

# EXPLORING SERVANT LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES IN PRIVATE ISLAMIC SCHOOL TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

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**Abstract:** *Social enterprise has emerged as an effective means of addressing social and environmental issues. Although model of servant leadership is developed, demonstrating how social entrepreneurs can wield power and control over their followers under the guise of social mission, creating social value, serving and empowering their followers, and empowering society. This study focuses on servant leadership attributes among entrepreneurs towards sustainability of social enterprises on Private Islamic School. The servant leadership style on social entrepreneurs is critically in this study. Insights are provided into how the concept of “service”, which is central to both social enterprise and servant leadership, can be another aspect of social entrepreneurs' soft and subtle power over their followers. However, research on the specific characteristics of social entrepreneurs is currently limited, and propositions regarding the influence of certain characteristics such as compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, and honesty on social entrepreneurial behaviour have yet to be empirically tested. This study serves as a preliminary exploratory step for future research in this area by identifying a possible set of such attributes among servant leaders towards their social enterprises sustainability.*

**Keywords:** *Servant leadership, social enterprise, sustainability, Private Islamic School*

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## Introduction

In recent years, social entrepreneurship has gained increasing popularity and recognition. In Malaysia, this emerging field is experiencing a growing interest both in practical application and theoretical exploration (Rahim, 2020). A social enterprise essentially operates as a business with the primary objective of generating profits that contribute to the betterment of both society and the environment (Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, 2021). These entities pursue a social mission through a business model, often combining elements of both non-profit organizations and for-profit corporations. This rise in social entrepreneurship is particularly significant in addressing prevalent challenges such as scarcity, corruption, poverty, economic stagnation, and violence in developing countries. Even non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have sometimes overlooked these pressing social issues in the developing world.

According to Olinski et al. (2022), these challenges clearly fall under the domain of the social economy. Nevertheless, it's essential to steer clear of confusing social enterprise with the larger concept of the social economy, as this might appear obvious. Instead, the emphasis should be on establishing a connection between social enterprise and sustainability. It's worth highlighting that there tends to be more in-depth scholarly examination of the connection between social enterprise and sustainability, while there is a comparative dearth of discussions addressing the practical aspects of sustainable social enterprises, their long-term viability, or sustainable business models.

According to Russell and Stone (2002), servant leadership theory shares commonalities with other leadership theories, but none of these theories comprehensively encompass all the attributes of a servant leader. A servant leader's role involves a focus on performance planning, day-to-day coaching, and aiding individuals in realizing their aspirations, all while understanding their expectations and desired outcomes. The primary duty of a servant leader is to dedicate one's life to the well-being of those they lead. Leaders grapple with the constant challenge of harmonizing organizational objectives with each employee's personal aspirations, especially concerning matters like promotions and job security. However, the commitment to service goes beyond employees and their development; servant leaders prioritize the needs of customers, employees, and communities. In each of these relationships, the organization's primary emphasis should be on meeting the needs of others. Servant leadership also pertains to the responsibilities and relationships of all those engaged in their business endeavors.

As stated by Vikhanskiv et al. (2018), the aim was to introduce a novel methodological approach to research and make a meaningful contribution to the development of management concepts. This study also delves into investigating the intricate relationship and interdependence between social entrepreneurship and servant leadership. It furthermore addresses the distinctive characteristics of servant leadership ideology and underscores the importance of the servant leader. This research is particularly focused on exploring the qualities of servant leadership within the context of social entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on highlighting the fundamental attributes that reflect shared value orientations between servant leaders and social entrepreneurs. In summary, it is expected that the roles and attributes of servant leaders will exert a positive influence on social entrepreneurs, leading to favorable outcomes for their businesses.

## Literature Review

The literature addresses theories that have been proposed relating attributes of servant leadership and how it can build the sustainability of social enterprise on Private Islamic School management.

### Servant Leadership

Servant Leadership was initially introduced by Greenleaf in 1970, and it emphasizes that the most effective leaders are those who serve their followers (Greenleaf, 1977). According to the author, the primary goal of business is to have a positive impact on its customers and society in general. In contrast, servant leadership places a significant focus on serving and delivering a meaningful impact to stakeholders who have an interest and are in need. An adept leader is one who embodies core spiritual values and skillfully translates these principles into tangible actions. These leaders extend their service beyond their immediate colleagues and organizations, reaching out to benefit the larger society. Importantly, this commitment to service is deeply rooted in spiritual wisdom (Adeleye et al., 2020).

Servant leadership places a strong emphasis on providing service and making meaningful contributions to individuals who are interested and in need. A capable leader serves as a prime example of fundamental spiritual values and effectively puts these principles into action. In the existing literature, there are nine functional and eleven accompanying attributes associated with servant leadership. These characteristics form the core of a servant leadership model, serving as the structural foundation for both theoretical exploration and practical implementation. Russell and Stone (2002) categorized these attributes into two groups: functional attributes and accompanying attributes. While, Functional attributes encompass vision, honesty, integrity, trust, innovation, service, role modeling, appreciation of others, and empowerment. Meanwhile, accompanying attributes encompass communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, attentive listening, encouragement, teaching, and delegation. As highlighted by Muhammad (2022), servant leadership underscores an approach where leaders focus their attention and efforts on serving and benefiting others, with the well-being of the community as a priority. A servant leader's role encompasses various aspects, including performance management, daily guidance, and supporting individuals in realizing their aspirations while understanding their expectations and desired outcomes. According to Akella and Eid (2019), a servant leader's ultimate duty involves dedicating their life to the betterment of those who follow them. These leaders face a constant challenge of harmonizing organizational objectives with each employee's personal goals, particularly in matters related to advancement and job security. However, the commitment to service extends beyond employees and their development; servant leaders prioritize the well-being of customers, employees, and communities. In each of these interactions, the organization's primary focus should revolve around meeting the needs of others. Servant leadership also extends its concern to those engaged in various aspects of the business, including their responsibilities and relationships.

### Social Enterprise

A social enterprise is essentially a business that seeks to make a positive impact on society and the environment by maximizing profits that benefit both society and the environment (Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, 2021). It is an entity that achieves a social mission through the use of a business model, and it typically combines elements of non-profit organizations and for-profit corporations. Social entrepreneurship relies heavily on innovation. These entrepreneurs have played an important role in developing countries where people are

suppressed due to resource scarcity, corruption, poverty, economic stagnation, and violence. Even non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have not paid enough attention to the social problems that exist in the developing world. Moreover, in the setting of social enterprise, moral emphasis is that differentiated social enterprise from conventional business entities and in this social context, it extends to environmental and social-nation organizations in which ideal moral and greater elevation of ethical values are considered to have more acceptability than in other forms of for-profit businesses.

In Malaysia, the landscape of social enterprises is characterized by a unique leadership style that combines entrepreneurial skills with a profound dedication to creating social change. As outlined by Tak Jie et al (2021), social enterprises hold a significant societal role as they directly contribute social value to their customers. The scholars emphasize that by consistently delivering this social value to their customers, social enterprises play a crucial function in society. A scrutiny of multiple case studies, particularly those involving private Islamic schools operating under the social enterprise-for-service model, reveals key prerequisites for sustaining social enterprises. To ensure their ongoing viability, social enterprises must adeptly identify appropriate funding sources, prudently allocate resources to enhance their physical infrastructure, effectively manage energy resources, foster a culture of altruism, and methodically offer products and/or services to their customers.

### **The Relationship of Social Entrepreneurship on Servant Leadership**

According to Petrovskaya and Mirakyan (2018) entrepreneurship is an important sector that can drive balanced national economic development. As a result, entrepreneurs must be creative, innovative, and competitive in order to succeed. Servant leadership and social entrepreneurship are both defined differently. The heart of social entrepreneurship, the benefits of which extend far beyond personal gain. Social entrepreneurs are the change agents of the social sector, with a mission of social improvement that goes beyond providing private benefits to individuals. Social entrepreneurs apply their business skills to address existing social issues, ensure the basic needs of the less fortunate, and work toward a more environmentally friendly society (Fowler, 2019).

Servant leadership is a sub-field of organizational behaviour concerned with the internal operations of established organizations, whereas social entrepreneurship is a sub-field of social entrepreneurship concerned with the formation of new organizations. As highlighted by Sendjaya et al (2008), entrepreneurial activities related to organizational behaviour can enrich both disciplines. According to the study's findings, there is a link between these two leadership disciplines. In this study, the researcher tries to bridge the concept of servant leadership and social entrepreneurship on the premise that both servant leaders and social entrepreneurs are driven by a social mission and the desire to "do good".

Most research indicates that there is a correlation between servant leadership qualities and social entrepreneurs. These studies have constructed management theories by establishing a symbiotic connection between social entrepreneurship and servant leadership. Conversely, the focus on the significance of servant leadership within social entrepreneurship revolves around fundamental traits that showcase shared values between servant leaders and social entrepreneurs. In a nutshell, the roles and attributes of servant leaders are important in guiding social entrepreneurs to effectively lead their businesses with a positive and effective leadership approach.

## **Sustainability**

Today's global challenges have revealed imbalances in poverty rates, inequality, and sustainability, which are still being debated. This competition demonstrates a keen interest in the social economy. The main component of the social economy is the social enterprise, which emphasizes its own distinct characteristics. In essence, social enterprises aim to rectify disparities in social, structural, and political aspects through a range of sources, including religious motivations, social movements, cultural or professional affiliations, a sense of community, altruistic intentions, and government support for executing public functions (Scott, 2022).

However, instead of linking social enterprise primarily to the concept of the social economy (which may appear self-evident), it is imperative to establish a strong connection between social enterprise and sustainability. Interestingly, there is a noticeable disparity in scholarly examination between the relationship of social enterprises and sustainability and the extensive literature that discusses sustainable social enterprises, their sustainability, or sustainable business models (Hummels, 2018). Moreover, sustainability refers to the capacity to consistently uphold or support a process for an extended duration. In both contexts of business and politics, the goal of sustainability is to ensure that natural or physical resources are preserved, preventing their depletion and enabling their indefinite utilization (He et al., 2022).

According to (Olinski et al., 2022), these challenges are directly relevant to the social economy. Nonetheless, it is critical to associate social enterprise with sustainability rather than social economy (which appears to be obvious). It has been observed that the relationship between social enterprise and sustainability is more frequently scientifically investigated than is written about sustainable social enterprises, their sustainability, or sustainable business models. Although there has been considerable emphasis on the significance of sustainability in the social enterprise, the existing literature exposes a notable absence of empirical data regarding the primary determinants of social enterprise sustainability. This gap in research provides a firm basis for the present study.

## **Methodology**

This chapter identifies the relevant methodology that will be used to explore of servant leadership attributes towards social enterprise sustainability. Sampling procedures and data collection processes were addressed accordingly. Each instrument items will be discussed as well as the outcome for conducting an in-depth analysis of these items.

## **Research Design**

The primary goal of this study is to investigate essential factors of social enterprise sustainability on Private Islamic School. This research is exploratory in nature and qualitative in method. When the research is exploratory, variables are unknown and/or underdeveloped, context is crucial, and there is a lack of theory background, qualitative approach is acceptable. The owners and/or operators of Private Islamic School will take part in this research. The convenience purposive sample method is preferred, and participants will be selected on the characteristics of the issue under investigation.

## **Data Collection**

To gather the requisite data, in-depth face-to-face interviews will be conducted with five individuals who serve as owners and/or operators across various categories within the center. In determining the number of participants, guidance was drawn from Eisenhardt (1989), who



suggests a range of four to ten cases for developing theories through case studies. A structured interview approach will be devised to steer the conversation, which was then employed during the interviews to gain insights and elucidate the definitions of sustainability within the school context. Additionally, the interviews sought to capture the perspectives on the crucial factors necessary to sustain the school. In the context of semi-structured interviews, the interview protocol serves a dual role as a guiding framework and a foundational structure upon which the interviews are built. This approach, as noted by Yin (2018), creates an atmosphere conducive to both creativity and adaptability, enabling a comprehensive exploration of each participant's distinctive experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview process will be properly structured by initially, recordings of the interviews will be made, followed by a precise verbatim transcription. These transcripts will then be meticulously compared with the original audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions for each participant, following the guidelines established by Bougie and Sekaran (2019). Following this, the researcher will proceed to conduct coding, examining the data to identify recurring themes, concepts, and categories. This analysis will be facilitated using the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, as recommended by Taylor and Gibbs (2010). The transcripts will undergo thorough evaluation through multiple iterations, resulting in their organization into meaningful and relevant information components. Given that the study's primary objective is to investigate the attributes of servant leaders that exert an influence on the sustainability of social enterprises, coding will be employed to underscore the most prominent elements considered critical for sustainability.

### **Discussion And Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study refers to leadership philosophy, which explains the impact of servant leadership characteristics on the sustainability of social enterprises. Furthermore, the study to see how servant leadership attribute affect the sustainability of social entrepreneurs on Private Islamic School. The element of sustainability in social enterprises characterized by servant leadership is also highlighted in this study and will also introduce and explain some leadership-compatible concepts or philosophies, such as servant leadership and spiritual leadership. This study is seen to provide a balance to the activities of social enterprises in line with the SDG targets to be achieved through 17 global goals aimed at addressing various social, economic, and environmental challenges to achieve sustainable development by 2030.

To summarise, Malaysian Private Islamic Schools to embrace an entrepreneurial attitude, discover possibilities, and utilize their resources to build sustainable programs match with their mission and educational objectives (Olinski et al. 2022). It is critical for Malaysian private Islamic schools to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset, discover possibilities, and leverage their resources to develop long-term initiatives that correspond with their educational mission and values. As a result of efficient leadership, they can boost the efficiency and the effectivity management performance while maintaining financial control, improving educational quality, and positively impacting society.

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