method. Researchers did this by formulating a research question and identifying key concepts and search terms. The validity and reliability of the scoping review were further enhanced by providing inclusion and exclusion criteria. The use of multiple databases ensured that a comprehensive search was performed. Researchers attempted to avoid bias in selecting the articles by an evaluation of two independent reviewers and by documenting the review well. Only studies where a direct pathway between servant leadership and positive psychological well-being outcomes could be found were included. The content analysis was applied according to the guidelines of Vaismoradi et al. (2016).

Next, a content analysis was carried out on the 14 extracted studies to further investigate the POP results of SL, of which a list of 1013 individual entries was found. After coding the entries, similar terms were grouped together resulting in a subsequent list of 109 codes. Nineteen subcategories of which three were deductively grouped as positive reciprocity, interrelated positivity and positive state and/or growth and meaning were identified. These three categories were each placed on the organisational, group and individual levels of the organisation. Positive reciprocity on the organisation level, interrelated positivity on the group level and lastly positive state, growth and meaning on the individual level of the organisation. Table 2 presents the categories and subcategories that further emerged as follows:

Category 1: Organisational level

At the organisational level, a *positive reciprocity* category emerged. Subcategories included *organisational citizenship behaviour, affective commitment and commitment, trust and supervision support and perceived relationship investment.* This category found that employees experienced positivity, commitment and loyalty towards the organisation because of the behaviours and attitudes of servant leaders. The servant leader puts the follower first and their career needs first. They

TABLE 2: Positive organisational psychology outcome categories and subcategories.

Categories	Subcategories
Organisational level *Positive reciprocity*	Organisation Citizenship Behaviour (A1, A5, A6)
	Affective commitment and commitment (A10, A2, A6)
	Trust and supervision support (A4, A6)
	Perceived relationship investment (A12)
Group level *Interrelated positivity*	Team reflexivity (A13)
	Flourishing at the group level (A11)
	Relatedness and care for others (A3)
Individual level *Positive State/Growth/Meaning*	Job satisfaction (A1, A5, A6, A14)
	Life satisfaction (A8)
	Happiness, Positive Affect (A8)
	Positive state (A7)
	Hope and Optimism (A10)
	Engagement (A4, A5, A9)
	Personal development; performance; competence (A1, A4, A6, A10, A12)
	Autonomy (A3)
	Initiative and Creative (A2, A14)
	Flourishing (A11)
	Purpose and Calling (A4, A10, A12)
	Feel valued and fulfilled (A9, A12)

provide employees with direction and organisational support to complete their work. As a result, employees will reciprocate these behaviours and attitudes by being committed and loyal to the organisation and going beyond the call of duty.

Kiker et al. (2019) concluded that the support provided by servant leaders to employees yields a positive affect on the organisation and employees. Panaccio et al. (2015b) established that employees are more committed to the organisation because of the support and the fulfilled expectations of the employees. Clarence et al. (2021) identified that the positive interaction of the servant leader results in employees reciprocating this positivity back to the organisation. Ozyilmaz and Cicek (2015) revealed that if servant leaders show altruism or emotionally support employees during challenging times, employees will reciprocate this. They will give back to the organisation through positive organisational behaviours. In conclusion, this category found that servant leaders' ability to care for their employees' needs is reciprocated by employees by giving back to the organisation.

Category 2: Group level

On a group level, an *interrelated positivity* category emerged relating to the extension of positive behaviour towards others and for the greater good. *It consisted of team reflexivity, group-level flourishing and relatedness and care for others.* Outcomes included positive transition efforts and positive adaptation to the environment and experiencing flourishing on a group level by putting others before yourself, wanting to take care of others and relating positively to others. Servant leaders can influence group-level behaviour and attitudes through inspiring, empowering and ensuring that they keep the promises they make to teams and groups in the organisation.

Employees will tend to listen to other employees about SL behaviours and actions. If the employee feels valued and

cared for, they will partake in group goals and activities that take the company forward. Wang et al. (2021) show that servant leaders can guide employees through changing environments by listening to employees and accepting the diverse views of the group. Giolito et al. (2021) identified that when there are shared positive emotions in a team, it will increase group-level well-being and interrelatedness to others. Chiniara and Bentein (2016) concluded that SL affects well-being at the group level because of the need for employees to be related to others. In conclusion, when employees feel positive emotions in a group, they want to identify more with the group and do more for the group. The employees will cooperate in making the group goals a reality and will feel that their well-being is taken care of.

Category 3: Individual level

On an individual level, *positive state, growth and meaning* emerged as a category. The subcategories were *job satisfaction, life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, positive state, hope and optimism, involvement, personal development, performance, competence and autonomy*. This category reflects the outcomes that surface on an individual level because of employees experiencing servant leader behaviours such as caring, putting their needs first, supporting and empowering employees to be the best versions of themselves. This translates into employees experiencing more positive emotions, employees experiencing growth and development because of the training and development they will receive, and they develop a sense of meaning and life satisfaction that is linked to being happy at work, hopeful, optimistic, competent, having autonomy over their work and being engaged. The nature of the servant leaders' approach to put their followers first results in employees being intrinsically and extrinsically satisfied with their jobs.

Clarence et al. (2021) indicated that leaders who practised a servant leadership management style positively impacted their subordinate's psychological well-being. Kiker et al. (2019) ascertain that the ability of the servant leader to connect with followers on an individual level results in employees showing positive work behaviours, affective commitment and job satisfaction. Pathak and Dey (2019) indicated that the presence of servant leadership will result in higher POP and higher levels of follower satisfaction. Employees who receive higher levels of support at work tend to be in a positive mood. In conclusion, when employees feel that there is a connection with the servant leader, they experience and exhibit positive work attitudes and behaviours. Clarence et al. (2021) confirm this in their study that demonstrates that the servant leader–follower relationship promotes positivity among employees through positive interactions and presence.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) (NWU-00923-21-A4).

Discussion
Outline of the results

The content of the conceptual map compiled indicated that most of the studies included in the scoping review were from a variety of authors but Leiden published the most studies. Participants and industries were diverse but most prominent in the production, manufacturing, banking and business sectors. The US and Asian countries produced the most studies and in 2021 the most studies were published. These results can be explained by the prominence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the US and Asia in 2021 – and servant leadership that was most probably investigated as a means to show care and motivation in turbulent times (Dominuguez-Salas et al., 2020).

Positive organisational psychology outcomes were found on organisation, group and individual levels. This is in accordance with Canavesi and Minelli (2022) who also found that there is evidence that SL can foster positive outcomes that can be found at the individual, team and organisational levels.

Positive reciprocity emerged as a category on the organisational level. It refers to the social exchange process where an employee who experiences positivity as a result of SL feels a need to reciprocate such positiveness in the form of a positive feeling, attitude or behaviour towards the organisation or supervisor. The results furthermore indicated that SL leads to employees experiencing organisation citizenship behaviour (Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015), feeling committed (Clarence et al., 2021; Kiker et al., 2019; Panaccio et al., 2015b) trusting the organisation and supervisors (Coetzer et al., 2017; Kiker et al., 2019) and reciprocating the perceived relationship investment (Thelen & Yue, 2021). In essence, it can be seen that because of SL, employees are 'returning the favour' or giving the positiveness back to the organisation as well as being received.

It can be further explained by applying the social exchange theory where the organisation or supervisor provides resources or a pleasant experience and in turn the employee exchanges this (giving in return) by a positive feeling, attitude or behaviour directed back to the organisation, supervisor or team. In essence, it refers to a mechanism for employees to respond to what they receive. Employees feel committed or affectively committed when they experience an overall positive attitude towards the organisation because of SL. They experience contentment, feel comfortable and sense a sense of belonging. Employees exhibit an overall positive attitude, along with ethical and moral behaviours in their assistance to others. They are loyal and internalise their sense of belonging to the extent that they feel they are part of the organisation (Wang et al., 2021).

Interrelated positivity emerged as a category on a group level. It refers to a positive interaction or positive sharing between and in a group that will induce a change of action either to adapt or experience a more positive transition or altering group goals in order to perform and reach organisational goals. It also refers to the experience of an overall group's

well-being and acceptance of one another. Team reflexivity refers to a positive team transition and reflection process where team members reflect and share job efforts and processes to adapt to changing or volatile organisational environments. During this adaptation process, work efforts are reflected upon and social information is used to adapt the goals of the team or organisation.

The employee, as part of the team, will review the performance of the team and initiate efforts to solve the evident problems creatively. As a result of SL, team members will listen to each other and accept various views (Wang et al., 2021). Servant leadership is guiding employees through a changing environment by fostering and cultivating reflective processes. The servant leader will foster a positive environment to drive the team's performance.

Servant leadership will foster group consensus, higher collective efforts and more shared goals (Giolito et al., 2021). The servant leader becomes the custodian of the larger team and puts emphasis on the benefits of the value of the 'greater good' vs. the 'self-centred efforts' of individual employees. The flourishing of the group is evident when the team members share their positive affect and collective consensus. Shared positive attitudes in the team can be a form of positive emotion contagion that increases group-level well-being. Chiniara and Benstein (2016) argue that employees have a need to relate to others, they want to feel connected and cared for and also want to take care of others. They point to the fact that SL is sensitive to the needs of others and helps others to foster trusting relationships where they feel safe and taken care of. In the presence of SL, employees will experience a sense of belonging.

Positive state or *growth* or *meaning as a category on the individual level.* It refers to a positive state, growth and meaning that employees experience as a result of SL. Several subcategories emerged that can be an indication of the profound impact of LS on employees. An overarching overlap of positive affect, attitudes and behaviours emerged that can be linked back to the pleasurable state of hedonic well-being. Employees will 'return' the behaviour of the servant leader of putting their followers 'first' by being intrinsically and extrinsically satisfied with their jobs (Ozylmaz & Cicek 2015).

The ability of the servant leader to empower, guide and provide organisational support enables servant leaders to assist employees in facing everyday challenges, ensuring that employees are satisfied and positive with their organisational needs. Servant leadership leads to employees who can exhibit positive attitudes. In the SL and employee relationship, employees experience job satisfaction through the servant leader's ability to understand the needs of followers, listen to them and place their needs before their own. In the servant–leader relationship, employees who prefer to feel like they can be part of decision-making have autonomy over their work, feel empowered by opportunities and will experience positive work attitudes (Zhang et al., 2021). It is the positive feelings of being understood, appreciated, motivated and empowered that are at the heart of SL that get followers to

engage in positive workplace attitudes and behaviours that contribute to well-being (Dey, 2019). One can deduce that if employees feel part of the organisation, it filters into their work and personal lives. Employees who receive higher levels of organisational support via SL tend to be in a positive mood at work (Maziriri et al., 2019).

Employees will also show levels of optimism when they believe that their leader cares about their emotions, development and spirituality (Clarence et al., 2021). In the leader–follower relationship, this could also mean that when employees feel that their career development is prioritised and planned, it could lead to optimism about the future. When goals and directions are clearly set by the SL, there is hope of achieving those goals. This results in employees feeling positive effects such as more work engagement (Clarence et al., 2021). Positive feelings result in altered behaviours and attitudes of employees. Servant leaders provide their employees with all the resources, such as organisational support, job clarity and supervisor support to complete their jobs. The ability of the servant leader to address the needs of followers results in followers being engaged (Coetzer et al., 2017).

Growth is related to the ability of the servant leader to help in the employee's personal development, performance, competence, autonomy, sense of taking initiative, creativity and flourishing. Employees will reciprocate the behaviours of servant leaders by showing the same behaviours themselves. The servant leader will create opportunities for employees to use their abilities and take on more responsibility at work. They create an environment where all organisational tasks can be completed and as a result, enabling employees to perform their jobs effectively. The servant leader will have knowledge and awareness of what is happening in the workplace and will give their followers the responsibility of ensuring that they prevent potential problems as and when they arise. As a result, employees have the opportunity to leverage their abilities and be competent in their jobs. The servant leader will empower and develop their people and provide direction for work tasks to be completed whereby employees will complete the tasks to the best of their ability. The growth of employees is of central importance to servant leaders, and their priority is to ensure that employees are developed and can function to the best of their abilities (Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015).

Servant leaders provide their employees with organisational support, and employees receive this through personal growth and development opportunities. The servant leader will provide continuous growth and development opportunities to employees, such as training and development, coaching and mentoring and allowing employees to make mistakes in their presence (Coetzer et al., 2017). The nature of a servant leader is to create a positive work environment for employees to encourage performance. The servant leader will continuously encourage the growth and self-actualisation of employees. In this positive climate, employees will feel

empowered to grow and self-actualise while performing in their roles (Kiker et al., 2019).

A study by Chiniara and Bentein (2016) found that SL is positively related to competence and autonomy. Servant leadership will increase task performance by satisfying the psychological needs for autonomy and competence. The servant leader communicates and understands the expectations of the followers, and as a result, the employees will be able to take initiative with respect to their work. The flourishing of the employees is an outcome of SL. It is the personal evaluation of the importance that something holds for them compared to what they consider important in life. When there is alignment between the values and the requirements of the job, employees experience a sense of purpose and calling, and they feel valued and fulfilled (Giolito et al., 2021).

Coetzer et al. (2017) argue that empowerment is not only about development but also relates to allowing employees to grow fully into their abilities and as a result achieve a higher purpose. In the servant leader and employee relationship, the servant leader will align work with the interests, passions, purpose, talent and skills of the employees, making work more meaningful. The servant leader can give clear directions, and when the expectations and purpose of a job are clear, employees become engaged with their work. Additionally, employee empowerment leads to employees experiencing meaning (Thelen & Yue, 2021). The ability of the servant leader to not focus on personal glory and gain, but rather encourage employees to engage in moral, ethical and socially responsible behaviours result in a meaningful and fulfilling life. When a servant leader develops a trusting relationship with employees, it results in an awareness of follower needs. It will further encourage employees to contribute to making work more valuable to them (Fatima et al., 2020). Thelen and Yue (2021) found a significant relationship between SL and psychological empowerment that indicated that in the presence of SL, employees will experience being valued and fulfilled.

Practical implications

The findings of the research show that SL improves the POP of employees, which provides some significant implications for human resources management strategies. Selection and promotion competencies can include individuals who exhibit caring for others along with leadership qualities. Dedication to serving others can be given the first priority as far as servant leadership qualities are concerned. Servant leader behaviours should be regarded as important to display and can be assessed as part of a 360 performance management system. A partnership between human resources and management can create a psychologically safe climate by fostering the values servant leaders display. Initiatives and interventions such as mentoring and reward programmes can support servant leadership behaviours. Additionally, succession planning should identify future potential leaders who exemplify the characteristics of servanthood. Leadership development programmes should be regarded as a priority to develop servant leadership qualities in both managers and employees. Space and contexts should be created where those who want to connect with each other and share the goals of the organisation can do so. Such programmes can be enhanced through a servant leadership strategy and policy.

Limitations and recommendations

It is important to note that this study had limitations. Firstly, the included studies were published only in English, which may have led to the exclusion of relevant research in other languages. Additionally, the studies considered in this scoping review were confined to the organisational setting, potentially overlooking meaningful relationships outside this context. The included studies were published between 2015 and 2021, resulting in the exclusion of studies published before 2015 and after 2021 that could have been pertinent. Furthermore, many of the included studies did not specify the industry or sector in which they were conducted, making it challenging to determine the prevalence of SL and POP outcomes in specific industries where turnover rates may be high. Lastly, the scope focussed solely on positive key terms, while negative key terms – such as emotional exhaustion and burnout – were not included, which could have broadened the scope of the review.

Conclusions

This study met the criteria for a scoping review as described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) by aiming to explore the outcomes of SL and POP in the workplace and in addition by providing a conceptual map of SL and POP in organisational settings. Servant leadership was associated with several positive states, including expected positive affect, personal growth, and a sense of meaning. Positive organisational psychology outcomes at the organisational and group levels should be included in investigations of psychological well-being. The results related to SL and POP at the group level highlighted the importance of well-being in fostering adaptability and psychological well-being within groups. Part of the definition of POP involves integrating our understanding of the negative aspects of human functioning. Future studies should also examine how SL can serve as a buffer against negative experiences, such as emotional exhaustion and burnout.

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Competing interests

Authors' contributions

C.S.J. assisted in conceptualising the research and article, as well as extracting and interpreting the data. C.S.J. took the lead in writing this research article. S.C.D., a Master's student

under the supervision of C.S.J., worked on the topic of servant leadership as part of a larger leadership research project.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its supplementary materials.

Disclaimer

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