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Authentic and Servant Leadership: Golden Keys to Enhance Innovative Performance in Sports Organizations with the Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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Article Info	Abstract
Article type: Research Article	This research investigated the impact of Authentic Leadership and Servant Leadership on Innovative Performance among employees of Tehran Province Sports and Youth Departments, with self-efficacy examined as a mediator. Utilizing a random sampling method, data were gathered from 267 participants via a 32-item, 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares regression in Smart PLS 3. The key findings indicate that while both AL and SL significantly boosted employees' self-efficacy, only AL and SE had a direct, positive effect on IP; SL's direct effect was not significant. Critically, SE served as a significant mediator in the pathways from both leadership styles to IP. This demonstrates that the primary mechanism through which both Servant and Authentic Leadership foster innovation is by indirectly enhancing employees' self-efficacy. The study concludes that cultivating leadership styles that build employee confidence and promoting an innovation-oriented culture are vital for boosting creativity in sports organizations.
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Introduction

In the contemporary dynamic business environment, heightened industrial competition necessitates innovative management strategies for organizations to sustain their global market position. Consequently, the function of leadership in fostering organizational innovation has become a critical focus (Cantafio & Munna, 2025; Nasr Esfahani et al., 2024). Innovative performance, a cornerstone of human resource management, depends on leaders who can introduce novel ideas, establish strategic objectives, and stimulate employee creativity. Authentic leaders are particularly effective in this regard, as they not only facilitate innovation but also reinforce a culture of innovation by enhancing organizational commitment (Siagian, 2024). Empirical evidence confirms the direct influence of authentic leadership (AL) on innovative performance (IP) (Shariq et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2017). This is supported by Zia (2020), who highlighted the strong leadership-innovation link, and Banmairuroy et al. (2022), who characterized authentic leadership as a hybrid of transactional and transformational styles that is vital for advancing organizational innovation.

In recent years, with the increasing inclination of organizations towards human-centered leadership approaches, attention to positive and non-self-centered leadership styles has grown. One of these emerging styles is servant leadership (SL), which emphasizes employee growth and meeting their needs (Robinson et al., 2021). In modern work environments, this leadership style not only helps solve organizational problems but also strengthens trust, fosters loyalty, and improves employee performance (Ren & Shen, 2024). Research has shown that organizations that adopt servant leadership perform better at the individual and team levels (Ogbonnaya et al., 2025). Additionally, by emphasizing employee support, servant leadership increases their positive attitude towards the organization, ultimately leading to improved overall performance (Bande et al., 2016; Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). Sports organizations are distinguished by their unique characteristics, particularly their team-oriented and performance-driven nature, which hinges on cooperation, empathy, and collective motivation for success (De Bock et al., 2022; Werner & Bischof, 2024). Leaders who embody servant and authentic leadership styles play a pivotal role in fostering solidarity and motivation by prioritizing growth, trust, and human values.

Authentic leadership, based on honesty, transparency, and moral support, would positively affect organizational resilience, improve trust and raise employees' and members' identification with the organization; such enhanced identification improves resilience in challenging periods or crises, typical for highly dynamic sport settings or high-pressure ones. Empirical research suggests that authentic leadership directly and indirectly bolsters employee resilience by leveraging organizational identification, trust, and positive psychological states (e.g., flow at work) toward a greater capacity to bounce back from disruptions (Mao et al., 2023). On the other hand, the servant leadership approach underlines the principle of prioritizing others and paying attention to the well-being and development of the organizational members. By focusing on these values, servant leadership nurtures an ethical organizational climate that strengthens trust in the leaders and perceptions of organizational justice for durability in resilience within sports organizations. In project-based and team settings, servant leadership enhances team goal and process clarity, leading to increased team effectiveness and, thus, resilience (Burton et al., 2017; Bilal et al., 2020).

Servant Leadership has been found to contribute significantly to predicting employee resilience in relation to various social identification processes. These processes are especially important in sports organizations, where sudden changes in strategies, stress, and performance pressures are common, thereby emphasizing the role of servant leadership in building a resilient and mission-driven organizational environment (Peng et al., 2022). Authentic Leadership plays a good role in this area in that it creates a setting where leaders' authenticity promotes persistence and a common cause, aligning personal development with organizational goals, and establishing a common, meaningful perspective in a sports setting (Wang et al., 2024; Abbas et al., 2020). Models of both Authentic Leadership and Servant Leadership encourage a setting where identity, trust, transparency, and a common cause are of primary preference, which would help sports organizations effectively address difficulties and maintain peak performance (Eliot, 2020; Burton et al., 2017).

In sports organizations, servant leadership has a positive impact on organizational performance by increasing team efficacy, goal clarity, and process clarity. In project-based organizations, findings have

proved that team members and leaders in sports organizations using team-level servant leadership as a methodology are able to increase team efficacy significantly as a means of team goal clarity and team process clarity, which are very important for organizational success and performance (Bilal et al., 2020). Using this methodology, leaders in sports organizations are able to create a sports organizational culture that focuses on providing support for other people, which in turn has a direct relation to improving organizational performance. Also, servant leadership has been recognized as developing trust, especially affective trust, that plays a middle role between applying servant leadership practices in an organization and developing various performance-related factors like organizational citizenship behaviors and task performance for individual as well as team levels in sports organizations (Saleem et al., 2023).

Furthermore, this form of leadership enhances internal social capital in teams through organizational citizenship behaviors among individual members, hence encouraging a positive team environment and a common focus that favors the organization (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2021). This application is particularly important in sports institutions, as group cohesion, common goals, and team support are key for long-term success. The servant leadership approach also plays a moderating function in countering adverse benefits that emerge from differences in leader-member associations, hence encouraging shared leadership and enhanced team performance, as well as citizenship behaviors (Wang et al., 2012). These characteristics are of great significance to sports institutions that are often faced with difficulties involving different team members and shifts in leadership requirements. Moreover, literature indicates that servant leadership has been related to fostering organizational cultures with characteristics of empowerment, ethical functioning, stewardship, and family-like, which contribute to organizational sustainability and satisfaction of members in organizations (Franco & Antunes, 2020). These features are in relation to values-driven sports organizations that require consistent and supportive conditions. Therefore, in conclusion, applying servant leadership in sports organizations benefits in increasing team and organizational efficiency in terms of issues of clarity, trust, organizational citizenship, and internal organizational social capital. Besides, this form of leadership practices ethical stewardship and supportiveness, which are fundamental in their own right in relation to organizational efficiency and sustainability, independent of their influence on individual sporting performance. Sports organizations that embrace this form of leadership would, therefore, look forward to enjoying improved internal functioning.

Recent research indicates that authentic and servant leadership styles significantly enhance individual creativity and team innovation, leading to high performance in dynamic environments (Ren & Shen, 2024). Furthermore, self-efficacy, by increasing innovation, contributes to creating an innovation culture within the organization, while a supportive team environment strengthens this relationship (Akbari et al., 2020). Additionally, studies suggest that authentic leadership enhances innovative work behaviors and positively impacts creativity and organizational performance (Khan et al., 2024). On the other hand, the synergistic effect of authentic and servant leadership styles increases employee creativity and ultimately improves innovative work behaviors (Gelaidan et al., 2023). Leaders described themselves as highly authentic, especially in terms of being transparent, which fosters open dialogue and shared decision-making. Experience and training were associated with stronger leadership traits. A positive but modest relationship was observed between leadership dimensions and innovation, suggesting that although leadership contributes to promoting innovation, additional organizational and contextual factors are also influential. (Hubbart, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025; Shafiq et al., 2019) Notably, these findings emphasize the need to support leadership and innovation as mechanisms for advancing social inclusion in organizations for people with disabilities (Toumpeki & Gdonteli, 2025).

Despite the positive effects of these two leadership styles on organizational performance and innovation, their implementation faces challenges such as resistance to change.

The main challenge is the natural resistance to change demonstrated by employees and the prevailing organization cultures, especially where changes are foreseen to affect the routines and comfort levels of employees (Appelbaum et al., 2015). The structure of an organization in terms of bureaucracy and hierarchy may be a constraint to leadership strategies that are meant to bring changes due to the inflexibility and slow decision-making process in the organization (Adserias et al., 2017). Change resistance will also be enhanced by a lack of employee involvement in decision-making and reduced confidence in the leadership's intentions

(Musaigwa & Kalitanyi, 2024).

The need to explore the interrelationships between servant leadership, authentic leadership, self-efficacy, and innovative performance in sports organizations continues to be valid in spite of the existence of proof regarding the positive relationships in other settings. First, while servant and authentic leadership have been demonstrated to improve self-efficacy and consequently creative and innovative work in banking, the public sector, the health sector, and education, the specific context in sports organizations has received little investigation and should be verified in the current context (Yang et al., 2017; Gelaidan et al., 2023; Abbas et al., 2020).

Secondly, existing literature shows that servant leadership enhances creativity through the means of creative self-efficacy and team efficacy beliefs, and finally influences individual and group creative accomplishments. Another form of leadership, authentic leadership, has been shown to enhance performance and creativity because of the values and authenticity of the followers based on the values of the leadership and the authenticity of the leaders (Abbas et al., 2020; Gelaidan et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2017).

The combined and comparative effect of the two aforementioned leadership approaches in the context of sports organization settings and their effect on innovation self-efficacy and innovative performance has, however, not been properly examined and requires special focus.

Third, innovative performance emerges as a critical source of competitive advantage in sports organizations, but the process constituting the mediated effect of innovation self-efficacy in the relationship between leadership and innovation is intricate and possibly contingent upon circumstances such as goal achievement transparency and the sports-specific organization environment (Bilal et al., 2020; Hu & Liden, 2011). Thus, the interaction and combined effect of servant and authentic leadership styles in the process of improving innovation through the efficacy process has emerged as a remaining gap in the literature and the focus of the present investigation. Overall, the current study is made necessary by the need to (a) fill the gaps in the context and directly investigate the relationships in the sports context, (b) confirm the mechanisms through innovation self-efficacy that translates the respective leadership styles into innovative performance, and (c) offer empirical results that will assist in the design of sports-specific leadership and innovation practices based in the current sector (Abbas et al., 2020; Gelaidan et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2017) through the need to fill the gaps in the current literature and its results regarding the effectiveness and respective mechanisms of servant and authentic leadership regarding innovation.

Authentic leadership, by creating commitment and facilitating innovative processes, and servant leadership, by strengthening trust and improving interpersonal interactions, play a crucial role in overcoming these challenges. Consequently, combining these two styles can be an effective solution to enhance productivity and competitiveness in the modern world.

Theory and Hypotheses Development

The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Promoting Innovative Performance in Sports Organizations

The relationship between servant leadership and innovative performance in sports organizations is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in fostering creativity and effectiveness (Dilianto, 2025). Servant leadership, characterized by its focus on serving others and promoting their development, significantly enhances innovative behaviors among employees. This relationship is mediated by various factors, including an innovation climate and psychological empowerment, which collectively create an environment conducive to innovation. (Nugroho, 2022) Research highlights a strong positive relationship between servant leadership and employee innovative behavior in IT organizations, suggesting that similar dynamics may exist in sports organizations, where supportive leadership can boost innovative performance by nurturing an environment ripe for creativity (Nazir & Iqbal, 2024). Furthermore, researchers have stated that servant leadership positively impacts team innovation performance, with dimensions such as persuasion and guidance being significant predictors. This relationship is mediated by innovation self-efficacy, indicating that fostering a supportive environment can enhance innovative outcomes in sports organizations (Musenze et al., 2024; Ren

& Shen, 2024). Additionally, studies have shown a significant positive correlation between servant leadership and employee innovative behavior, demonstrating that cultivating leaders with a servant mindset can drive innovation (Kamil et al., 2024; Karatepe et al., 2020), which may be applicable to sports organizations seeking to improve performance through similar leadership approaches. Moreover, servant leadership characteristics, such as altruistic calling and organizational stewardship, positively influence individual innovation, which can enhance overall innovative performance. These findings suggest that similar dynamics may apply in sports organizations, fostering creativity and innovation among staff (Mallén Broch et al., 2020; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2019).

The sports sector stands out in a leadership capacity in relation to other settings because of their unique elements regarding structure, sports sector culture, leadership, and team processes (Megheirkouni, 2017). The sports sector requires unique leadership processes, which include shared leadership in sports teams by athlete-leaders and coaches, where a number of leaders undertake clearly defined functions such as task leadership, motivation leadership, social leadership, and external leadership (Fransen et al., 2015). The corporate, voluntary, and tourism organizations focus differently on leadership processes, such as corporate social responsibility, group processes, and employee well-being (Reyaz, 2024). Another factor is the sports sector and its variations regarding the associated cultural and gender elements, significantly affecting leadership style and effectiveness, and the sports sector and other organizations in terms of its expressions (Cuadrado et al., 2008; Koo & Park, 2018).

Finally, it has been stated that servant leadership positively affects employee innovative work behavior, suggesting that similar dynamics may apply in sports organizations (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2023). The findings show that servant leadership is linked to organizational performance from the viewpoints of administrative staff. In addition, for the administrative group, competency acted as a mediator between servant leadership and organizational performance. This study also adds to existing research by showing that servant leadership positively influenced organizational performance even after accounting for tenure (Dilianto, 2025). By nurturing a supportive environment, servant leadership can enhance innovative performance among team members in such settings. Servant leadership is recognized as a key factor in promoting innovative performance in sports organizations. This leadership style, which emphasizes serving others and their development, fosters an environment conducive to creativity and innovation through creating an innovation climate and psychological empowerment. Studies have shown that servant leadership enhances innovative behaviors among employees and improves team innovation performance by establishing a supportive environment. Furthermore, characteristics such as altruism and organizational stewardship positively impact individual innovation. Overall, this leadership style can lead to increased creativity and competitive advantage in sports organizations by fostering trust, innovation self-efficacy, and employee engagement. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Servant leadership positively influences the promotion of innovative performance among employees in sports organizations.

The Relationship Between Authentic Leadership and Promoting Innovative Performance in Sports Organizations

The relationship between authentic leadership and innovative performance in sports organizations is significant, as authentic leaders cultivate an environment conducive to innovation (Hanaysha, 2020; Korku & Kaya, 2023). By building trust and promoting a collaborative culture, these leaders can enhance employee innovative work behavior, ultimately leading to improved performance. The following sections detail key aspects of this relationship (Novitasari et al., 2021). Authentic leadership creates a supportive atmosphere where employees feel valued and empowered, which is crucial for innovation (Lewicka & Rehman, 2024). Authentic leaders build trust, which is essential for knowledge sharing and organizational commitment, both playing vital roles in innovation (Siagian, 2024). Research indicates that trust and meaningful work mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative work behavior, demonstrating that it enhances employee engagement and creativity (Chaudhary, 2018). Furthermore, authentic leadership fosters an innovative culture by promoting trust, resilience, and ethical commitment, which are essential for sports organizations. This leadership style encourages collaboration and empowers individuals, ultimately driving

innovation and competitive advantage in the sports sector (Malloy et al., 2023; Mao et al., 2023). Additionally, it has been stated that authentic leadership positively impacts innovative work behavior by increasing the meaningfulness of work, suggesting that similar dynamics can be applied in sports organizations, where authentic leaders can foster engagement and creativity, ultimately boosting innovative performance among athletes and staff (Kusmargono et al., 2023; Yamak & Eyupoglu, 2021). It has also been stated that authentic leadership cultivates an innovation culture in sports organizations by empowering employees, enhancing their performance, and encouraging creativity. This leadership style fosters optimism and participation in decision-making, leading to improved innovative outcomes and competitive advantage for the organization (AlMazrouei, 2023; Doh et al., 2024). Authentic leadership positively influences organizational citizenship behaviors—such as altruism, sportsmanship, civic virtue, conscientiousness, and courtesy—as well as employee creativity and individual performance. Creativity serves as a partial mediator between authentic leadership and individual performance. Additionally, certain OCB components, specifically altruism, civic virtue, and courtesy, also help explain how authentic leadership leads to improved individual performance (Ribeiro et al., 2018). Authentic leadership plays a key role in promoting innovative performance in sports organizations. By building trust, promoting a collaborative culture, and empowering employees, authentic leaders provide an environment conducive to innovation. Studies have shown that this leadership style enhances the innovation culture and improves employee innovative behavior by increasing trust, resilience, and ethical commitment. Furthermore, trust and meaningful work act as mediating factors in this relationship, enhancing employee engagement and creativity. Ultimately, authentic leadership improves innovative performance in sports organizations and creates a competitive advantage by fostering optimism, participation in decision-making, and employee empowerment. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Authentic leadership positively influences the promotion of innovative performance among employees in sports organizations.

The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in Promoting Innovative Performance in Sports Organizations

Both authentic and servant leadership are pivotal in boosting innovative performance within sports organizations, primarily through the mechanism of enhancing self-efficacy (SE) (Wu et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025). These leadership styles cultivate a supportive environment that is conducive to individual and team creativity, thereby driving innovation.

The mechanisms of their impact are detailed as follows:

Servant Leadership significantly boosts innovation by strengthening innovation self-efficacy, which acts as a key mediator. Specific characteristics such as altruistic calling, emotional healing, and organizational stewardship are identified as directly fostering individual innovation, which is a critical component for achieving a competitive advantage (Simatupang et al., 2022).

Authentic Leadership contributes by promoting valuable employee behaviors and attitudes that enhance both individual and team performance, thereby improving overall innovative capabilities (Polat et al., 2024).

Critically, research indicates that the combined impact of these two leadership styles is particularly powerful. Their synergy enhances employee creativity and fosters greater support for innovative work behaviors. This is often explained by the mediating role of creative self-efficacy, which translates leadership support into tangible innovative performance, a finding applicable to sports organizations (Gelaidan et al., 2023).

On the other hand, research has shown that servant leadership significantly increases self-efficacy in various fields, including healthcare and education (Haryanto & Sutawijaya, 2024). This leadership style fosters an environment that encourages personal growth and consistent performance, ultimately leading to improved self-efficacy among employees. The following sections describe the mechanisms through which servant leadership influences self-efficacy (Listyani & Tung, 2024). In the area of positive effects of self-efficacy, research shows a strong positive relationship between servant leadership and self-efficacy, particularly among employees, who reported a significant percentage of high levels of servant leadership

(Hotta et al., 2025; Mohamed et al., 2024). On the other hand, in the context of team innovation, innovation self-efficacy acts as a mediator between servant leadership and team performance, highlighting how leadership behaviors can enhance personal beliefs (Siddiquei et al., 2025). Ultimately, it was found that servant leadership not only increased self-efficacy but also increased adaptive performance, indicating that employees felt more capable of adapting to changes in their work environment (Qiao et al., 2025).

In the context of authentic leadership and its relationship to self-efficacy, it was found that authentic leadership significantly increases self-efficacy in various professional settings (Azila-Gbette et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025). This leadership style, characterized by transparency, fairness, and open communication, fosters an environment in which people feel empowered and confident in their abilities. The following sections describe the mechanisms through which authentic leadership influences self-efficacy. In terms of transparency, it has been shown that authentic leaders promote open sharing of information, which is associated with increased job self-efficacy among employees, as they feel more informed and valued (Podder & Saha, 2024). On the other hand, in terms of empowerment in healthcare settings, authentic leadership encourages nurses to develop their expertise, thereby increasing their self-efficacy and overall job performance (Farg et al., 2024). In addition, in terms of positive correlation, studies have shown a strong positive relationship between authentic leadership and self-efficacy in sports, where athletes report higher self-efficacy when guided by authentic coaches (Gelaidan et al., 2023; Nam et al., 2024). While authentic leadership is beneficial, it is important to keep in mind that not all leadership styles may have similar effects on self-efficacy. For example, more authoritarian leadership approaches may stifle individual self-confidence and engagement, suggesting that context and leadership style play an important role in shaping self-efficacy outcomes. However, when individuals feel competent both in their professional and personal lives, they often experience higher levels of self-efficacy and self-confidence (Bai & Kahsari, 2025).

Researchers have suggested that self-efficacy plays an important role in promoting innovative performance in sports organizations. It increases individuals' belief in their own abilities, which can lead to increased creativity and initiative in problem solving (Kim et al., 2017). This relationship is supported by various studies that highlight the importance of self-efficacy in fostering innovative behaviors among athletes, teams, and organizational leaders. In terms of individual empowerment, self-efficacy increases self-confidence and enables individuals to take risks and propose innovative ideas, which is essential in competitive sports environments (Jenkins, 2008). In terms of mediation in leadership, research also shows that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between self-leadership strategies and career success, suggesting that effective leadership in sports organizations can promote innovative performance by increasing self-efficacy (Chamberlin et al., 2025; Megheirkouni, 2018). Finally, in the discussion of the supportive environment, it was found that an inclusive organizational environment that enhances self-efficacy can significantly enhance employees' innovative behaviors, as seen in studies conducted in various sectors, including sports. Both authentic and servant leadership play key roles in enhancing innovative performance in sports organizations, particularly through their impact on innovation self-efficacy. These two leadership styles create a supportive environment that enhances individual and team creativity, thereby fostering innovation. Innovation self-efficacy acts as a mediator in this process, with characteristics such as altruism, emotional healing, and altruistic calling in servant leadership positively impacting individual innovation. Additionally, authentic leadership enhances innovative capabilities by promoting valuable attitudes and behaviors. Combining these two leadership styles can enhance employee creativity and foster greater support for innovative behaviors. Therefore, these leadership styles enhance innovative performance in sports organizations through the mediating role of self-efficacy. Building on this foundation, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Servant leadership is effective in increasing self-efficacy.

H4: Authentic leadership is effective in increasing self-efficacy.

H5: Self-efficacy promotes innovative performance in sports organizations.

H6: Servant leadership enhances the promotion of innovative performance through increased innovation self-efficacy.

H7: Authentic leadership enhances the promotion of innovative performance through increased innovation self-efficacy.

Model development, variables, and hypotheses

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual framework, outlining the proposed connections between authentic leadership, servant leadership, self-efficacy, and innovative performance in sports organizations. The model specifically investigates SE as a mediating variable in these relationships. Direct effects are denoted by solid lines, whereas indirect pathways are represented by dashed lines. The formulated hypotheses are grounded in the influences of AL and SL on IP, as well as SE's impact on innovative capacity. This framework facilitates a deeper comprehension of how leadership styles promote innovation, offering strategic insights for improving performance in sports settings.

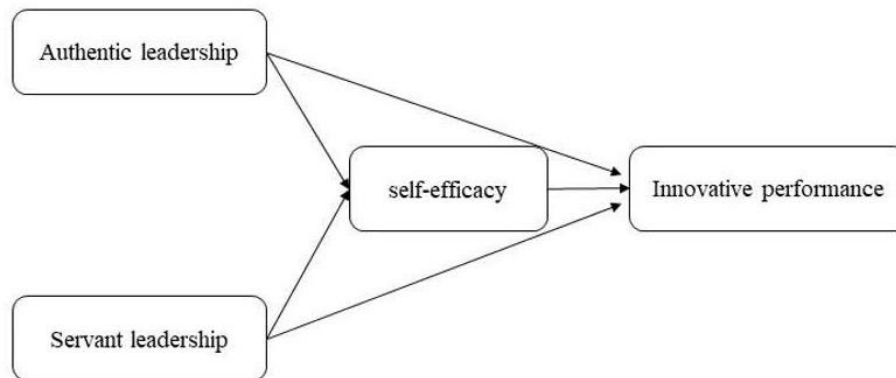


Fig 1. Conceptual mediation model

Research Methods

Procedure for Data Collection

The original survey instrument was translated into Persian so that it would be linguistically and culturally acceptable to the responding audience. We conducted a pilot test with 30 employees before launching the full survey. Data were collected from the employees of Tehran Province Sports and Youth Departments. In-person survey was administered from January to February 2025, using a Simple Random Sampling. At the beginning of the survey, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and we did not request any personal information, ensuring complete anonymity. The survey took approximately 7 minutes to complete.

Participants

The statistical population consisted of all employees of the sports and youth departments of Tehran province (about 650 people). For structural equation modeling (SEM), there are different methods for determining the sample size, which in this study, as a rule of thumb, 5 to 10 observations were considered for each item (Nicolaou & Masoner, 2013). Considering that the questionnaire contains 32 items, the minimum sample size is 160 items. However, more questionnaires were distributed (300). From these, 267 fully completed responses were obtained for the final analysis.

Measures

This study employed established scales to measure its core constructs. The research instrument incorporated:

Four pre-existing measurement tools were used: A scale with 11 items adapted from Neider and Schriesheim (2011), examining the aspects of Authentic Leadership working on self-awareness, relationship transparency, internalized moral values, and balanced processing; A scale with 6 six items adapted from Haar et al. (2017), examining leaders' focus on followers' development and service-minded behavior; A scale with 6 items adapted from Scott and Bruce (1994), examining employees' innovativeness at work, involving idea generation, selling, and implementation; A scale with nine items adapted from Bandura (1977),

examining an individual's perceptions of own competence and efficacy. Instrument validity and measurement accuracy were determined with 7 experts judgments and pilot-testing for Face validity, and factor-analytic methods (construction- and confirmatory factor analysis). The instrument validity and various specific scales were again checked with tests for convergent validity and/or discriminant validity. Also, common method bias tests were conducted. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To ensure reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 30 employees. The results were satisfactory, showing test-retest correlations above 0.70 for all 32 items over a one-week period. The final distribution of questionnaires was in-person and simple random.

Data Analysis

The data were examined using Smart PLS 3, with statistical significance set at $\alpha < .05$. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to evaluate both the overall model fit and the hypothesized relationships among the variables. The quality of the inner model was determined through measures of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability was considered acceptable when Composite Reliability (CR) exceeded 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011). Convergent validity was supported by factor loadings above 0.707 and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Path analysis examined hypothesized relationships, and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples assessed indirect effects at a 95% confidence interval (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) indices evaluated the model's adequacy. Lower values suggest better model fit, highlighting PLS-SEM's focus on predictive capability.

Findings

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the statistical sample. Among the participants, 68% were male and 32% were female. The majority of respondents, 39%, fell within the age range of 31 to 40 years. Additionally, 62% held at least a Master's degree, and 52% had more than 15 years of work experience.

Table 1- Demographic characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	68
	Female	85	32
Age group (years)	Under 30	88	33
	31–40	104	39
	41–50	56	21
	Above 50	19	7
Education level	Bachelor's degree	89	33
	Master's degree	165	62
	Doctoral degree	13	5
Work experience (years)	Less than 5	14	5
	5–10	39	15
	11–15	75	28
	More than 15	139	52

The table (2) presents descriptive statistics for four key variables using mean, standard deviation, kurtosis, and skewness.

Table 2- Descriptive statistics for variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
Authentic Leadership	3.955	0.709	2.010	-1.335
Servant Leadership	3.998	0.778	2.200	-1.329
Innovative Performance	4.077	0.729	2.621	-1.454
Self-Efficacy	4.086	0.761	3.916	-1.790

All variables reflect a range of means of their measurement scales from 3.955 to 4.086, which reflects that overall, respondents perceive a high degree of authenticity in leaders, servant leaders, innovative performance, and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has the highest mean score of 4.086, which reveals that respondents were extremely confident in their own abilities. Standard deviations for all variables range

between 0.709 and 0.778, which reflects that there is moderate variation in the ratings, and respondents are not identical in their ratings. Moreover, all variables reflect positive values of kurtosis, which are above 2. This reflects that all variables are leptokurtic, and their values are closely grouped around their means, with fatter tails than a normal distribution. Variables also reflect negative values of skewness, which range between -1.329 and -1.790 . This reflects that all variables are left-skewed, and there are higher chances that a majority of respondents would use higher-end values of a particular question.

To test the research hypotheses, the partial least squares (PLS) method was applied. The measurement model was assessed first, and Table 3 shows that all item factor loadings exceeded 0.7, with Cronbach's alpha and rho_a values above 0.7 (Wong, 2013). Additionally, composite reliability scores were over 0.8, and average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3- Psychometric characteristics of the measurement instruments

Authentic Leadership		Loading	A	rho_a	CR	AVE
Self-Awareness	AL1	0.918	0.813	0.813	0.915	0.843
	AL2	0.918				
Relational Transparency	AL3	0.834	0.790	0.794	0.877	0.703
	AL4	0.835				
	AL5	0.847				
Moral Perspective	AL6	0.822	0.773	0.779	0.868	0.687
	AL7	0.859				
	AL8	0.803				
	AL9	0.768				
Balanced Processing	AL10	0.876	0.757	0.760	0.861	0.674
	AL11	0.815				
Self-Efficacy			0.813	0.813	0.915	0.843
	SE1	0.822				
	SE2	0.858				
	SE3	0.815				
	SE4	0.853				
	SE5	0.799				
	SE6	0.822				
	SE7	0.727				
	SE8	0.760				
	SE9	0.720				
Servant Leadership			0.881	0.886	0.910	0.629
	SL1	0.767				
	SL2	0.818				
	SL3	0.869				
	SL4	0.839				
	SL5	0.724				
Innovative Performance			0.879	0.879	0.909	0.626
	IP1	0.753				
	IP2	0.841				
	IP3	0.818				
	IP4	0.840				
	IP5	0.775				
	IP6	0.711				

Cross-loadings, coefficients, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion serve as three indicators for assessing the discriminant validity of the measurement scale (Hair et al., 2011). Following evaluation, the cross-loadings for each construct were substantially higher within its own structure compared to others. In the Fornell-Larcker criterion results presented in Table 4, the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded the inter-construct correlation coefficients.

Table 4- Intercorrelations between the higher-order factors

Variables	Authentic Leadership	Innovative Performance	Self-Efficacy	Servant Leadership
Authentic Leadership	0.733			
Innovative Performance	0.666	0.791		

Variables	Authentic Leadership	Innovative Performance	Self-Efficacy	Servant Leadership
Self-Efficacy	0.713	0.789	0.799	
Servant Leadership	0.700	0.623	0.681	0.793

Note: The bolded diagonal elements represent the square roots of the AVE for each construct.

From the HTMT matrix in Table 5, it can be seen that there are acceptable levels of discriminant validity for all pairs of constructs. Specifically, the HTMT values are as follows: Servant–Authentic = 0.787, Servant–Innovative = 0.695, Servant–Self-Efficacy = 0.746, Authentic–Innovative = 0.743, Authentic–Self-Efficacy = 0.773, and Innovative–Self-Efficacy = 0.896. As these HTMT values lie significantly below conventional thresholds set at 0.85 or 0.90, it is clear that all pairs with values ranging from 0.695 and 0.787 are well within these and thus demonstrate discriminant validity as separate constructs. The Innovative Performance ↔ Self-Efficacy HTMT of 0.896 is above the conservative 0.85 cut-off and very close to the liberal 0.90 cut-off, so it is borderline.

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	Authentic Leadership	Innovative Performance	Self-Efficacy	Servant Leadership
Authentic Leadership				
Innovative Performance	0.787			
Self-Efficacy	0.695	0.743		
Servant Leadership	0.746	0.773	0.896	

The final research model is presented below, illustrating factor loadings and path coefficients (Figure 2), as well as the model including t-values (Figure 3).

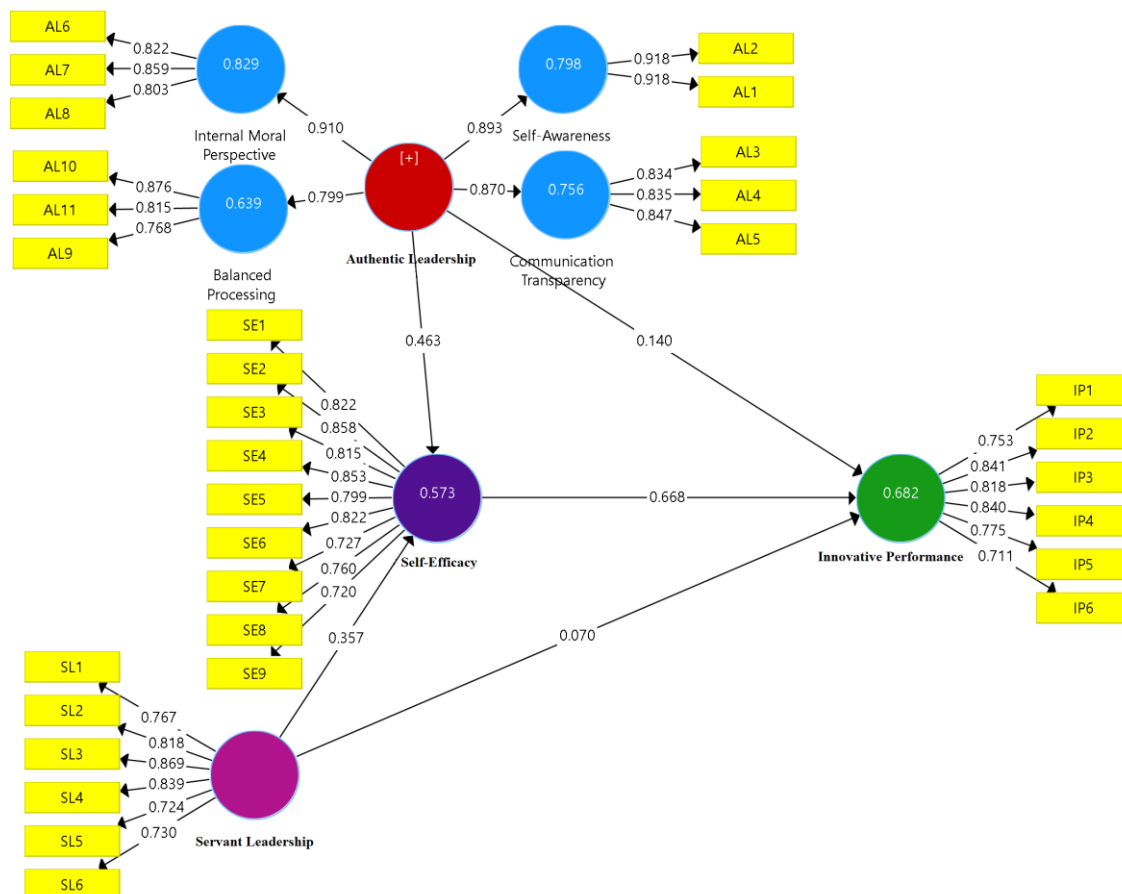


Fig 2. Diagram illustrating factor loadings and path coefficients in the model

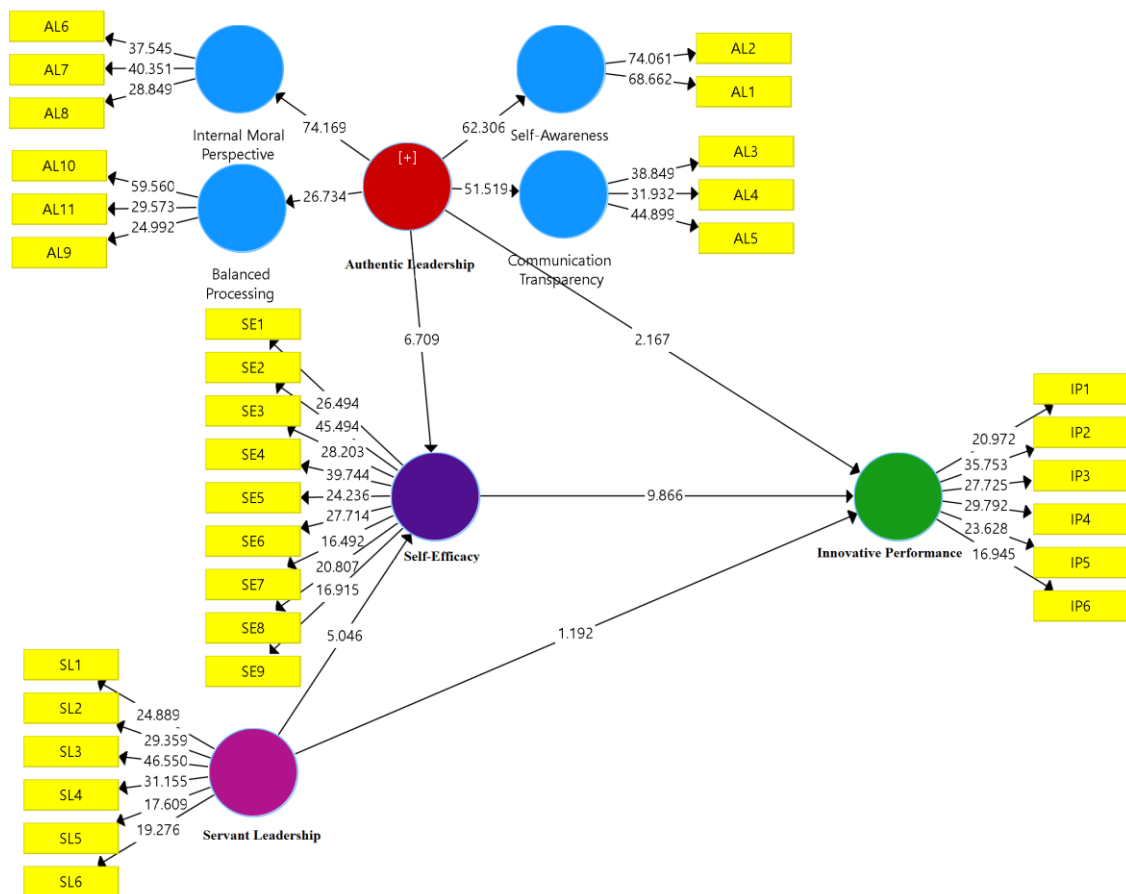


Fig 3. Model with t-values

The first part of Table 6 shows the results of the research hypotheses. The results showed that Servant Leadership ($\beta = 0.352$ $t = 4.603$) and Authentic Leadership ($\beta = 0.470$ $t = 6.481$) had a positive and significant effect on Self-Efficacy. Also, Authentic Leadership ($\beta = 0.134$ $t = 2.084$) and Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.664$ $t = 9.771$) had a positive and significant effect on Innovative Performance. But Servant Leadership has not significant effect on Innovative Performance ($\beta = 0.082$ $t = 1.414$).

The results also confirmed the mediating role of the Self-Efficacy variable in the relationship between Servant Leadership and Innovative Performance ($\beta = 0.234$ $t = 4.503$) and Authentic Leadership and Innovative Performance ($\beta = 0.312$ $t = 5.092$).

Table 6- Parameter estimates within the proposed structural model.

Relationships		β	SD	t	Vif	Decision
H1	Servant Leadership $\rightarrow$ Innovative Performance	0.070	0.059	1.160	2.258	Not Supported
H2	Authentic Leadership $\rightarrow$ Innovative Performance	0.140	0.065	2.095	2.462	Supported
H3	Servant Leadership $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy	0.357	0.071	4.532	1.960	Supported
H4	Authentic Leadership $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy	0.463	0.069	6.114	1.960	Supported
H5	Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Innovative Performance	0.668	0.068	9.532	2.342	Supported
H6	Servant Leadership $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Innovative Performance (indirect effect)	0.238	0.051	4.683	-	Supported
H7	Authentic Leadership $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Innovative Performance (indirect effect)	0.309	0.057	5.403	-	Supported
Model Fit	Variable	R ²	Q ²	NFI	SRMR	
	Self-Efficacy	0.573	0.340	0.906	0.095	
	Innovative Performance	0.682	0.393			

*Significant at $p = .05$.

In the partial least squares (PLS) approach, the quality and fit of the model are measured using several measures. One of these measures is the R² and Q² coefficients, which, according to the results in Table 4,

are within the appropriate range for the two variables Self-Efficacy and Innovative Performance (Henseler et al., 2014). Another measure is the SRMR index, which was less than 0.1, indicating the appropriate quality of the tested model. The NFI results in values between 0 and 1. The closer the NFI to 1, the better the fit. NFI values above 0.9 usually represent acceptable fit (Hair et al., 2017). In this model, the NFI value is 0.906, which is greater than 0.9. Furthermore, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for all Variable is below the threshold of 5, confirming the absence of multicollinearity.

Discussion

The outcomes of the initial hypothesis demonstrated that the direct association between servant leadership and innovative performance lacked significance. This outcome contrasts with certain earlier studies that have illustrated how servant leadership can enhance workers' creativity and innovative capabilities (Ogbonnaya et al., 2025; Ren & Shen, 2024). Such a result may stem from the influence of mediating or moderating elements, including organizational trust, a culture of innovation, and staff motivation, which were not explored in the present research. Various investigations stress that servant leadership's effect on innovation tends to manifest indirectly, via the enhancement of individual efficacy (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). As a result, companies should carefully consider these mediating aspects to maximize the advantages of servant leadership in promoting innovation.

The findings from the second hypothesis indicated that authentic leadership exerts a direct influence on innovative performance. This outcome aligns with earlier studies that have demonstrated how authentic leadership can enhance creativity and innovation (Khan et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2017). Authentic leaders, as a result of their own heightened self-awareness, transparency, integrity, and consistency, provide an enabling atmosphere for creativity and risk-taking, which are imperative for innovation. Justification for this finding emerges from previous research that ascertains authentic leaders have a highly positive influence on creativity and innovation due to the trust, openness, and feelings of safety created among followers, which play an imperative role in optimizing the creative potential among followers (Lee et al., 2019; Alzghoul et al., 2018). Additionally, authentic leaders' focus on relational transparency and moral perspective enhances authentic interactions that enable employees to share new and creative ideas without fear of retaliation. The enabling leadership environment directly influences employees' innovation performance because it boosts their motivation and involvement with innovation behavior (Grošelj et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019). From an organizational perspective, some ways in which they would be able to improve their innovativeness could be achieved by working on authentic leadership traits among the organizational managers and supervisors. Based on that, they would be able to build an organizational environment that would encourage innovation among employees, who would, in turn, be encouraged and empowered to generate new creative ideas and contribute toward organizational goals (Khalili, 2017).

The results of the third hypothesis revealed that servant leadership exerts a positive and noteworthy impact on personal effectiveness. This outcome aligns with prior studies indicating that servant leaders, through their support of staff members, enhance intrinsic motivation while boosting self-assurance and self-efficacy in professional settings (Bande et al., 2016). The connection between self-efficacy and servant leadership is one of the most positive and marked effects of servant leadership, thus pointing out the pivotal part of a servant leader in the employee's establishment of their confidence in their professional abilities. The conclusion drawn is in line with the assumption that the servant leader's style of leadership which is marked by the commitment to staff welfare and development, creates a professional atmosphere in which the employees receive the guidance, help, and most of all, the intrinsic motivation they need to develop their self-confidence and trust in their abilities (Li et al., 2018). By encouraging, mentoring, and delivering valuable feedback, servant leaders assist in the mental and creative self-efficacy of the employees, which leads to a higher level of creative performance and problem-solving development (Yang et al., 2017). This type of leadership approach makes use of the intrinsic rewards based on self-determination theory, thus fulfilling the employees' fundamental psychological needs and enabling positive behaviors and attitudes at the workplace (Brière et al., 2020). In addition, self-efficacy is not only directly supported by the servant leader but also indirectly through positive communication channels, such as the motivating language that enhances the employees' confidence and commitment (Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015). The results of this

study have significant implications for organizations, which can use the adoption of servant leadership practices as a stepping stone to build resilient and competent employees with higher self-efficacy, and this in turn, will contribute to better job performance, creativity, and organizational citizenship behavior. Moreover, it is indicated that leadership development programs targeting servant leadership skills could be a practical and effective self-efficacy uplift for employees that translates to increased overall organizational efficacy and higher employee satisfaction.

The outcomes of the fourth hypothesis indicated that authentic leadership exerts a positive and substantial influence on personal effectiveness. This result aligns with prior studies demonstrating that authentic leaders enhance personal effectiveness through the cultivation of trust, openness, and encouragement of employees' individual development (AlMazrouei, 2023; Siagian, 2024). The results indicating that authentic leadership has a beneficial and considerable impact on personal effectiveness could be viewed from the perspective of several inter-connected mechanisms that have been recognized in recent leadership studies. Such leaders create a working atmosphere that is characterized by trust, transparency, and openness, which in turn, encourages the workers to be vocal, and to participate deeply in their work. The psychological capital of the employees, which consists of self-confidence, optimism, and resilience, is enhanced indirectly through this organizational support and thus, employees' effectiveness is directly increased. Moreover, the authenticity in leadership leads to the emotional attachment of the workers to the organization, which in turn, crowd the employees' job satisfaction and work engagement, through personal identification with the leader, and trust built on one's feelings about the leader. All such processes combined make individuals capable of performing according to the highest standards, and the factors that drive them are genuineness, moral integrity, and support from their relationships. On top of that, authentic leadership brings about a positive change in personality traits as advocates of the leaders' individual growth and creativity through the provision of psychological resources and relational exchanges. Nevertheless, it should be observed that the impact that authentic leadership has on performance might be affected by the company's situation, such as the presence of organizational politics, which is one of the factors that can further limit the positive impact of leadership on the followers' performance. Still, the trust, moral integrity, and nurturing development that the leaders have been able to instill, inauthentic ways, would be considered as one of the major factors that has scaled up personal effectiveness to a high level across different organizations (Munyon et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2012; Lux et al., 2019).

Effectiveness exerts a robust positive influence on innovative performance. This aligns with established theory suggesting that confident, capable problem-solvers are more predisposed to innovation (Akbari et al., 2020; Cartigny et al., 2021). Effectiveness has a strong positive impact on innovative performance, which means that people who think of themselves as good problem solvers are more likely to participate in innovative activities and to do so with greater confidence and success. This connection corresponds to theoretical viewpoints that have been accepted for a long time which say self-efficacy or a strong belief in one's ability encourages the person to face problems in a creative way and thus to be more inclined to innovate. The most effective people are able to show cognitive flexibility and psychological empowerment that help them to generate new ideas and to put them into practice, which is a great factor for the improvement of innovations in companies. Besides, organizational support factors like managerial backing, independence, and a culture that permits mistakes being made, keep this effect going by giving individuals more assurance and, hence, motivation to go and find new solutions. As a result, creating effectiveness by ways of proper intervention and supportive atmosphere can be considered a tactical means of making the most of innovative performance, at last, to not just gain a competitive edge but also to achieve continuous growth of the company. This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of individual self-confidence combined with organizational support in the process of innovation, which has been confirmed by empirical research done in several studies on creativity and innovation performance.

The sixth hypothesis revealed that servant leadership positively influences innovative performance by enhancing personal effectiveness. This indicates that while servant leadership's direct impact on innovation is insignificant, its indirect effect, mediated through personal effectiveness, is substantial. This aligns with previous research by Kamil et al. (2024) and Ekmekcioglu and Öner (2023), which found that servant leadership fosters innovation by cultivating employees' sense of competence and autonomy. Consequently,

organizations can promote innovation by developing servant leaders, who in turn create an environment that boosts personal effectiveness.

The seventh hypothesis demonstrated that authentic leadership significantly enhances innovative performance by acting through the mechanism of personal effectiveness. This finding clarifies that while the direct effect of authentic leadership on innovation is not significant, its indirect effect, mediated by employee self-efficacy, is substantial. This is consistent with prior research (Gelaidan et al., 2023; Kusmargono et al., 2023), which indicates that authentic leaders, through their emphasis on ethics and transparency, build trust and create a psychological safe space conducive to innovative idea generation. Thus, by empowering employees and fostering a climate of trust, authentic leaders can effectively cultivate organizational innovation.

Self-Efficacy is an important mediator through which the outcomes of Servant Leadership and Authentic Leadership are obtained in terms of better innovative performance. This is because Servant Leadership has a positive influence on the self-efficacy of employees, as it creates an environment of support and empowerment, leading to an increase in the confidence of individuals in their creative abilities. This, in turn, leads to better innovative work behaviors and performance, as research shows that self-efficacy completely mediates the relationship between servant leadership and innovation (Ji & Yoon, 2021; Ghulam Jan et al., 2021). Additionally, servant leadership enhances both individual and team creative self-efficacy, leading to better employee and team creativity (Yang et al., 2017).

Likewise, Authentic Leadership encourages transparency, trust, and ethical behavior, all of which increase employees' confidence in their innovative capabilities. Even if Authentic Leadership were to directly impact self-confidence and adaptive motivational outcomes, which are essential in the process of innovation, studies have it that it serves as a moderator between self-efficacy and individual creativity (Lei et al., 2021). All these leadership approaches combine to boost employees' confidence and faith in their creative potential, making self-efficacy a key psychological process that brings about the impact of leadership on innovation (Gelaidan et al., 2023).

In conclusion, self-efficacy is an important psychological channel through which successful leadership behaviors, expressed through support, empowerment, transparency, and trust, influence high innovative performances at both personal and team levels (Ji & Yoon, 2021; Yang et al., 2017; Lei et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The results of this research indicated that servant leadership and authentic leadership do not have a direct impact on innovative performance. However, they can contribute to strengthening innovation in organizations by increasing personal effectiveness. These findings underscore the importance of the indirect role of leaders in creating a supportive and motivational environment for employees. Specifically, enhancing employees' sense of competence and self-confidence improves creativity and innovation in both work and sports environments. Therefore, organizations and managers should adopt strategies that, in addition to developing effective leadership styles, focus on strengthening self-efficacy and an innovation culture.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that organizations implement professional development programs for leaders and managers. These programs should aim to increase employee motivation and self-confidence by strengthening psychological support. Additionally, fostering an organizational culture based on innovation and continuous learning can help improve innovative performance. Finally, it is suggested that future research explore the role of mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational support and intrinsic motivation, in the relationship between leadership styles and innovation to gain a deeper understanding of this connection.

Practical suggestions

The results of this study offer several practical implications for leaders and managers in sport organizations:

1. Invest in Authentic Leadership Development: Training and development programs that focus on enhancing authenticity, transparency, and ethical behavior in coaches and managers can directly and indirectly improve the innovative performance of sports teams and staff.

2. Leverage Personal Effectiveness as a Bridge to Innovation: Since personal effectiveness emerged as a strong predictor of innovative performance, sport organizations should implement mentoring, coaching, and empowerment programs that increase athletes' and staff members' self-efficacy, confidence, and problem-solving skills.

3. Use Servant Leadership Strategically: Although servant leadership does not directly enhance innovation, its positive impact on personal effectiveness makes it a valuable leadership approach. Leaders who focus on supporting and serving their athletes or staff can foster a more motivated and capable environment conducive to innovation.

4. Create a Supportive Organizational Culture: Sport organizations should foster a culture of trust and psychological safety where both servant and authentic leadership styles can thrive. Such an environment enables innovation through open communication, ethical behavior, and emotional support.

5. Tailor Leadership Style to Innovation Goals: Depending on the innovation objectives—whether short-term creative output or long-term cultural transformation—leaders may need to balance between servant and authentic leadership approaches to maximize their impact.

Research Limitations

This study, while providing valuable insights into the relationships between leadership styles, personal effectiveness, and innovative performance, is not without limitations.

First, the research design was cross-sectional, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to better examine causality over time.

Second, the research was conducted in a specific context, likely within a limited cultural or organizational setting, which may reduce generalizability. Future studies should test the proposed model across different countries, industries, and cultural environments to increase external validity.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that no conflicts of interest exist.

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Statement on the Utilization of Generative AI and AI-Supported Tools in the Composition Process

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