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Value co-creation with customers: a conceptual model of the key role of servant leadership and employee motivation

**Pablo Ruiz-Palomino¹, M. Angeles Garcia-Haro¹, M. Teresa Gonzalez-Fernandez¹, Ricardo Martinez-Cañas¹*

¹ Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha

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Servant leadership, motivation to co-create, value co-creation, employee motivation; customer co-creation; common Good.

RESUMEN:

In recent years, the value co-creation process has been the subject of attention in the academic literature as a primary factor for organizational sustainability and competitiveness (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). In this regard, the high competitiveness and increased demand and personalization of customers has led to an increasing number of companies seeking to offer customers a unique experience with the aim of enhancing their level of loyalty and satisfaction (Vega-Vázquez et al. 2013).

Especially in this innovation process, the behavior of employees is considered a key factor for the success of organizations, since it directly affects the decisions of customers and their impression of the organization (Yi and Gong 2008; Hsiao et al. 2015). Therefore, having employees that are motivated is essential to ensure the success of the organization in its relationship with customers (Erdogan 2019). To achieve this motivation in their employees, it is essential to develop effective management and thus ensure employees feel more engaged with the organization and are involved in the relationship with customers (Erdogan 2019). In this line, one of the fundamental factors that enhances employee motivation is the leadership implemented by executive directors (CEOs), middle managers and supervisors within the organization (Barbuto 2005; Isaac et al. 2001; Yukl 2008).

Currently, one of the leadership styles that improves the leader-follower relationship and employee motivation is servant leadership (Jaramillo et al. 2015), which is a unique leadership approach that, as its name suggests, focuses on serving others: employees, customers, and society in a broader sense (Graham 1991; Wu et al. 2013). The presence of a servant leader can motivate employees to involve themselves in co-creation processes with customers in order to obtain high levels of service and the pursuit of excellence (Hsiao et al. 2015).

While research related to servant leadership theory has advanced significantly, enabling a better understanding of the leader-follower relationship and the development of positive attitudes and behaviors in employees within the organization (Eva et al. 2019), there is currently relatively little knowledge about how servant leadership can influence the co-creation process with employees (Hsiao et al. 2015). The study of this relationship will allow us, on the one hand, to fill this important gap in research and, on the other, to analyze the value co-creation process from an internal point of view, focusing on employee motivation. This approach is novel for value co-creation research since it has traditionally focused mainly on the customer as the main agent in the value co-creation process (Assiouras et al. 2019; Yi and Gong 2013). Our paper may help better understand recent advances in social economy research.