



# A Structural Model of Servant Leadership, Teachers’ Job Participation, and Administrators’ Innovative Behavior at Liaoning University

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Received 09/12/2025

Revised 14/01/2026

Accepted 03/04/2026

## Abstract

**Background and Aim:** Higher education institutions in China are facing increasing pressure to enhance administrative effectiveness and innovation amid rapid organizational and technological change. Servant leadership, emphasizing service, empowerment, and ethical conduct, has been recognized as a leadership approach suited to academic contexts. However, empirical evidence regarding its influence on administrators’ innovative behavior, particularly through participatory mechanisms, remains limited. This study aims to examine the direct effect of servant leadership on administrators’ innovative behavior and to investigate the mediating role of teachers’ job participation at Liaoning University, China.

**Materials and Methods:** A quantitative research design was employed using survey data collected from 352 university administrators at Liaoning University in 2024. The research instrument measured servant leadership, teachers’ job participation, and administrators’ innovative behavior using five-point Likert-scale items. Data were analyzed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess measurement validity and to test direct and indirect relationships among the variables.

**Results:** The CFA results indicated satisfactory construct validity and reliability. SEM analysis revealed that servant leadership had a significant positive direct effect on administrators’ innovative behavior ( $\beta = 0.28, p < .001$ ). In addition, servant leadership significantly influenced teachers’ job participation ( $\beta = 0.61, p < .001$ ), which in turn positively affected administrators’ innovative behavior ( $\beta = 0.52, p < .001$ ). Mediation analysis confirmed that teachers’ job participation partially mediated the relationship between servant leadership and administrators’ innovative behavior, with a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.32, p < .001$ ). The overall model demonstrated good fit with the empirical data.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that servant leadership enhances administrators’ innovative behavior both directly and indirectly through teachers’ job participation. This partial mediation highlights the importance of combining servant-oriented leadership with participatory governance practices to foster innovation in higher education administration. Universities seeking to strengthen administrative innovation should promote servant leadership while actively encouraging teachers’ involvement in institutional decision-making and collaborative processes.

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership; Teachers’ Job Participation; Innovative Behavior; Higher Education Administration; China

## Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide, including those in China, are experiencing profound transformation driven by globalization, technological advancement, and increasing demands for organizational effectiveness and innovation. (Gao and Huang, 2024). Universities are no longer expected to function solely as knowledge-producing institutions but also as adaptive organizations capable of continuous improvement and creative problem-solving. (Worapongpat et al., 2026). In this context, administrative innovation has become a critical factor in enhancing institutional performance, governance quality, and long-term sustainability.

Leadership plays a central role in shaping organizational climates that support innovation. (Jia et al., 2022). Among various leadership approaches, servant leadership has gained increasing attention in educational settings due to its emphasis on service orientation, empowerment, ethical conduct, and the development of followers. (Worapongpat, 2026). Unlike traditional hierarchical leadership models, servant leadership prioritizes the needs of organizational members and promotes shared responsibility, trust, and collaboration. These characteristics align closely with the values of higher education institutions, where collegiality and participatory governance are essential for effective decision-making.

At the administrative level, innovative behavior refers to the generation, adoption, and implementation of new ideas, processes, and practices that improve organizational functioning. (Latif





et al., 2021). University administrators are expected to respond creatively to complex challenges such as academic reform, resource constraints, and digital transformation. (Worapongpat et al., 2025). However, administrators' capacity to innovate does not emerge in isolation. It is strongly influenced by leadership practices and by the extent to which academic staff actively engage in institutional processes. When leadership encourages openness, inclusion, and shared governance, administrators are more likely to receive diverse perspectives, constructive feedback, and collaborative support that foster innovation.

Teachers' job participation represents a key mechanism through which leadership practices translate into organizational outcomes. (Qin et al., 2023). Job participation involves teachers' active involvement in decision-making, committee work, academic planning, and institutional development. (Worapongpat et al., 2024). Prior research has shown that higher levels of employee participation are associated with greater organizational commitment, knowledge sharing, and adaptive behavior. In university contexts, teachers' participation can enhance communication between academic and administrative units, reduce resistance to change, and contribute valuable expertise that supports innovative administrative actions.

Although existing studies have examined servant leadership, participation, and innovation separately, empirical research integrating these constructs within higher education, particularly in Chinese universities, remains limited. Moreover, the mediating role of teachers' job participation in linking servant leadership to administrators' innovative behavior has received insufficient scholarly attention. Most prior studies focus either on faculty outcomes or leadership effectiveness without fully examining cross-role dynamics between teachers and administrators.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the structural relationships among servant leadership, teachers' job participation, and administrators' innovative behavior at Liaoning University, China. Specifically, the study examines whether servant leadership directly influences administrators' innovative behavior and whether this relationship is mediated by teachers' job participation. By clarifying these pathways, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of participatory leadership mechanisms in higher education and to provide empirical evidence to inform leadership development and governance practices in Chinese universities.

## Objectives

1. To examine the direct effect of servant leadership on administrators' innovative behavior at Liaoning University.
2. To analyze the effect of servant leadership on teachers' job participation.
3. To investigate the effect of teachers' job participation on administrators' innovative behavior.
4. To examine the mediating role of teachers' job participation in the relationship between servant leadership and administrators' innovative behavior.

## Hypotheses

**H1:** Servant leadership has a positive direct effect on administrators' innovative behavior at Liaoning University.

**H2:** Servant leadership has a positive effect on teachers' job participation at Liaoning University.

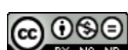
**H3:** Teachers' job participation has a positive effect on administrators' innovative behavior at Liaoning University.

**H4:** Teachers' job participation mediates the relationship between servant leadership and administrators' innovative behavior at Liaoning University.

## Literature Review

### Servant Leadership in Higher Education

Servant leadership is a leadership approach that emphasizes serving others, empowering followers, ethical behavior, and prioritizing collective well-being over individual authority. (Worapongpat, 2025). In contrast to traditional hierarchical leadership styles, servant leadership focuses on developing people, fostering trust, and creating inclusive organizational climates. Within higher





education institutions, this leadership style aligns closely with academic values such as collegiality, shared governance, and professional autonomy.

Previous studies have demonstrated that servant leadership positively influences a range of organizational outcomes, including trust, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and knowledge sharing. (Shaojin et al., 2025). In academic settings, servant leaders are more likely to encourage open communication, support professional development, and involve faculty members in institutional decision-making. These practices contribute to a supportive environment that enhances engagement and collaboration, which are essential for organizational adaptability and innovation.

From a theoretical perspective, servant leadership can be explained through social exchange theory, which suggests that leaders who demonstrate care, fairness, and support elicit reciprocal positive behaviors from organizational members. (Worapongpat et al., 2025). When employees perceive leadership as service-oriented and empowering, they are more willing to contribute beyond formal role expectations, including engaging in innovative and collaborative activities.

### **Teachers' Job Participation**

Teachers' job participation refers to the extent to which academic staff are actively involved in decision-making processes, institutional governance, committee work, and organizational development activities. (Tian Shu and Worapongpat, 2023). Participation is a core element of shared governance in universities and reflects the democratic and professional nature of academic institutions. Rather than being passive recipients of administrative decisions, teachers who participate actively contribute expertise, perspectives, and feedback that improve institutional effectiveness.

Research on employee participation consistently indicates that higher levels of involvement are associated with increased motivation, organizational commitment, and psychological ownership. (Yasuttamathada and Worapongpat, 2025). In higher education contexts, teachers' job participation enhances communication between academic and administrative units, reduces resistance to change, and strengthens alignment between institutional policies and academic realities. Participation also facilitates knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving, which are essential for managing complex organizational challenges.

The job demands resources perspective further explains the role of participation by suggesting that opportunities for involvement function as motivational resources. (Zeng and Xu, 2020). When teachers are given voice and influence, they experience greater autonomy and meaning in their work, which encourages proactive and constructive behaviors that support institutional goals.

### **Administrators' Innovative Behavior**

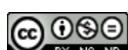
Innovative behavior among administrators involves the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas that improve administrative processes, service delivery, and organizational performance. (Worapongpat, 2024). In university settings, administrators are expected to address challenges such as curriculum reform, digital transformation, quality assurance, and resource management. Innovative behavior enables administrators to respond effectively to these demands and to support academic development.

Prior research suggests that innovative behavior is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by organizational context and leadership practices. Supportive leadership, access to information, and collaborative climates have been identified as key antecedents of innovation. In universities, administrators' innovative behavior is particularly dependent on interactions with faculty members, as academic staff provide critical input, feedback, and expertise relevant to institutional change initiatives.

Thus, innovation in higher education administration should be viewed as a collective and socially embedded process rather than an individual endeavor. Environments that encourage participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility are more likely to stimulate innovative actions among administrators.

### **The Mediating Role of Teachers' Job Participation**

While leadership has been widely recognized as a driver of innovation, scholars increasingly emphasize the importance of mediating mechanisms that explain how leadership influences innovative outcomes. Job participation is one such mechanism, as it translates leadership behaviors into everyday organizational practices.





Servant leadership is expected to enhance teachers' job participation by fostering trust, psychological safety, and empowerment. When teachers feel respected and supported by leadership, they are more willing to engage actively in institutional processes. Increased participation, in turn, creates conditions that support administrators' innovative behavior by improving information flow, encouraging collaboration, and providing diverse perspectives for decision-making.

From a mediation perspective, teachers' job participation serves as a conduit through which servant leadership affects administrators' innovative behavior. Leadership practices shape participation levels, and participation subsequently influences innovation outcomes. This perspective suggests that leadership alone may be insufficient to promote innovation unless it is accompanied by structures and practices that enable meaningful participation.

Despite its theoretical relevance, empirical research examining teachers' job participation as a mediator between servant leadership and administrators' innovative behavior remains limited, particularly in the context of Chinese higher education. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing understanding of participatory leadership mechanisms and their role in fostering administrative innovation.

### Conceptual Framework

This study proposes a conceptual framework that explains the relationships among servant leadership, teachers' job participation, and administrators' innovative behavior within the context of higher education. The framework is grounded in the assumption that leadership practices influence organizational outcomes both directly and indirectly through participatory mechanisms.

#### Servant Leadership (Independent Variable)

Servant leadership refers to a leadership approach characterized by service orientation, empowerment, ethical conduct, and a commitment to supporting followers' growth and well-being. In university settings, servant leaders emphasize collaboration, shared governance, and respect for professional expertise, thereby fostering an inclusive and supportive organizational climate. Such leadership behaviors are expected to shape employees' perceptions by enhancing trust, psychological safety, and openness to dialogue. Consequently, servant leadership is proposed to directly encourage innovative behavior among administrators and to indirectly influence innovation by motivating teachers to engage more actively in participatory processes.

#### Teachers' Job Participation (Mediating Variable)

Teachers' job participation reflects the extent to which academic staff are actively involved in institutional decision-making, academic planning, committee work, and governance activities. Within the proposed framework, teachers' job participation functions as a key mediating mechanism that translates leadership behaviors into organizational outcomes. When servant leadership is present, teachers are more likely to feel empowered and motivated to contribute beyond their formal roles. Increased participation enhances communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing between teachers and administrators, thereby creating organizational conditions that support innovative behavior.

#### Administrators' Innovative Behavior (Dependent Variable)

Administrators' innovative behavior refers to the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas, practices, and processes aimed at improving administrative efficiency, academic support services, and overall institutional development. In higher education contexts, innovative behavior enables administrators to respond effectively to organizational challenges such as reform initiatives, technological change, and quality enhancement. This behavior is shaped not only by individual capabilities but also by leadership practices and the availability of diverse input and collaboration from academic staff.

Based on this conceptual framework, servant leadership is expected to have a direct positive effect on administrators' innovative behavior. In addition, servant leadership is proposed to indirectly influence administrators' innovative behavior through teachers' job participation. Teachers' job participation facilitates information exchange, collaborative problem-solving, and shared decision-making, which enhance administrators' capacity to generate and implement innovative solutions.





Accordingly, teachers' job participation is conceptualized as a partial mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and administrators' innovative behavior.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the causal relationships among servant leadership, teachers' job participation, and administrators' innovative behavior. SEM was selected due to its suitability for testing complex relationships involving both direct and indirect effects among latent variables.

### Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of university administrators at Liaoning University, China, including heads of departments, deputy deans, deans, and administrative directors. Although teachers' job participation is included as a key construct in the conceptual framework, the unit of analysis in this study is the administrator. Teachers' job participation was therefore measured based on administrators' perceptions of the extent to which teachers are involved in institutional decision-making and governance processes.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across academic faculties and administrative units. A total of 352 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum sample size recommended for SEM analysis. This sample size satisfies commonly accepted guidelines for model stability and statistical power in structural equation modeling.

### Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two main sections.

Section 1 collected demographic information of administrator respondents, including gender, age, administrative position, and years of administrative experience.

Section 2 consisted of measurement items assessing the three latent constructs: servant leadership, teachers' job participation, and administrators' innovative behavior. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Teachers' job participation items were designed to capture administrators' perceptions of teachers' involvement in decision-making, academic planning, committee participation, and institutional development activities. This approach is consistent with prior leadership and organizational research that examines participation and climate variables from the perspective of organizational leaders.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey distributed via official university communication channels during the 2024 academic year. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the research objectives, anonymity, and confidentiality of their responses. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the data collection process.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed using SPSS to summarize respondent characteristics and assess data distribution. Measurement model validity and reliability were examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), including assessments of factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS to test the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships among the variables and to evaluate the mediating role of teachers' job participation.





**Results**

1. Demographic Statistics of Administrators (N = 352)

Table 1. Profile of Administrators at Liaoning University

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	217	61.6%
	Female	135	38.4%
Age	<40	82	23.3%
	40–49	146	41.5%
	50–59	102	29.0%
	60+	22	6.2%
Administrative Position	Head of Department	124	35.2%
	Deputy Dean	97	27.6%
	Dean	48	13.6%
	Director (office/center)	83	23.6%
Tenure in Administration	<5 years	106	30.1%
	5–10 years	138	39.2%
	>10 years	108	30.7%

2. Descriptive Statistics & Normality Analysis

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Latent Variables

Latent Variable	Indicator Count	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
Servant Leadership (SL)	12 items	4.21	0.61	-0.32	-0.46
Teachers’ Job Participation (TJP)	9 items	4.08	0.67	-0.25	-0.58
Administrators’ Innovative Behavior (AIB)	8 items	4.16	0.59	-0.41	-0.33

3. Correlation Matrix

Table 3. Correlation between SL, TJP, and AIB

Variable	SL	TJP	AIB
Servant Leadership (SL)	1	0.61**	0.54**
Teachers’ Job Participation (TJP)	0.61**	1	0.67**
Administrators’ Innovative Behavior (AIB)	0.54**	0.67**	1

p < .001

4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Criterion	Result
$\chi^2/df$	2.14	< 3	Good
CFI	0.963	> 0.90	Good
TLI	0.957	> 0.90	Good





Fit Index	Value	Criterion	Result
RMSEA	0.057	< 0.080	Good
SRMR	0.046	< 0.080	Good

Factor Loadings (All Significant at  $p < .001$ )

- SL: 0.71–0.89
- TJP: 0.68–0.87
- AIB: 0.73–0.91

Composite Reliability (CR) & AVE

Construct	CR	AVE
SL	0.951	0.622
TJP	0.936	0.589
AIB	0.943	0.671

(CR>0.7, AVE>0.5)

5. Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Model Fit

Fit Index	Value
$\chi^2/df$	2.27
CFI	0.958
RMSEA	0.061
SRMR	0.049

6. SEM Path Analysis

Direct Effects

Path	Estimate ( $\beta$ )	Z	p
SL → AIB	0.28	4.91	<.001
SL → TJP	0.61	11.72	<.001
TJP → AIB	0.52	9.46	<.001

Indirect Effect

Path	Indirect $\beta$	p	Mediation Type
SL → TJP → AIB	0.32	<.001	Partial Mediation

Total Effect

Path	Total $\beta$	p
SL → AIB	0.60	<.001

7. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported?
H1	SL → AIB (positive effect)	✓ Supported
H2	SL → TJP (positive effect)	✓ Supported





Hypothesis	Statement	Supported?
H3	TJP → AIB (positive effect)	✓ Supported
H4	TJP mediates SL → AIB	✓ Supported

### 1. Demographic Statistics of Administrators

The demographic profile of administrators at Liaoning University (N = 352) indicates a majority of male respondents (61.6%) relative to female respondents (38.4%). The age distribution reveals that the predominant group of participants is aged 40–49 (41.5%), followed by those aged 50–59 (29.0%). Participants under 40 constitute 23.3%, while only 6.2% are aged 60 and above. In terms of administrative roles, Heads of Department represent the largest segment at 35.2%, followed by Deputy Deans at 27.6%, Directors of offices or centers at 23.6%, and Deans at 13.6%. Regarding administrative tenure, the majority of respondents possess 5–10 years of experience (39.2%), while those with less than 5 years (30.1%) and more than 10 years (30.7%) are comparatively equal. The sample exhibits a seasoned and proficient administrative workforce.

### 2. Descriptive Statistics and Normality Analysis

The descriptive statistics reveal that all latent variables—Servant Leadership (SL), Teachers’ Job Participation (TJP), and Administrators’ Innovative Behavior (AIB)—exhibit relatively elevated mean scores (4.21, 4.08, and 4.16, respectively), indicating a generally favorable perception of these constructs among respondents. The standard deviations, which range from 0.59 to 0.67, signify moderate variability in the responses. Furthermore, the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fall within acceptable limits (around zero), suggesting that the data are approximately regularly distributed. This verifies that the dataset satisfies the prerequisites for subsequent multivariate analysis.

### 3. Correlation Matrix

The correlation analysis demonstrates substantial positive associations among all variables at the  $p < .001$  level. Servant Leadership (SL) exhibits a strong correlation with Teachers’ Job Participation (TJP) ( $r = 0.61$ ) and a moderate to strong correlation with Administrators’ Innovative Behavior (AIB) ( $r = 0.54$ ). TJP exhibits the most robust correlation with AIB ( $r = 0.67$ ), signifying that elevated teacher participation is closely linked to enhanced innovative behavior among administrators. These results offer initial support for the proposed links among the constructs.

### 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

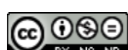
The confirmatory factor analysis indicates that the measurement model aligns effectively with the data. The fit indices satisfy the suggested thresholds ( $\chi^2/df = 2.14$ , CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.057, SRMR = 0.046), signifying a favorable model fit. All factor loadings are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and vary from 0.68 to 0.91, indicating robust item reliability. Moreover, composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs surpass 0.90, and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceed 0.50, thereby affirming robust internal consistency and convergent validity. The results demonstrate that the measurement model is dependable and valid.

### 5. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Fit

The structural equation model exhibits a satisfactory fit to the data, evidenced by fit indices like  $\chi^2/df$  (2.27), CFI (0.958), RMSEA (0.061), and SRMR (0.049), all conforming to specified thresholds. This suggests that the postulated structural connections between servant leadership, teachers' job involvement, and administrators' innovative conduct are strongly corroborated by the empirical evidence.

### 6. SEM Path Analysis

The path analysis findings indicate substantial direct impacts among the variables. Servant Leadership (SL) positively influences Administrators’ Innovative Behavior (AIB) ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and exerts a substantial positive effect on Teachers’ Job Participation (TJP) ( $\beta = 0.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). TJP substantially affects AIB ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). TJP serves as a mediator in the link between SL and AIB, exhibiting a substantial indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mediation is partial due to the significance of both direct and indirect effects. The overall impact of servant leadership on innovative





behavior is significant ( $\beta = 0.60, p < .001$ ), suggesting that servant leadership promotes innovative conduct both directly and indirectly via teacher involvement.

### 7. Hypothesis Testing

The outcomes of hypothesis testing demonstrate that all presented hypotheses are validated. H1 affirms that servant leadership positively impacts administrators' creative conduct, H2 substantiates that servant leadership considerably improves teachers' job involvement, and H3 demonstrates that teachers' job participation positively affects innovative behavior. Moreover, H4 is substantiated, indicating that teachers' job engagement partially mediates the connection between servant leadership and administrators' innovative conduct. These results offer robust empirical validation for the suggested research model.

### Discussion

The results from research objective 1 indicate that servant leadership has a significant and positive direct effect on administrators' innovative behavior. This finding suggests that when administrators perceive leadership as service-oriented, ethical, and supportive, they are more likely to engage in innovative practices, such as generating new ideas and implementing improved administrative processes. This may be because servant leadership fosters an organizational climate characterized by trust, psychological safety, and empowerment. Such conditions encourage administrators to take initiative, experiment with (Aboramadan et al., 2021). new approaches, and engage in creative problem-solving without fear of negative consequences. This finding is consistent with (Cheng et al., 2025). leadership and innovation theories that emphasize the role of empowering and ethical leadership in promoting innovation-supportive environments within organizations.

The results from research objective 2 reveal that servant leadership has a strong positive effect on teachers' job participation. This indicates that servant-oriented leadership practices significantly enhance teachers' willingness to engage in institutional decision-making, academic planning, and governance activities. This may be because servant leadership emphasizes respect, inclusion, and shared responsibility, which strengthen teachers' sense of belonging and commitment to the institution. When teachers feel valued and supported by leadership, they are more likely to contribute actively beyond their formal teaching roles. (Dongjie and Worapongpat, 2024). This finding supports perspectives grounded in social exchange theory, which propose that supportive leadership behaviors encourage reciprocal engagement and participation among organizational members.

The results from research objective 3 show that teachers' job participation has a significant positive effect on administrators' innovative behavior. This finding highlights the importance of collaborative engagement between teachers and administrators in fostering innovation within higher education institutions. This may be because active teacher participation enhances communication, knowledge sharing, and the exchange of diverse academic perspectives. Teachers' involvement in committees and institutional activities provides administrators with (Maalouf, 2023). valuable insights that support informed decision-making and innovative administrative initiatives. This result reinforces the view that innovation in higher education is a collective process that depends on effective collaboration across academic and administrative roles.

The mediation analysis demonstrates that teachers' job participation partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and administrators' innovative behavior. This indicates that servant leadership influences administrators' innovative behavior both directly and indirectly through increased teacher participation. This finding suggests that leadership alone is not sufficient to fully drive innovation in higher education. Innovation is strengthened when servant leadership is accompanied by participatory structures that enable teachers to engage meaningfully in institutional processes. (Geng and Wang, 2024). The partial mediation effect underscores the importance of integrating leadership practices with participatory governance mechanisms to maximize innovative outcomes.

### Overall Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the higher education leadership literature by clarifying the structural pathways linking servant leadership, teachers' job participation,



and administrators' innovative behavior. The findings advance understanding of how leadership effects are transmitted through participatory mechanisms in academic institutions.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that universities seeking to enhance administrative innovation should prioritize the development of servant leadership competencies while simultaneously creating opportunities for meaningful teacher participation. Promoting shared governance, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving may significantly enhance administrators' capacity for innovation.

Overall, the findings emphasize that innovation in higher education is not solely the responsibility of administrators but emerges from a collaborative process supported by servant leadership and sustained by active teacher involvement.

### Knowledge Contribution

From the study of A Structural Model of Servant Leadership, Teachers' Job Participation, and Administrators' Innovative Behavior at Liaoning University found knowledge that can be summarized into a diagram.

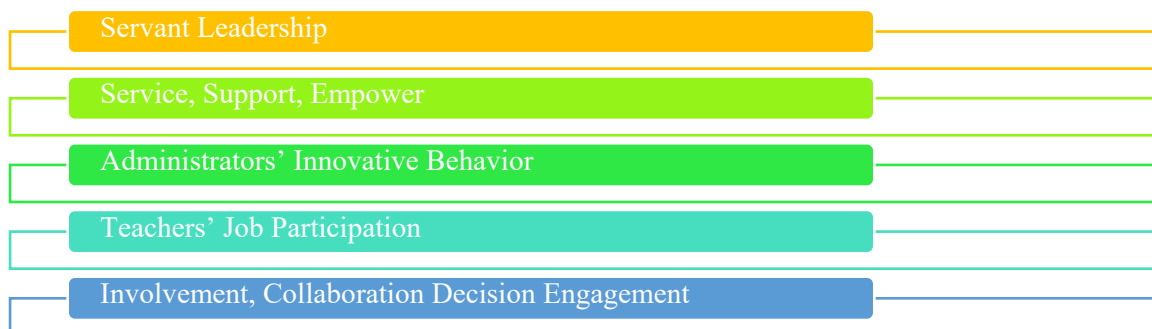


Figure 2 shows the results. Explanation of Knowledge Contribution

1. New Insight into Administrative Innovation in Higher Education  
This study provides new knowledge by demonstrating that servant leadership influences not only teachers but also the *innovative behavior of university administrators*, through the mechanism of teachers' job participation, an underexplored area within Chinese university contexts.
2. Expansion of Servant Leadership Theory  
The findings extend servant leadership theory by showing that servant-oriented leadership can stimulate administrative innovation indirectly, even when administrators are not in the same direct leadership line, thereby highlighting systemic and cross-level influence.
3. Identification of Teachers' Job Participation as a Critical Mediator  
The research establishes teachers' job participation as a key mediating variable, offering a new theoretical understanding of how engagement and participation affect broader organizational innovation outcomes.
4. Shift from Traditional Managerial Leadership to Participatory Leadership  
The study provides empirical support for transitioning from traditional command-based management to participatory and service-oriented leadership, which fosters innovative administrative decision-making.
5. Contribution to Human Resource Development in Higher Education  
Results show that increasing teachers' job participation can enhance administrators' innovative actions. This contributes to HRD knowledge by suggesting participatory-driven strategies for developing innovation within universities.
6. A New Structural Model Applicable to Chinese Universities  
The proposed SEM model provides a validated framework for examining leader–teacher–administrator relationships, offering a new analytical tool for educational researchers and policymakers in China.



7. Highlighting Teachers' Influence on Administrative Innovation

The findings illuminate teachers as important catalysts of innovation, demonstrating how their participation can stimulate creativity and problem-solving among university administrators.

8. Empirical Support for Shared Governance in Universities

This research reinforces the concept of shared governance, showing that collaborative involvement between leadership and teachers significantly enhances innovative outcomes at the administrative level.

9. Contribution to Organizational Psychology in Education

The study enriches organizational psychology literature by identifying cross-level effects where job participation influences administrators' behaviors—a rarely examined dynamic within university systems.

10. Clarification of Direct and Indirect Effects

The study clearly distinguishes the direct effects of servant leadership and the indirect effects mediated through job participation, contributing to a more precise understanding of causal pathways in educational administration.

11. Practical Framework for University Leaders and Policymakers

The study offers a practical framework to guide policy development in universities, emphasizing activities that enhance teachers' job participation as a strategy to stimulate administrators' innovative behavior.

## Recommendation

Based on the empirical findings, this study offers several recommendations for enhancing administrators' innovative behavior through servant leadership and teachers' job participation in higher education institutions.

First, universities should strengthen servant leadership practices among academic and administrative leaders. Leadership development programs should focus on cultivating service orientation, ethical behavior, empowerment, and supportive leadership competencies. Such practices can foster trust and psychological safety, which are essential for encouraging innovation among administrators.

Second, institutional structures that promote teachers' participation in decision-making should be further developed. Universities should establish formal mechanisms that enable teachers to engage in curriculum planning, academic policy formulation, and institutional governance. Increased participation can enhance communication and collaboration between teachers and administrators, thereby supporting innovative administrative initiatives.

Third, universities should encourage collaborative innovation by creating cross-functional teams and committees that include both teachers and administrators. These collaborative platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing, collective problem-solving, and the integration of diverse perspectives, which are critical for innovation in complex academic environments.

Fourth, effective communication channels between teachers and administrators should be strengthened. Regular meetings, open forums, and digital communication platforms can support transparent, two-way communication and reinforce teachers' job participation, which in turn contributes to administrators' innovative behavior.

Finally, universities should recognize and support participatory behaviors through appropriate incentive systems and supportive work environments. Acknowledging teachers' contributions to institutional development and reducing structural barriers to participation can sustain engagement and maximize the innovative potential of leadership practices.

Overall, these recommendations emphasize the importance of integrating servant leadership with participatory governance mechanisms to promote sustainable innovation in higher education administration.





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