

**Sustainability in Project Management through Servant Leadership Mediated by Green  
Organizational Culture: Evidence from Constructions Projects**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the impact of servant leadership on project sustainability performance in the context of infrastructural and construction projects, with green organizational culture as a mediating variable. Grounded in contemporary leadership and sustainability literature, this research explores how servant leadership practices influence sustainability outcomes, especially when a culture supportive of environmental practices is present. A quantitative approach was used to survey 300 project professionals, analyzing data through structural equation modeling (SEM). Results reveal that servant leadership significantly enhances project sustainability performance, both directly and indirectly, through green organizational culture. The findings have important and extensive implications for practitioners and policymakers for achieving and sustaining an organizational green culture in support of the green initiatives undertaken by the servant leaders.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Project Management; Servant Leadership; Green Organizational Culture; Constructions Projects

**Introduction**

Being one of the dominant sectors globally, the construction and infrastructure sector provides incentives for economic development and societal wellbeing while acting as one of the biggest polluters, carbon emitters, and resource consumers (Fulford, 2019 Khalil, Ihsan, Khan & Ali, 2023). Recently however there has been increased pressure to promote the use of sustainable practices in this industry due to increased emphasis on corporate responsibility and environmental management worldwide (Abergel, Dean & Dulac, 2017; Ahn et al., 2013). Sustainability in

construction is no longer considered as an add-on factor; it has undoubtedly turned into a necessity in order to respond to the existing challenges such as global warming and rarity of resources as well as the need to achieve more competitive construction industry (Ntakana, & Ahmi, 2024; Saradara et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the best implementation of sustainable practices in construction projects has been a problem, especially in the development of sustainable tools (Fulford 2019). Such context calls for identification of leadership styles and organizational behaviors that foster sustainable project performance.

It is widely understood that leadership plays an essential part in organizational performance, however the implication of the servant leadership style for increasing sustainability in construction projects is not clearly defined (Ismail & Fathi, 2018). Servant leadership, which incorporate such attributes as empathic understanding, feelings of responsibility while striving to support rather than ordering others, reflects the modern trend of making organizations take responsibility for the harm they cause while striving to maximize their profits (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Different from other forms of leadership, servant leadership focuses on workers, and encourages everyone's actions to enhance organizational objectives and priorities in addition to the overall good of the society. A synthesis of available literature suggests that servant leadership enhances a contextual outcome by fostering an environment in which people feel empowered to act in accordance with the broader environmental stewardship and organizational standards (Mustam & Najam, 2020; Setiawan & Irawant, 2020).

However, there is a scarcity in studies that explore the effects of the servant leadership on the sustainability performance of projects in the infrastructure sector when green organizational culture is the mediator (Yu, Abbas, Rizvi & Najam, 2024). This study postulated that green organizational culture could mediate the servant leadership to sustainable outcomes in projects by creating awareness, wise utilization of resources, and being accountable to the environment. However, there still is a considerable scarcity of the empirical evidence in literature regarding this issue, thus leaving a knowledge gap on how GC could act as a moderator of servant leadership-sustainability link in construction context (Tuan, 2021; Yu et al., 2024).

This research therefore fills this gap through an analysis of the relationship between servant leadership and green organizational culture for project sustainability performance. In establishing the premise and scope for this exploration, this research situates itself within the most current theories and literature on sustainability and leadership to conform to the new trend that seeks to

establish ways of improving on the sustainability of project outcomes. A timely theoretical framework for this research is the servant leadership theories since their foundation on concepts like empowering, being stewardly ethical and building community emphasizes on the principles of green organizational culture. This alignment is in line with the study aim of establishing whether a servant leadership function can promote green culture within construction organizations for enhanced sustainability performance.

The aim of this research is twofold: to assess the influence of servant leadership on project sustainability performance and to examine the moderating role of green organizational culture in infrastructure and construction projects. More precisely, the following research objectives are proposed: (1) To measure the direct effect of servant leadership on project sustainability performance; (2) To determine the organizational green culture as a mediator; (3) To enhance the knowledge of leadership and sustainability in the construction domain. With this evidence in mind, this research provides theoretical and practical contributions to how best leadership can be deployed to bring about long-term gains. In terms of application, these findings would inform the recommendations on specific leadership practices for managers and policymakers when attempting to improve project performance, while pursuing sustainable business operation and ecological stewardship.

The study structured as: subsequent to this introduction, the literature review presents a brief background on servant leadership, project sustainability performance, and green organizational culture, theoretical frameworks, and research findings from previous studies. Following literature review, the research methodology section is presented addressing the research design, sample, and collection of data and data analysis techniques. The result and discussion sections describe the outcome of the research in light of the research questions and hypothesis or objectives of the study. The final section is the conclusion where the implication of the study, its limitation and suggestion for future research are presented.

## Literature Review

### Servant Leadership as Theoretical Framework

The conceptual underpinnings of this research are based on the Servant Leadership Theory, in which leadership is conceived as a way to serve others, and that mainly emphasises the enhancement of the qualities of employees and communities (Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014). Servant Leadership Theory, first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf three decades ago, is an organizational

leadership model that by its core changes the meaning of the leadership role from dominating and authoritative to caring and serving (Greenleaf, 1970; Pawar, et al., 2020). Servant leaders work for the benefit of others with the ideal of building a better community, because these leaders focus on people, organizations aspire to set high values of empathy, stewardship, humility, and respect of human beings in those organizations (Ogochi et al., 2022). In contrast to traditional leadership approaches that pursuit individual or organizational goals, servant leadership takes the needs of the employees / stakeholders as paramount and seeks to transform everyone in the organization for a collective betterment (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). It is especially valid in the contemporary environment of organizations that pays much attention to the aspect of ethics and sustainable corporate management.

According to Servant Leadership Theory, one has to establish trust and collaborate and ensure the employees engage actively in contributing to the goal of the organization. In expanding on the defl of stewardship, servant leaders develop and sustain relationships with people with the view of creating long term cooperation, where people will exercise behaviors and practices that are not only in their self-interest but for the benefit of the business enterprise. This ethical foundation is a good source of personal development and job satisfaction as well as a good way to create a favorable climate to achieve the sustainability goals (Kauppila et al., 2022).

### **Servant Leadership and Project Sustainability Performance**

Servant leadership had characteristics such as empathy, stewardship, and a focus on the growth of others so the employees started to adhere to sustainable practices of the company and its environmental targets. Unlike other forms of leadership where the emphasis is placed on the authority of the leader and how he or she controls the behavior of team members, servant leadership cultivates a culture of support for committing to pro-environmental behaviors (Mughal et al., 2024; Hou, Gai & An, 2023). Different publications indicate that servant leadership contributes to achieving better sustainability performance inside an organization because it sets clear ethical standards of accountability for social and environmental issues within the company.

Servant leaders support project sustainability by outlining structures necessary for an organization to own and nurture the project and to cultivate organizational culture that is suitable for supporting collective accountability, innovation and sustainable solutions. For example, Nauman et al., (2022) established that servant leadership enhances a culture of accountability and responsibility within project teams such that these groups work with a superior awareness of

social responsibility and environmental consciousness. Furthermore, the manner in which servant leaders encourage stewardship helps employees to undertake practices that reduce the negative effects on the environment making projects to have better sustainable performance (Siddiquei, et al., 2021). This leadership culture fosters organizational culture in which employees willingly extend their discretionary effort towards heeding organizational and external ecological sustainability recommendations.

### **Servant Leadership and Green Organizational Climate**

Another equally important construct for creating sustainable green organizational environment and translating servant leadership to project outcomes is green organizational climate, which reflects the set of shared perceptions and behavioral norms regarding environmental stewardship. An organizational green climate occurs when a green value are promoted through green organizational climate by servant leaders to foster green behaviors and practices among the employees. Servant leadership research also reveal that sustainable behavior demonstrated by top management encourage employees' propensity towards embracing environmentalism as a shared organizational culture (Zafar, Tian, Ho & Zhang, 2020). This effect is especially significant, since servant leadership empowers individuals to act on the organizational goals and objectives that are aligned with their own goals and creates the organizational culture which fosters sustainable behavior in the long term (Ren et al., 2021).

In addition, servant leaders foster green attitudes by encouraging organizational activities for promoting sustainability within the workplace, knower environmental conservancy, energy retention, and the reduction of wastage. As such, they assist in ensuring the sustainability initiatives are adopted deep within the organization, put in place structures that encourage and/or motivate sustainable actions (Pirzada et al., 2023). Ying et al. (2022) opine that the use of pro-environmental actions synergies with servant leadership where leaders foster self-organizing employees to volunteer in maintaining organizational and personal environment health. Therefore, as a culture of sustainability, servant leadership guarantees that workers embrace green values and are self- driven in the same.

### **Green Organizational Climate as a Mediator**

Culture plays an important role in fulfilling the promise of servant leadership for green projects, the specific way of thinking and approaching the problems we found as green organizational climate. In this type of a climate environmental responsibility is fostered and employees are motivated

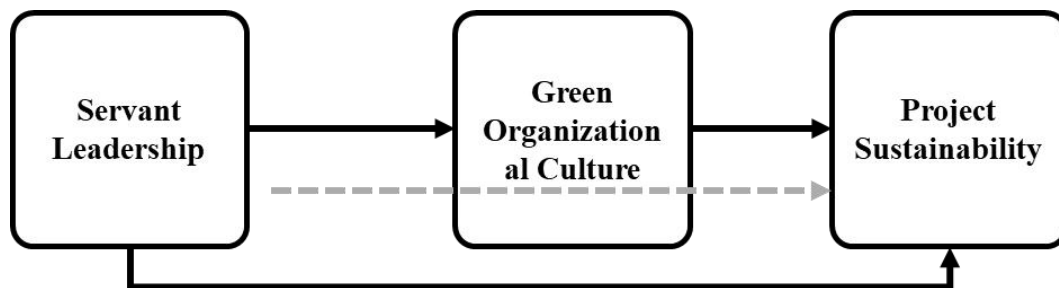
towards adopting environmentally friendly practices as part of their work culture (Faraz, et al., 2021; Tuan, 2021). Servant leaders, by embracing stewardship and environmental responsibility organizational climate, ensure that they enhance green practices by emphasizing employee self-organizing to support organizational sustainability objectives (Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014).

The analysis of the impact of servant leadership on green climate also supports the idea about the intermediary position of green climate in the provision of project sustainability performance. In other words, when servant leaders provide sustainability values, it improves congruence between self-organizational sustainability value. This alignment enhances commitment and the pursuit of environmental sustainability goals enhancing positive contribution to project outcomes while encouraging employee motivation as noted by Huo et al., (2023) and Siddiquei et al. (2021). For this reason, servant leadership is a crucial factor in forming and maintaining the green organizational environment and promoting decision-making leading to environmentally friendly organizational practices and organizational sustainability.

Green organizational climate strengthens the effects of servant leadership on project sustainability through creating a structure that supports sustainable employee behaviors. Such mediation is crucial in transmuting servant leadership into a tangible organizational culture of environmental sustainability (Ren et.al., 2021) In the organizations that have a favorable green culture, the staff members are apt to embed sustainable practices within their functional goals to enhance the achievements of projects aligned to the green culture (Ying et al., 2020).

The green organizational climate also creates commitment by the parties by enhancing the sense of responsibility towards the purpose of the organization and in line with high quality relationship. Environmental initiatives, along with advocating for employee pro-environmental practices, make a link with servant leadership and positive environmental impacts all the more concrete (Huo et al., 2023). For this reason, project green organizational climate mediates an association between servant leadership and project sustainability performance by cultivating a culture that embraces sustainability.

## Conceptual Model



## Hypotheses of the Study

*H1: Servant leadership significantly influence project sustainability in construction sector.*

*H1: Servant leadership significantly influence green organizational culture in construction sector.*

*H3: Green Organizational culture mediated the relationship between servant leadership and project sustainability in construction sector.*

## Methodology

### Research Design

In this study, the research methodology adopted is a quantitative research with cross-sectional survey design to examine the cross sectional correlation between servant leadership, green organizational climate and project sustainability performance. The survey design for this study will prove useful because the study aims to gather data from various participants increasing the likelihood of generalizing the results (Huo et al., 2023).

### Sample and Sampling Techniques

The target population covers all project managers and other employees who serve organizations that have adopted sustainable practices. The sample is estimated as 300 participants and selected through stratified random sampling technique (Ozturk & Ivascu, 2023). The criteria for selecting participants consist of employees who have been working in the organization for at least one year, and those with experience in sustainability projects at the firm.

### Data Collection Methods

Respondents will complete an online structured questionnaire with established surveys for servant leadership (Servant Leadership Scale) adapted from Liden et al. (2015), green organizational culture is measured with six item scale adapted from Pham et al. (2018) and project sustainability



performance adapted from Zhang et al. (2021), and Khan, Zafar, Anwar and Ahmad (2020). This scale has three dimensions such as environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability. All items are measured with five-point Likert scales ranging 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected was analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through SmartPLS. Specifically, SEM is selected not only because it has a better performance in terms of testing the relationship of the multiple variables than other more basic models but also because it can estimate not only direct, but also indirect impacts. Bootstrap versions of the indirect effects are computed to determine the mediated effect of green organizational climate in the relationship between servant leadership and project sustainability performance, following Zhao et al (2022).

### Results

Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the sample respondents. The statistic indicates that majority of respondents are male with percentage of 91.7%, indicating construction sector as male dominant sector in Pakistan. Regarding age, majority are within 31 and 40 years of age. Similarly, majority of respondents are graduates with experience of up to 5 years. Designation shows that majority of sample respondents are project team lead. This statistic indicates a good representation of sample populations.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	275	91.7
	Female	25	8.3
Age	20–30 years	101	33.7
	31–40 years	135	45.0
	More than 40 years	63	21.0
Education Level	Intermediate	75	25.0
	Graduate	129	43.0
	Master's	95	31.7
Experience	1–5 years	121	40.3
	6–10 years	99	33.0



	11 years and above	79	26.3
Job Designation	Project Manager	55	18.3
	Project Team Lead	95	31.7
	Supervisor	73	24.3
	Project Worker	77	25.7

Measurement Model Evaluation

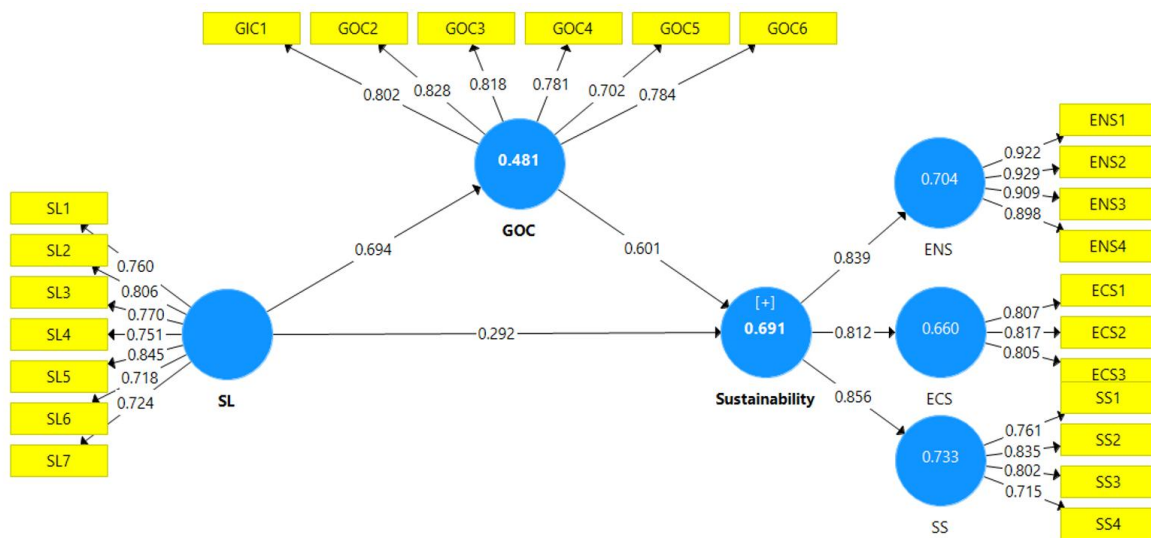


Figure 1: Measurement Model

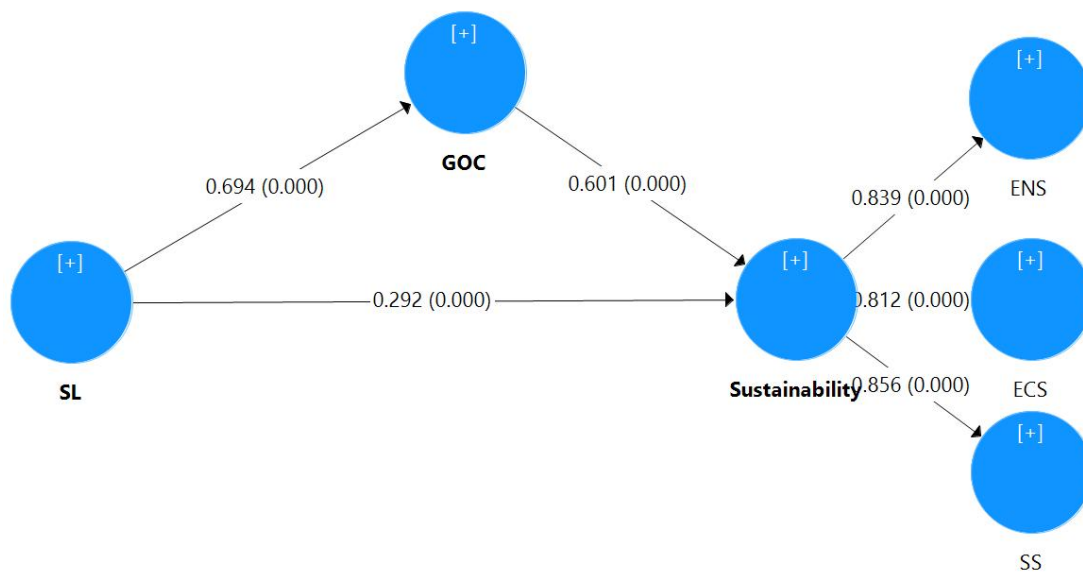
Table 2 depicts measurement model of SEM. According to statistic the factors loadings for all the items are well above the threshold value of 0.708; indicating the highest factor reliability. further, Cronbach’s alpha values for all the variable ranges between 0.737 to 0.935; indicating excellent internal consistency reliability. Similarly, composite reliability also shows acceptable reliability with values higher than 0.70 (Haier et al., 2017). For example, economic sustainability has CR value of 0.851 and servant leadership has CR value of 0.910. Convergent validity is assessed with AVE; indicating that all the variables shows acceptable convergent validity with values greater than 0.50. Moreover, we have also assessed the discriminant validity with Fornell-Lorcker and HTMT ratios. Both statistics indicate an acceptable level of discriminant validity. The results indicate that the measurement model satisfies the requisite quality criteria, demonstrating an adequate fit to the data, as evidenced by the parameter estimates.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

Variable	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Economic Sustainability	ECS1	0.807	0.737	0.851	0.656
	ECS2	0.817			
	ECS3	0.805			
Environmental Sustainability	ENS1	0.922	0.935	0.953	0.836
	ENS2	0.929			
	ENS3	0.909			
	ENS4	0.898			
Green Organizational Culture	GOC1	0.802	0.876	0.907	0.619
	GOC2	0.829			
	GOC3	0.818			
	GOC4	0.781			
	GOC5	0.702			
	GOC6	0.784			
Servant Leadership	SL1	0.759	0.884	0.91	0.591
	SL2	0.806			
	SL3	0.77			
	SL4	0.751			
	SL5	0.845			
	SL6	0.718			
	SL7	0.724			
Social Sustainability	SS1	0.761	0.784	0.861	0.608
	SS2	0.835			
	SS3	0.802			
	SS4	0.715			

**Structural Model Analysis for Hypotheses testing**

Table 3 depicts results of structural model indicating significant relationships among the study's variables. Servant Leadership (SL) links with Sustainability, is significant, with a beta of 0.292, a T statistic of 6.346, and a p-value of 0.000, highlighting a direct, positive effect of servant leadership on sustainability. Similarly, GOC and Sustainability shows a strong positive effect, with a beta value of 0.601 and a p-value of 0.000, (T = 13.973). Moreover, SL also has a direct positive relationship with GOC with a higher beta value of 0.694, T stat of 23.542 and p<0.000 reminding us of the importance of servant leadership in promoting green culture. Regarding the mediating role of GOC between SL and Sustainability, the results shows a significant mediating role, (Beta =0.417, T statistic = 11.712; p-value = 0.000).



**Table 3: Structural Model**

Path	Beta	STDEV	T		
			Statistics	P Values	Remarks
GOC → Sustainability	0.601**	0.043	13.973	0.000	Supported
SL → GOC	0.694**	0.029	23.542	0.000	Supported
SL → Sustainability	0.292**	0.046	6.346	0.000	Supported
SL → GOC → Sustainability	0.417**	0.036	11.712	0.000	Supported

Note: \*\* indicate significance; GOC = Green Organizational Culture; SL = Servant Leadership

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to establish the relationship between servant leadership and project sustainability and the mediating influence of green organizational culture in infrastructure and construction projects. The findings of the study also show that servant leadership has a positive influence on project sustainability. This is in line with the study hypothesis that leaders who espouse and promote ethical people-centred values are capable of pushing for sustainable gains by encouraging their subordinates to embrace the environmental, social, and economic aspects of project sustainability. Moreover, the present study establishes that green organizational culture fully mediates this relationship, implying that the integration of green organizational practice enhances the impact of servant leadership on sustainability performance.

The results of this research contribute to the present body of knowledge on sustainable project management and leadership by providing empirical evidence on the hypothesized model of servant leadership and organizational culture. Past studies have always pointed out that leadership behavior plays crucial roles in determining sustainable outcomes in organizational context especially in industries with high impacts on environment such as construction industry (Afzal & Tumpa, 2024). Servant leadership with its emphasis on the improvement of the follower, is positively linked with different organizational performance measures such as organizational commitment and work-related morality (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). These findings complement and build on these observations, as we demonstrate that servant leadership enhances project sustainability by promoting practices that ensure team members adhere to sustainable goals in their projects. This links with Greenleaf's (1970) work of defining servant leadership as a leadership style that seeks to serve the highest purpose in an organization. Later studies stress that servant leadership can be used as a framework for changing an organisation for the better, as servant leadership naturally presupposes sustainability's ethical and people-oriented components (Peterlin, Pearse & Dimovski, 2015).

Green organizational culture as a mediating variable provides additional explanations related to the influence of leadership on sustainability by placing leadership into a cultural context that embraces environmental and sustainability perspectives. Some recent scholarships have pointed out that culture plays a central role in the integration of sustainability into the

organizational (Xu, Gao, Cai & Jiang., 2022). In particular for construction management, the impact of green organizational culture in encouraging sustainable behaviour has been additionally stressed in existing literature in line with the results of this research (Ahn et al., 2013). Leaders who develop a supportive culture promote sustainability not only by directly adopting green practices but also by encouraging people to support and follow sustainable practices, designs, and resource optimization within projects (Xia et al., 2022). This study supports and builds upon these findings by offering empirical evidence showing that green organizational culture not only acts as a moderator but also bears a direct impact on sustainability and thus improves the general sustainability performance in construction projects.

In addition, this study's findings differ from previous research, which has reported inconclusive results concerning the effects of leadership styles on sustainability, especially in organisations that adopt transformational or transactional leadership (Imran, 2024). Compared to these leadership styles, it is therefore hypothesized that the specific focus of servant leadership – on community, capability, and ethical responsibility – offers a firmer basis for the development of green organisational practices. Therefore, as transformational leadership can positively influence organizational innovation, servant leadership that supports the idea of serving the organization's interest is more relevant to sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

This study brings out the significance of servant leadership in the attainment of project sustainability within the infrastructure and construction industries. That servant leadership has a direct effect on the sustainability outcomes, it confirms that leaders who embrace servant leadership can create the right environment for sustainable performance. Further, it is revealed that green organizational culture enhances this relationship suggesting that organizational culture is not just the passive context but a crucial component for efficient functioning of sustainable practices. These insights are rather meaningful for both the theory and practice as they point to the need of implementing the principles of green organizational solutions as parts of the leadership approaches aimed at improving the level of sustainability.

The findings have important and extensive implications for practitioners and policymakers for achieving and sustaining an organizational green culture in support of the green initiatives undertaken by the servant leaders. This highlights a strong need for firms to ensure they cultivate for green culture which in turn will enhance the achievement of more sustainable project results

towards the overall goal of environmental conservation. The study also provides suggestions for further research for culture and/or industry different study and even the nature of a different society that may provide a clearer picture of how servant leadership affects green organizational practices. This research, thus, provides a starting point in comprehending the intertwined relationship between leadership and culture in determining sustainability performance, as well as facilitating the progression towards improved ecological and socially responsible project management practices.

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