

The relationships between servant leadership, job embeddedness, and turnover intention of information technology employees

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ABSTRACT

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Besides the remarkable development of the Information Technology (IT) industry in Vietnam, the high level of turnover intention is still a great challenge among businesses in this area. Therefore, finding factors that help to improve this situation is indispensable. This study aims to provide a conceptual model to explain the role of Servant Leadership (SL) and Job Embeddedness (JE) in decreasing IT engineers' turnover intention. Using the quantitative approach, the data collected from 240 IT engineers in Ho Chi Minh City were analyzed by the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method with SPSS and AMOS software. The research findings show that SL positively affects IT engineers' JE ($\beta = 0.597$, $p = 0.006$), and has a negative effect on their turnover intention ($\beta = -0.366$, $p = 0.006$). In addition, JE not only negatively influences IT engineers' turnover intention ($\beta = -0.237$, $p = 0.04$) but also plays a mediating role in the indirect effect of SL on turnover intention ($\beta = -0.141$, $p = 0.029$). The current study contributes to the literature by explaining the detailed mechanism by which SL influences employee turnover intention and highlights the mediating role of JE in this relationship. Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the vital role of SL and JE in decreasing employee turnover intention and provides managerial implications for organizations in the IT industry.

1. Introduction

Information Technology (IT) industry has become one of the most important pillars contributing to economic development in Vietnam. By the end of 2021, IT had had the fastest growth rate in the country, with a 22 times increase in revenue compared to 2009, and is forecasted to continue to grow faster in the future (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2022). Besides, strong development, attracting and retaining IT employees becomes a great challenge for IT businesses in Vietnam. There has been a lack of human resources in recent years because of the skyrocketing demand for IT engineers in Vietnam (VietnamWorks, 2020). According to TopDev (2022), Vietnam has a shortage of 175,000 IT engineers, and this number will increase to 195,000 by 2024. Moreover, IT employee turnover is significantly higher in developing and newly industrialised countries like Vietnam than in developed economies (Alpar, 2020). In "The Great Resignation" situation occurring worldwide, the IT sector in Vietnam has an extremely high employee turnover rate, with one in every two employees actively looking for

work in the next 12 months (TopDev, 2022). In this circumstance, studying the factors to improve employees' attachment as well as reduce their turnover intention is necessary and can bring many benefits to enterprises in the IT area.

To explain why employees leave an organization, job satisfaction and organizational commitment have attracted much research interest (Alam & Asim, 2019; Labrague et al., 2018; Pratama, Suwarni, & Handayani, 2022; Suárez-Albanchez, Blazquez-Resino, Gutierrez-Broncano, & Jimenez-Estevez, 2021). Nevertheless, the above concepts did not fully explain the reasons for employees' stay or leave (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). The theoretical review shows that job embeddedness is a new concept that uses a positive perspective to explore why people stay at an organization. This concept provides a better comprehensive view in explaining the relationship between employees and the organization than previous concepts such as job satisfaction or commitment (Sun, Zhao, Yang, & Fan, 2012). Job embeddedness is conceptualized as the extent of an employee's enmeshing in the organization, which results from numerous external forces including links, fit, and sacrifice (Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014). Kiazad, Holtom, Hom, and Newman (2015) said that job embeddedness elements (e.g., link, fit, and sacrifice) can be seen as valuable resources. Hobfoll (2011) argued that individuals are motivated to accumulate, protect, and allocate their resources to protect against resource loss. This conservation of resource theory can help clarify the potential of job embeddedness as a resource in enhancing organizational desirable outcomes. Accordingly, it has provided an effective approach to keeping employees staying with the organization (Huning, Hurt, & Frieder, 2020). Nevertheless, studies on job embeddedness in Vietnam are still quite limited. Only a few studies can be found, such as research on employees' job embeddedness in state-owned companies by Nguyen (2015), Nguyen, Taylor, and Bergiel (2017). Hence, research on job embeddedness in the IT sector may yield different results from previous studies. Along with examining the relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intention among IT employees, this study also investigates the mediating role of job embeddedness since the studies on this aspect have been scant (Safavi & Bouzari, 2021). Thus, the findings of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge about job embeddedness.

In addition to job embeddedness, this study also focuses on exploring the role of leaders in retaining IT employees. A lot of previous studies have shown the important role of leadership in influencing employee attitudes and behavior (Lotfi, Atashzadeh-Shoorideh, Mohtashami, & Nasiri, 2018; Ma et al., 2021). This study specifically focuses on exploring the role of servant leadership in the relationship with job embeddedness, and turnover intention. Servant leadership lays stress on motivation to serve employees and denial of self-interest (Liden, Wayne, Liao, & Meuser, 2014). Servant leaders are valuable resources in the organization because they are primarily people-oriented, with a focus on employee well-being and serving them (Bavik, 2020). As a result, many researchers indicated that servant leadership has positive influences on employees' psychological well-being (Clarence, Devassy, Jena, & George, 2021), affective commitment (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018), job satisfaction (Al-Asadi, Muhammed, Abidi, & Dzenopoljac, 2019) and job performance (Kadarusman & Bunyamin, 2021). However, whilst servant leadership has shown positive effects on workplace attitudes and attachments, the strength of the effects was reported to be varied (Mustamil & Najam, 2020). Furthermore, there is still less research examining the mechanism through which servant leadership influences these outcomes (Huning et al., 2020). To fill this gap, besides aiming to investigate the direct relationships among servant leadership, job embeddedness, and turnover intention, this study also examines the indirect effect of servant leadership on IT employees' intention to leave through their job embeddedness. The conservation of resource perspective, which was

recommended as an advanced theoretical framework for servant leadership research (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, Van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019), is applied along with the social exchange theory in this study to explain servant leadership's effects. As such, besides the practical significance, the research findings in the IT industry context of a developing country may have a theoretical contribution to a certain extent. The following sections will show the theoretical foundation and research model justification.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Servant leadership

Greenleaf (1970, p. 07) defined that "The servant-leader is servant first. (...) It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first". Accordingly, core characteristics of servant leadership are empowering and developing people, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leaders intend to help their subordinates obtain development opportunities, as well as invest in their followers by coaching them, creating a sense of community, and mentoring them to do their best and, hence, benefit the organization (Bande, Fernández-Ferrín, Varela-Neira, & Otero-Neira, 2016). Moreover, servant leaders are viewed as valuable resources in the organization since they are primarily people-oriented, with an emphasis on employee well-being (Bavik, 2020). In the context of today's business world, which places a high demand on ethical business practices and emphasizes people-centered management, the necessity for servant leadership becomes even more pronounced. Because of this, there has been a significant increase in research and investigation into the theory of servant leadership, making it one of the most extensively studied leadership approaches (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022).

There are numerous studies have demonstrated the significant impact of servant leadership on organizational outcomes. For instance, studies have found that servant leadership positively influences affective organizational commitment (Jang & Kandampully, 2018), employees' self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Bande et al., 2016), and employee engagement (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Furthermore, servant leadership has been proved to have positive influences on organizational citizenship behaviors (Howladar & Rahman, 2021), and innovative behaviors (Zeng & Xu, 2020).

2.2. Job embeddedness

Job Embeddedness (JE) can be conceptualized as "reflecting the totality of forces that constrain people from leaving their current employment" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1115). The construct consists of three critical aspects: (1) *Link* are the formal or informal connections between a person and other people or the organization, (2) *Fit* captures the employee's perceived compatibility or comfort within the organization and work environment, (3) *Sacrifice* represents the perceived costs of material or psychological benefits that are lost by quitting a job. Together, these factors provide a comprehensive view of the employer and employee relationship by explaining how employees become psychologically and socially enmeshed within the broader organizational system (Holtom & O'Neill, 2004; Sun et al., 2012). Empirical research demonstrates that JE can predict employee retention better than traditional variables like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search behaviors (Mitchell et al., 2001; Yao, Lee, Mitchell, Burton, & Sablinski, 2004).

Several previous studies have shown many benefits that JE can bring to the organization. Rahimnia, Nosrati, and Eslami (2022) found a positive relationship between job embeddedness and innovative work behavior. Additionally, Jaleel and Sarmad (2022) revealed a direct positive

impact of JE on employee well-being. Moreover, JE also positively influences employee performance (Liu, 2018), and their organizational citizenship behavior (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004). These findings highlight the far-reaching implications of job embeddedness, not only on employee retention but also on various facets of employee and organizational outcomes.

Due to the significant and remarkable benefits of job embeddedness, the focus shifts to enhancing job embeddedness. Numerous studies have been conducted in this regard, the research findings showed that transformational leadership, job characteristics, supervisors' support, employees' advocacy, quality of work life, etc. are important determinants of job embeddedness (Al-Ghazali, 2020; Nguyen, 2015; Shehawy, Elbaz, & Agag, 2018; Zhao et al., 2012). While job embeddedness research has been conducted worldwide, encompassing various countries (Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012), there remains a scarcity of research on job embeddedness in the context of Vietnam. Given the cultural, economic, and organizational differences that may exist in Vietnam, conducting more research in this area would be highly beneficial. Further investigations into job embeddedness in the Vietnamese context would not only enrich the existing body of knowledge but also provide essential information for organizations in Vietnam to enhance desired outcomes.

2.3. Turnover intention

According to Sousa-Poza and Henneberger (2004, p. 113), turnover intention reflects “the (subjective) probability that an individual will change his or her job within a certain time period”. Simply, the turnover intention is employees' intention to leave the job (Hui, Wong, & Tjosvold, 2007). Employees with turnover intentions deliver poor performance and erode organizational competitiveness (Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). A study by Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner (2000) claimed that there is a positive relationship between turnover intention and actual turnover. A study by Kaur, Mohindru, and Pankaj (2013) proved that turnover intention has been acknowledged as the best predictor of actual turnover. Consequently, investigating employee turnover intention might help in the determination of their propensity to leave the organization (Rahman & Nas, 2013).

In today's competitive and turbulent landscape, employees are one of the most valuable resources of any organization. As such, it is essential for organizations to find ways to minimize turnover intention. Many researchers found that job characteristics, transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, compensation, and work engagement had significant negative effects on turnover intention (Chang, Wang, & Huang, 2013; Oliveira & Rocha, 2017; Schyns, Torka, & Gössling, 2007). On the contrary, work-family conflict, job insecurity, despotic leadership, and toxic workplace environment, etc. may increase the turnover intention of employees (Iqbal, Asghar, & Asghar, 2022; Lee & Jeong, 2017; Suifan, Abdallah, & Diab, 2016).

2.4. Research model and hypotheses

To achieve the research objectives, a research model is proposed and illustrated in **Figure 1**. In this proposed model, servant leadership is hypothesized to have a positive effect on employee job embeddedness (H1), and a negative effect on employee turnover intention (H2). In addition, job embeddedness negatively impacts employee turnover intention (H3). Finally, to fully understand the impact of servant leadership on employee turnover intention, there is a hypothesis about the mediating role of job embeddedness in this relationship (H4). The following sections will justify these hypotheses.

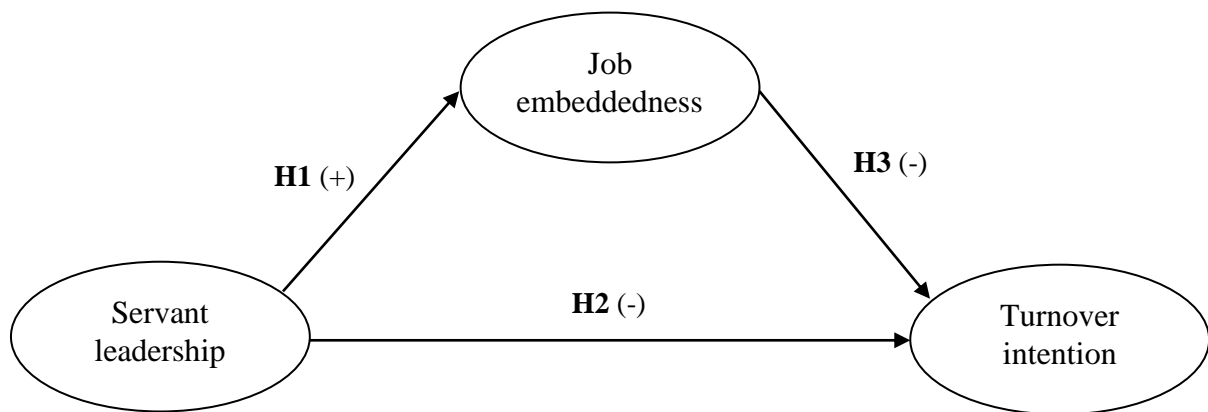


Figure 1. The proposed research model

2.4.1. The effect of servant leadership on employee job embeddedness and turnover intention

As defined, servant leaders prioritize their employees' needs (Greenleaf, 1970), which makes employees more likely to develop a sense of familiarity and empathy towards the leader. Hence, servant leadership nurtures strong links between employees and their leaders. More than that, when a leader genuinely cares about their subordinates, these employees experience a sense of self-worth and importance within the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As a result, employees experience a heightened sense of belonging and alignment with the company, leading to the perception of fit with the organization. Moreover, Schaufeli (2015) suggested that leadership, such as servant leadership, serves as a valuable job resource in an organization. This means that the more employees receive from a servant leader (e.g., support, care, recognition, etc.), the greater the sacrifice they perceive if they leave the organization. Furthermore, based on the Conservation Of Resource (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2011), dedicated support from servant leaders may create resource caravans and sustain organizational ecologies. Employees with more resources are less vulnerable to resource loss and more capable of orchestrating resource gain (e.g., links, fit, sacrifice). Based on the aforementioned arguments, servant leadership can help enhance employees' links, fit, and sacrifice, which means increasing their job embeddedness. Therefore, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Servant leadership has a positive effect on employee's job embeddedness

Moreover, servant leaders put the interests of others first and are willing to sacrifice their individual benefit to ensure their followers' participation, prosperity, and achievements. Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees who perceive positive support from their leaders are more likely to develop high-quality exchange relationships and exhibit cooperative and helpful behaviors toward their organizations (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). They, thus, demonstrate their high commitment to the organization rather than quit. As a result, servant leadership can decrease employee turnover intention. Hence, the following hypothesis is:

H2: Servant leadership has a negative effect on employee turnover intention

2.4.2. The effect of job embeddedness on employee turnover intention

Job embeddedness is considered a new approach that predicts the intention to quit besides traditional factors such as job satisfaction or commitment to the organization (Huang, Xia, Zhao, Pan, & Zhou, 2020). Employees with high JE are reflected in having many links, a good fit with the organization, and having many valuable things to sacrifice when quitting a job (Mitchell et al., 2001). Moreover, JE, including links, fit, and sacrifice can be viewed as resources of

individuals in the organization (Kiazad et al., 2015). At the same time, the theory of Conservation Of Resources (COR) emphasizes that employees always want to protect the resources they have (e.g., relationships with supervisors and colleagues, good working conditions, compensation and benefits, etc.). Therefore, the higher the job embeddedness, the less likely they are to quit because they do not want to lose these resources. From there, hypothesis H3 is formed as follows:

H3: Employees' job embeddedness has a negative effect on their turnover intention

2.4.3. The mediating effect of employee job embeddedness on the relationship of servant leadership and employee turnover intention

In addition to the direct effect, this study investigated the indirect effect of servant leadership on employee turnover intention, in which job embeddedness played the role of mediator. Although limited, there were some studies examining the mediating role of job embeddedness between occupational factors and employee behaviors (Huning et al., 2020; Safavi & Bouzari, 2021; Zia, Naveed, Bashir, & Iqbal, 2022). The present study proposed that job embeddedness could mediate the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention. Servant leaders focus on developing long-term relationships with subordinates and helping to improve their skills in doing their jobs (Koyuncu, Burke, Astakhova, Eren, & Cetin, 2014). Hence, servant leaders try to enhance a sense of belonging, build a good community and establish deep ties with their employees (Huning et al., 2020). As a result, the links between employees and their organization become stronger, which can diminish turnover intentions. Moreover, when employees recognize that these links are valued and they are having a good work environment (e.g., good relationships with leaders and co-workers, good fit with the job and organizational culture, great career development opportunities, etc.), employees may feel that leaving their current job may lead to a greater sacrifice (Huning et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2001). It is consistent with the social exchange theory, when employees perceive the positive behavior of servant leaders as well as good support from organizations, this will increase employees' job embeddedness and hence stay longer with the organization (Ramalu & Kalimuthu, 2022). Based on the above justification, hypothesis H4 is proposed:

H4: The relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention is mediated by the job embeddedness of IT employees

3. Research method

In this study, the quantitative method was employed with the data collected by a structured questionnaire. The target respondents were Information Technology (IT) employees in Ho Chi Minh City, where over half of the IT workforce is working. Using the convenience sampling method, the questionnaires were delivered to employees of different firms. In total, 274 responses were obtained, of which 240 were qualified. This sample size is suitable for data analysis using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019).

The measurement scales in this research were adapted from previous studies. Specifically, the 7-item scale measuring servant leadership was obtained from Liden et al. (2015). The job embeddedness scale, including 07 items, was from Crossley, Bennett, Jex, and Burnfield (2007). The measurement scale of turnover intention (03 items) was adopted from Hui et al. (2007). Since all measurement scales were initially in English, they were translated into Vietnamese by two academics fluent in both languages, using the collaborative translation method (Douglas & Craig, 2007).

After that, preliminary research was carried out. The preliminary qualitative stage was conducted by interviewing one senior technical recruiter in the IT industry, one IT team leader, one IT department manager, and six IT engineers having at least 2-year experience in this area. These in-depth interviews provided a deep understanding of the overview about the current situation and labor workforce in the information technology area. Moreover, based on the discussion with interviewees, the initial measurement scales were revised to make the meaning of each statement clearer and easier to understand in the research context. Consequently, in the pilot test, a structured questionnaire was designed and used to collect data from 50 IT engineers. The preliminary quantitative results showed that all validity and reliability assessment criteria of each scale were achieved. Eventually, the final questionnaire, including 17 items (Table 1) measuring three constructs, was used to collect research data.

4. Research findings

4.1. Sample characteristic

Research data were collected from 240 IT engineers in Ho Chi Minh City, who are working in many different positions, such as Back-end Developer, Front-end Developer, Full-stack Developer, AI Engineer, UX/UI Designer, Tester, IT Business Analyst, Embedded Developer, DevOps Engineer, and Cyber security, etc. Statistics on the gender of the respondents showed that the percentage of males was dominant at 78.33%. Among respondents, the most common age range from 22 - 30 years old accounted for approximately 70%, while the respondents over 30 years old consisted of about one-fifth of the sample. There were just a minority of the participants from 18 - 20 years old (~10%). Regarding marital status, the single group accounted for the majority with 78.33%, whilst the married group was just 21.67%. A large number of respondents got an undergraduate degree (77.92%). In respect of income, 20 - 40 million VND is the income level that most respondents earned monthly (35.83%), followed by 10 to 20 million VND and over 40 million VND, with 30.83% and 21.25% respectively, and only 12.8% of respondents having income less than 10 million VND for a month. Most participants (83.75%) showed that they had been working at their current companies for under 04 years. This once again reflects the fact that currently, the IT industry is having a relatively high rate of turnover. In conclusion, the research sample is diverse enough in terms of age, income, education level, marital status, working position, etc., which is suitably used for statistical and causal tests.

4.2. Scale assessment and refinement

In the beginning, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to assess the dimensional structure for each scale. The results indicated that all measurement scales were unidimensional as designated. Bartlett's test results of all scales have Sig.= 0.00 < 0.05, KMO > 0.5, and eigenvalue > 1, total variance explained > 50%. Nevertheless, one item measuring servant leadership was eliminated due to low factor loading. Next, the reliability of each measurement scale was assessed by using Cronbach's alpha. All the Cronbach's alpha were from 0.714 to 0.884 (> 0.6). Additionally, the corrected item-total correlation of each item was greater than 0.3. Thus, all measurement scales met the requirement of reliability (Nguyen, 2011).

Thereafter, the measurement model (three constructs, 16 items) was assessed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with Amos software. In the first analysis, the model fit indices are as follows: Chi-square/df = 2.494 < 3; TLI = 0.898 < 0.9; CFI = 0.915 > 0.9; RMSEA = 0.079 < 0.08. Since the TLI did not satisfy the requirement of greater than 0.9 (Hair et al., 2019), there were some items eliminated to improve the model fit indices. To be more specific,

one item of the servant leadership scale and two items of the job embeddedness scale were removed due to significant error covariance between items. As a result, the estimation of the final measurement model satisfied fit indices, including Chi-square/df = 1.987; CFI = 0.949; TLI = 0.936; and RMSEA = 0.064.

Table 1 shows all items in each measurement scale. The standardized factor loadings of these items were from 0.536 to 0.877 (> 0.5), and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.502 to 0.513 (> 0.5). This means that the measurement scales achieved the criteria of convergent validity. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) of each scale was from 0.745 to 0.838 (> 0.7), which satisfied the requirement of reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1

Summary of the results of measurement scales assessment

Constructs and items	Std. factor loading
Servant leadership (CR = 0.838; AVE = 0.510)	
My leader tell me if something related to my work is going wrong	0.668
My leader makes my career development a priority	0.830
I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem	Eliminated in CFA
My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community	0.714
My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own	0.703
My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best	Eliminated in EFA
My leader would not violate ethical principles in order to achieve success	0.642
Job embeddedness (CR = 0.837; AVE = 0.513)	
I feel attached to this organization	Eliminated in CFA
It would be difficult for me to leave this organization	0.700
I am too caught up in this organization to leave	Eliminated in CFA
I feel tied to this organization	0.810
I simply could not leave the organization that I work for	0.652
It would not be easy for me to leave this organization	0.536
I am tightly connected to this organization	0.842
Turnover intention (CR = 0.745; AVE = 0.502)	
I often think of leaving the organization	0.877
It is very possible that I will look for a new job next year	0.653
If I may choose again, I will not choose to work for the current organization	0.557

In terms of discriminant validity, the squared correlation coefficient between each pair of constructs was less than the AVE of the corresponding measurement scales (**Table 2**). This means that all scales met the criterion for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2

Discriminant validity of the measurement scales

	Job embeddedness	Servant leadership	Turnover intention
Job embeddedness	0.513		
Servant leadership	0.356	0.510	
Turnover intention	0.207	0.257	0.502

Note: + Values in the lower triangular region represent the squared correlation coefficients
 + Values (in bold) in the diagonal represent the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

4.3. Structural model estimation and hypothesis testing

In this section, the research model was assessed by the CB-SEM method using Amos software. All model fit indices were achieved, including Chi-square/df = 1.978 < 3; TLI = 0.936 > 0.9; CFI = 0.949 > 0.9; RMSEA = 0.06 < 0.08. With regard to hypotheses testing, **Table 3** displays that all hypotheses were supported at p < 0.05. Specifically, servant leadership shows a significant positive effect on job embeddedness ($\beta = 0.597$, p = 0.006), and a negative effect on turnover intention ($\beta = -0.366$, p = 0.006). Moreover, job embeddedness also has a negative effect on turnover intention ($\beta = -0.237$, p = 0.04).

Table 3

Structural model estimation and hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis		Std. coeff.	p-value	Result
H1	Servant leadership → Job embeddedness	0.597	0.006	Supported
H2	Servant leadership → Turnover intention	-0.366	0.006	Supported
H3	Job embeddedness → Turnover intention	-0.237	0.040	Supported

Furthermore, this study examined the mediating role of job embeddedness in the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention. The results displayed in **Table 4** indicate that servant leadership has a negative direct effect ($\beta = -0.366$, p = 0.006) and a negative indirect effect ($\beta = -0.141$, p = 0.029) on turnover intention. This means that job embeddedness partially mediates the impact of servant leadership on the turnover intention of IT employees.

Table 4

The result of the mediating role of job embeddedness

Relationships		Std. coeff.	p-value
Direct effect	(H2) Servant leadership → Turnover intention	-0.366	0.006 < 0.05 (Supported)
Indirect effect	(H4) Servant leadership → Job embeddedness → Turnover intention	-0.141	0.029 < 0.05 (Supported)

5. Discussion

This study is an attempt to unveil the roles of servant leadership and job embeddedness in influencing IT engineers' turnover intention. The results show that all hypotheses in this study are supported. To be more specific, servant leadership positively influences IT employees' job embeddedness. Next, both servant leadership and job embeddedness have negative effects on employee turnover intention. In the IT industry context of a developing country, this study contributes to the body of servant leadership knowledge that job embeddedness mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee turnover intention. These research findings not only filled the gap but also responded to recent calls about investigating the mechanism of how servant leadership influences outcome variables (Eva et al., 2019; Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). In this study, servant leadership is seen as a valuable job resource in an organization (Schaufeli, 2015). Based on the resource perspective, IT engineers will have a high level of job embeddedness if they perceive abundant resources presented by the leaders' support and the prioritizing employees' interests of leaders. Hence, the impact of servant leadership on job embeddedness is highest in this study. Huning et al. (2020) said that the emphasis on employee development of servant leaders will create robust links between leaders and followers, which increase an individual's sense of attachment. This result provides an insightful understanding of how leadership style, specifically servant leadership, can reinforce employees' job embeddedness in the information technology industry.

Additionally, this study indicates that employees with higher job embeddedness will have less turnover intention. This finding supports the work of (Akgunduz & Sanli, 2017; Huang et al., 2020; Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). The result is aligned with the theoretical premise that job embeddedness is "like a net or a web in which an individual can become stuck" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1104). The relationships with colleagues, the perceived fit between employees and their organization, or the sacrifices they have to trade off if they leave the organization are all external forces that make employees enmeshed in their organization (Lee et al., 2014). Hence, when employee job embeddedness increases, their intention to leave will be lower. Thus, this finding has provided a meaningful contribution to the importance of job embeddedness in reducing the intention to leave IT employees in the current context.

Eventually, in the context of "The Great Resignation" crisis occurring globally, this study highlights the vital role of servant leadership in reducing IT engineers' turnover intention. Servant leaders not only have a direct effect but also an indirect effect on IT engineers' turnover intention through their job embeddedness. To be more specific, this finding indicates that job embeddedness plays a mediating role in the mechanism accounting for servant leadership's effects on turnover intentions within organizations in the IT sector. Consistent with social exchange theory, the research finding shows that when IT employees perceive positively their leaders who prioritize subordinate interests and development, they will reciprocate with high job embeddedness which ultimately improves employee turnover intention. It contributes to narrowing the gap in exploring the relationship between servant leadership and organizational outcome, as well as enriches the literature about job embeddedness.

6. Managerial implication and conclusion

Based on research findings, this study contributes to the literature by providing an insightful conceptual model, including direct, and indirect relations among the three constructs, namely servant leadership, job embeddedness, and turnover intention in the context of the IT industry of a developing country. There are several practical implications that can be derived from these findings.

Servant leaders are essential assets for the IT sector, and organizations need to create a favorable environment that fosters this leadership style. Specifically, servant leadership plays a key role in strengthening job embeddedness and lowering the turnover intention of IT engineers. Therefore, enhancing servant leadership style in IT organizations can effectively solve the current problem of high turnover rate in this area. The research data indicated that IT employees highly appreciate their leaders in terms of ethical standards at work, which is one of the important elements of servant leadership (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). This makes IT employees respect their leaders and want to stick with the organizations for a long time. Hence, ethical standards aspect (e.g., a model of integrity) should be promoted as the indispensable characteristic of each servant leader. Additionally, it is better if the leaders support their subordinates in career path development. As mentioned by Liden et al. (2015), one of the vital aspects of a servant leader is to help followers reach their full potential and succeed in their careers. Therefore, leaders need to show the ability to listen and truly care about the problems of IT staff related to their tasks as well as career development. The leaders need to be ready to support and give them solutions or reasonable advice at work. To do that, the organization ought to carefully seek leaders who have appropriate technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills (Robbins & Coulter, 2016) to help IT employees with work-related problems and invest in their career development. In the same vein, Ramalu and Kalimuthu (2022) argued that employees frequently regard leaders as organizational personifications. Thus, their behaviors and attitudes related to employee well-being and professional development are critical in creating a positive perspective of the firm among employees. As a result, it will reinforce employee job embeddedness, and then facilitate their longer and stronger membership with the organization. Hence, organizations should provide several training programs for IT managers to thoroughly understand the nature of servant leadership and how to behave as a servant leader in leading IT engineers and retaining them in the organization.

In addition to pivotal implications related to servant leadership, the results of this study also emphasize the significant role of job embeddedness in lowering the intention to leave IT engineers both as a direct determinant and as a partial mediator in the servant leadership and turnover intention relationship. Based on these results, improving the job embeddedness of IT engineers becomes an effective strategy for organizations to retain human resources. It suggests that organizations should focus on improving the relationship of employees with their leaders and colleagues to strengthen their links. More than that, recruiting and assigning a person with a suitable position and task need much serious attention from the organization, of which the fit between an employee with organizational culture should be considered as well. Mitchell et al. (2001) posited that the better fit, the more likely an employee stays longer with an organization. Additionally, enterprises should focus on IT employees' perception of sacrifice when they leave their current jobs. Holtom, Mitchell, and Lee (2006) asserted that retaining employees by increasing salary is only a short-term solution, in the long run, it does not bring competitive efficiency to enterprises. For this reason, a number of perks, such as essential services in the workplace (e.g., healthcare service, fitness center, flexible work schedule, job autonomy, stock options, etc.), should be offered to create good working conditions for employees. The sacrifices of leaving the organization are both psychological and material forms. For instance, offering training and mentoring programs is one of the valuable perks as employees consider these programs essential for talent development as well as social ties in the organization (Holmes, Chapman, & Baghurst, 2013). As such, a variety of unique values makes employees realize that the sacrifice when quitting the job is considerable, which prevents them from leaving the organization.

Besides the meaningful findings, this study still has certain limitations. To begin with, research data collected only in Ho Chi Minh City may not represent all IT markets in the country. Moreover, in the IT sector, there are a variety of job positions with dissimilar characteristics. Hence, further research should collect many samples from different job types in the IT area and compare the research findings between them. Another limitation worth mentioning is that the components (links, fit, sacrifice) of job embeddedness were not investigated specifically in this study. Therefore, further studies should examine separately these components, and even take on-the-job and off-the-job aspects into account to provide more insights about job embeddedness. Finally, researchers should conduct future studies in different sectors and industries to provide a comprehensive view of servant leadership and job embeddedness, as well as their impacts on organizational outcomes in various contexts.

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