

# The Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Team Commitment: The Mediating Effects of Servant Leadership\*

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## Abstract

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This study is, based on the leader's emotional intelligence is a root of servant leadership, just for verifying the truth that leader's emotional intelligence contributes to commitment through mediating relations. To do that, leader's emotional intelligence was investigated by team managers themselves, and also leader's servant leadership and team commitment-oriented members took part in that investigation, therefore we got over the common method bias. This measurement has been done by team managers and their members who were role-divided as team manager and member respectively with a questionnaire method. The result of that, other's emotion only among factors of emotional intelligence affects servant leadership significantly and the servant leadership showed us that it mediated leader's emotional intelligence about team commitment of members perfectly.

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**Keywords :** Emotional intelligence, Servant Leadership, Team Commitment

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\* 논문접수일 2013년 3월 1일, 게재확정일 2013년 3월 29일

본 연구는 학술진흥재단과 한국산업경제저널에서 정한 연구윤리규정을 준수함

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## I . Introduction

Emotional intelligence refers to the abilities humans have when dealing with their emotions (Thorndike, 1920). It affects how we recognize our feelings, the feelings of others and how we control these feelings. This is important for managers and leaders to be aware of as their behavior directly affects the behavior of those around them(Russell and Stone, 2002). Through their use of managing their emotions, they are better able to motivate others around them to perform to their best abilities (Sundstrom and Futrell, 1990). Emotional intelligence is important because it helps leaders in a company see their own emotions and those of others around them. The leaders can take their followers' thoughts and feelings into account and help the followers or motivate them as needed. The leaders can also help followers meet their goals and empower them. Cherniss (2003) concluded that leaders may not be able to reach their highest potential as leaders and mentors without an understanding of EI and how it affects others. In other words, it may be as important as the general intelligence we refer to when we talk about IQ or wisdom.

The purpose of this study is to look at how emotional intelligence affects servant leadership, which affects team commitment. This research will aid future business managers and leaders make effect use of their emotions to increase commitment from employees to aid the company.

## II. Literature review

### 2.1 Emotional Intelligence and Servant Leadership

The idea of emotional intelligence(EI) began with Thorndike's (1920) research into social intelligence. He proposed that humans have different types of intelligence: thinking in abstracts, thinking with mechanical productivity and thinking of others socially. Thanks to Thorndike's ideas, researchers began looking at EI (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2005) because EI focuses on the inter-social skills that are not even considered when talking about intelligence. Scott-Ladd and Chan (2004) describe social intelligence as "the ability to understand and relate to people" (p.95). Mayer and Salovey (1997) characterize EI as the "ability to accurately perceive reality through understanding and regulating one's emotions while adapting and responding to the emotions of others" (p.3).

Robert Green (1977) provided a foundation for the emerging discipline of servant leadership through his pioneering work. Greenleaf's (1977) essay entitled "Servant leadership" states "The great leader is seen as

servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness”(p.21). For Greenleaf, servant leadership begins with the innate feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. “That person is sharply different from one who is leader first. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served”(p.27). Greenleaf posits that the best test of a servant leader, but difficult to administer, is this: “Do those served grow as a person? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become a servant? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?”(p.27). A further differentiation of this theory with other theories of leadership is that while persons in the ‘leader-first’ model may utilize service at times for the purpose of realizing the visions and goals of the leader and/or the organization. The ‘servant-first’ model is focused on serving the highest priority needs of the people and such is a follower-oriented theory of leadership (Irving and Longbotham, 2006). Greenleaf’s greatest contribution to the study of servant leadership was its conceptualization and his understanding of what characterizes a servant leader.

In 1998, Goleman began researching and writing on the topic of EI with a focus on the role EI plays in the workplace. He identified five components that comprise emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman, 1998). The first three components focus on self-management skills while the last two components focus on managing one’s relationships with other people. This is important to note because it shows the social context the emotions play in our daily lives.

Goleman (2001) suggests that the emotional intelligence skill of empathy plays a key role in serving others. Goleman explains that the ability to identify another’s stated or unstated need and match it to the appropriate product or service is an empathic strategy that leads to success. Bardzil and Slaski (2003) proposed that higher emotional intelligence could facilitate conditions for a positive climate of service to emerge from within organizations.

Goleman (1995) also states that emotional intelligence can grow, like any other kind of intelligence with age and experience and that they can also be improved through explicit training. While Goleman (1995) does not dismiss the role of IQ or general ability as important factors in strong leadership, he found that more than just these are necessary, that Thorndike’s (1920) previous research was correct in the identification of other types of intelligences. Goleman (1995) writes “it was once thought that the components of emotional intelligence were ‘nice to have’ in business leaders. But now we know that, for the sake of performance, these are ingredients that leaders ‘need to have’” (p.102).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) seem to focus on emotions as one of many aspects of social intelligence. Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) later and most recent framework can be summarized as:

- 1) the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotion through recognizing and monitoring emotions

in oneself and others;

2) the ability to access, understand and use emotions as necessary to communicate feelings or influence other cognitive process;

3) the ability to sense, analyze and understand emotions in terms of how to best use emotional understandings to discern intensity, contradictory emotions, and sequences of emotions; and

4) the ability to regulate emotions through engaging, disengaging, reflecting upon, and evaluating emotions so to promote positive over negative emotional exchanges.

Wong and Law (2002) simplified the Mayer and Salovey (1997) model into self-emotional appraisal(SEA), others' emotional appraisal(OEA), use of emotions(UOE) and regulation of emotions(ROE) then developed a 16-item self-scoring instrument that measures EI in terms of the model.

Winston and Hartsfield found strong ties between servant leadership and all of the above-noted emotional intelligence factors except for the ability to understand and analyze emotions. Winston and Hartsfield(2004) propose that similarities exist between the concepts of EI and servant leadership.

Van Staden's (2007) work on SL and emotional intelligence showed significant relationships between servant leadership, emotional intelligence and trust.

Greenleaf (1977) proposes that servant leaders bring inspiration, reflection, empathy, foresight and intuition, perceptivity, and relational aptitude to their service which involves emotional intelligence within the leaders.

Researchers have found support for three variables in servant leadership including service, empowerment and visioning (Dennis and Winston, 2003; Page and Wong, 2000).

Senge (1997) found a link between EI and service, in that employees with EI tend to be more interested in outcomes that benefit others as well as themselves. Servant leaders serve the greater good of others through not seeking recognition, learning from followers, serving potentially to the point of personal sacrifice, and seeing leadership as responsibility over position (Page and Wong, 2000). Greenleaf (1977) captures the emotions of servant leaders in his statement, "The servant leader is servant first . . . it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first"(p.27). Yet servant leaders do not stop with understanding their own feelings as part of their service includes empathy and taking others' feelings into account. In fact, servant leaders learn from followers' feelings and ideas. Carmeli (2002) found emotional intelligence to augment altruistic behavior in senior managers. Winston (2003) suggests the servant leader is able to focus his or her feelings on serving others as opposed to feeling a sense of servitude or requirement. Service is not taken from the servant leader; instead, it is felt and freely chosen by the leader.

Emotional intelligence enables servant leaders to choose extreme acts of service that may be considered sacrificial nature. EI has been found to have a relationship with satisfaction (Wong and Law, 2002), the

ability to handle stress (Cherniss, 2003a), mood management and higher levels of self esteem (Ciarrochi, Chan, and Caputi, 2000). All of these traits are important for sacrificial services. In a broadcast of Dateline NBC (Phillips, 2004), Larry Spears explained the strength of inner character that motivates sacrifice in servant leaders. Emotional intelligence increases the leaders' stamina in the midst of sacrificial service. Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) propose that followers respond to a leader's sacrifice and service in reciprocal ways.

Servant leaders display EI and empowerment by inviting followers to do their own thinking without appealing to positional power so that power, authority, responsibility, and resources can be shared. Followers feel valued and better utilized when servant leaders allow for more mutual exchanges of power rather than making followers feel subservient.

Emotional intelligence soothes any feelings of threat or insecurity within the empowering servant leader so that the leader can empower followers by valuing their unique contribution and making a way for them within the organization.

**H1: Leader's emotional intelligence has a positive effect on servant leadership**

## 2.2 Team Commitment

The use of teams in today's organizations is increasing and numerous research done focusing on the importance of teams and team-functioning (e.g. Witt, Hilton and Hochwarter, 2001; Ellemers, De Gilder and Ven den Heuvel, 1998; Cohen and Bailey, 1997). Pearce and Herbig (2004, p.295) define team commitment as "the psychological attachment that binds team members together." It is similar to organizational commitment except that the target of the attachment is the team rather than the larger organization, of which the team is a part. Employees' commitment to their work teams and to the organization can influence turnover, willingness to help co-workers and team performance (Bishop and Scott, 1997). Therefore, creating employee commitment in the workplace is one important goal of human resource policies and practices that is likely to positively affect team performance and productivity. Focus has shifted from the study of smaller interpersonal groups in social psychology to the study of teams in organizational psychology (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006). This has led to the massive formation and employment of teams as a strategy for increasing productivity and employee flexibility in the United States (Bishop et al., 2000). They reported that 78 percent of U.S. organizations have acknowledged using teams. However, the sole use of teams does not guarantee success, the interaction of team members and employee commitment are important variables (Bishop and Scott, 1997).

Bishop et al. (2000) documented the benefits of work teams. They reported that work teams increase

individual performance, improve quality, reduce absenteeism, and employee turnover, and offers leaner plant structures and considerable improvements in production cycle time. The proliferation of the use of teams is also due to “old” organizational structures being too slow, unresponsive, and expensive to be competitive within the hyper-competitive business environment (Campion, Medsker and Higgs, 1993). However, the development of employee commitment in organizations has been seriously affected by a lack of consensus on the conceptualization of commitment, in the form of the definition and measurement (Rylander, 2003; Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982).

An increasing number of researchers within the organizational context (e.g. Eilemers, de Gilder and ven den Heuel, 1998; Witt, Hilton and Hochwarter, 2001) emphasize the importance that employees in most modern organizations are expected to work together in teams. This has raised the collective recognition by numerous authors of the growing importance of teams and team-functioning (e.g. Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Sunderstrom, De Meuse, and Futrell, 1990). According to Bishop, Scot, Goldsby and Cropanzano (2005), this probably explains why work teams have in recent years emerged as a focus of special interest. According to Ilgen and Kozlowski (2006, p.6) organizations world-wide are: “well along a decade and a half evolution in the design of work, shifting from individual jobs in functionalized structures to teams embedded in more complex workflow systems ... a variety of forces are driving this shift in work organizations to teams.”

Bishop and Scott (1997) point out that while commitment has been declining, the use of work teams has been on the rise. These authors claim that data indicate 47 percent of Fortune 1000 companies use teams to some extent, and 60 percent intend to increase the use of teams in the near future (Bishop and Scott, 1997). However, team success is often dependent on high levels of employee commitment – to both the organization, and its goals (Bishop and Scott, 1997).

## 2.3 Servant Leadership and Team Commitment

When looking at servant leadership, we must also look at how leaders affect others (Peck, 1995; Senge, 1990). Being able to meet the needs of others lower than themselves is the goal of servant leadership. This leadership style is a total package; it is seen in the leader’s everyday actions and not just in a few encouraging emails or after work meetings. It is important that how the leaders mentor others is also how they do their job. Otherwise, they may lose credibility as an authentic leader (Snodgrass, 1993). It is because of this leadership style that team commitment grows (McGee-Cooper and Looper, 2001).

An in-depth look into this research was done by Drury (2004). The research looked at how job satisfaction and commitment were connected to servant leadership. Drury concluded that there was a

positive relationship by using the Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) commitment scales and the Organizational Leadership Assessment (Laub, 1999) to measure servant leadership.

**H2: Leader's servant leadership has a positive effect on team commitment.**

Now that we have seen that emotional intelligence affects servant leadership and that emotional intelligence affects team performance we can expect the mediating effect of Servant Leadership on the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Team Commitment

**H3: Leader's emotional intelligence has a positive effect on employees' team commitment through servant leadership as a mediator.**

### III. Method

Three variables will be researched and explored in this study. They are emotional intelligence as independent variable, servant leadership as mediating variable and team commitment as dependent variable. A 5-point scale estimate is employed to measure all variables.

Emotional leadership is defined as a leader with high emotional intelligence who has a set of abilities to perceive emotions in the self and in others, use emotions to facilitate performance, understand emotions and emotional knowledge, regulate emotions in the self and use emotions effectively in order to get more achievement. The survey consists of 16 items based on Wong and Law's (2002) model.

Based on the classification in the study of Robert (2008), 7 out of 14 items of Robert's survey are measured in this study. They are 1)team members and their relationships, 2)delegation of authority, 3)support for team members' development and achievements, 4)moral behavior, 5)structural capacity, 6)staff respect, 7)add value to activities of organization.

Team commitment is the behavior and attitude that people have while working in a group to do a task. This behavior has many factors as each and every member brings with them their own ideology, method and expectations. 5 items developed by Bishop and Scott (2000) are used to measure team commitment as dependent variable.

Participants for the study were drawn from Chonbuk National University. Among 400 copies of questionnaires, only 240 of them were returned by the respondents. By deletion of those undesirable results, only 170 questionnaires were used for final statistical analysis, which can be divided into 39 different groups.

## IV. Results

The results of factor analysis of independent variables in this study are shown in Table 1. Among 16 survey items of emotional intelligence, items 1, 5, 10, and 15 were eliminated because of the insignificance of their values. There are four sub-classification of emotional intelligence: self emotional appraisal (SEA), other emotional appraisal (OEA), use of emotions (UOE), and regulation of emotions (ROE); each divided into a different factor.

The rotated factor loadings of servant leadership were ranged from 0.667 to 0.883. The survey items used for measuring each variable were shown to be grouped under the same factor as shown in Table 2.

Internal consistency of the items is measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the variables used in this study were all proved reliable (all above 0.6), as shown in Table 3.

〈Table 1〉 Rotated Factor Loadings for Emotional Intelligence

Component		Item	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4
Emotional Intelligence	SEA	I-2	-.247	.089	.815	.320
		I-3	.044	.172	.821	.367
		I-4	.273	-.026	.886	.089
	OEA	I-6	.136	.923	.004	.058
		I-7	.214	.930	-.049	.061
		I-8	.140	.775	.250	-.012
	UOE	I-9	.121	-.011	.136	.827
		I-11	.030	.141	.224	.778
		I-12	.252	-.038	.244	.798
	ROE	I-13	.908	.202	-.003	.152
		I-14	.916	.162	.089	.037
		I-16	.891	.152	.016	.126
Eigen Value			2,759	2,465	2,326	2,219
Percentage of Variance (%)			22,992	20,545	19,386	18,491
Cumulative Percentage (%)			22,992	43,536	62,923	81,414



〈Table 2〉 Rotated Factor Loading for Servant Leadership

Component	Item	Factor
Servant Leadership(SER)	II-1	.848
	II-2	.883
	II-3	.733
	II-4	.689
	II-5	.677
	II-6	.783
	II-7	.868
Eigen Value		4.336
Percentage of Variance (%)		61.942
Cumulative Percentage (%)		61.942

〈Table 3〉 Reliability Analysis of Measure and Descriptive Variables

Component		No. of Items selected	Cronbach's alpha
Emotional Intelligence	SEA	2	.884
	OEA	3	.852
	UOE	3	.711
	ROE	2	.921
Servant Leadership		7	.893
Team Commitment		5	.748

〈Table 4〉 Descriptive Statistics of Focal Variables

Component	Gender	OEA	UOE	ROE	SEA	SER	TCOM
Gender	1						
OEA	.077	1					
UOE	.112	.074	1				
ROE	.039	.367**	.238**	1			
SEA	.066	.123	.515**	.126	1		
SER	-.089	.245**	.129	-.010	.125	1	
TCOM	-.214**	.093	.116	.035	-.035	.351**	1

\* p<0.01,

\*\* TCOM : Team commitment

## 4.1 Hypothesis Testing

This study verifies the effect of emotional intelligence on employees' team commitment through servant leadership as mediator. The independent variable, EI, was subdivided into four factors, while servant leadership was dealt with as a single factor that can affect team commitment.

Regression analysis was conducted to verify the first hypothesis. Among the sub-classified factors of emotional intelligence, only other emotional appraisal has positive effect on servant leadership, and other factors have no effect on servant leadership, as shown in Table 5.

〈Table 5〉 Regression Analysis of Emotional Intelligence and Servant Leadership

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-statistics	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	3.368	.649		5.191	.000
GENDER	-.246	.150	-.121	-1.641	.103
SER	.058	.099	.051	.590	.556
OEA	.287	.076	.302	3.776	.000
UOE	.145	.105	.119	1.371	.172
ROE	-.116	.084	-.113	-1.393	.166
F=4.271 Adjusted R Square=.088					

In order to verify the mediating effect of servant leadership specifically, hierarchical regression was adopted by Baron and Kenney's (1986) research. To see whether a variable has mediating effect or not can be determined by the following three steps of regression analysis. The independent variable had significant effect on mediation at the first step when mediation was regressed by the independent variable. The independent variable had significant effect on the dependent factor at the second step, when the dependent factor was regressed by the independent variable. Finally, the mediator not only had significant effect on dependent factor but also on the independent variable. This was less effective when compared to the value of the second step than to the value of the third step when the dependent variable was regressed by the independent variable and mediator equally. It can be verified that there exists a complete mediating effect because the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable was insignificant when the mediator was controlled at the third step. Therefore, it can be said that the independent variable has an effect on the dependent variable through mediating factor only.

〈Table 6〉 Mediating Effect Verification of Servant Leadership on the relationship between Other Emotional Appraisal and Team Commitment

Steps	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	$\beta$
Step1	OEA	SER	.302**
Step2	OEA	TCOM	.153*
Step3	OEA	TCOM	.013
	SER	TCOM	.334**

P\*\* < 0.01, P\* < 0.05

At the second step, the positive effect of other emotional appraisal has significant effect on team commitment. At the third step, it was found that servant leadership has significant effect on team commitment. But, the effect of other emotional appraisal on team commitment became insignificant when servant leadership was controlled. Therefore, it can be said that there is a completed mediating effect of servant leadership on the relationship between Other Emotional Appraisal and Team Commitment. That is, other emotional appraisal has an effect on team commitment only through servant leadership.

## V. Discussion

### Summary of results

While the areas of servant leadership, emotional intelligence and team commitment have all been looked at before independently, there is woefully little research done to connect these topics and see how they apply to a modern company. This study shows how servant leadership, with emotional intelligence, affects team commitment. This study also shows that there is a positive relationship between being able to appraise others' emotions (OEA) and properly using one's emotions (UOE) and having servant leadership. It was then shown that servant leadership does affect group commitment and that both emotional intelligence and servant leadership affect group commitment. However, this goes against research from Wong and Law (2002) that reported "no relationship between the emotional intelligence of leaders and the job performance of their followers has been found"(p.269). This study show that there is a connection, however, it is important to note that not all four aspects of emotional intelligence seem to affect commitment, only (OEA) and (UOE).

This study concludes that a leader's emotional appraisal of others has positive effect on servant leadership and a leader's use of emotions has positive effect on servant leadership.

## Implications

How leaders behave affects how a team works together. With proper awareness of emotions, how to control them and how to observe them in others, we can give information to leaders to improve commitment in teams. As shown here, leaders that have high emotional intelligence and are servant leaders can positively affect the commitment and behaviors of others around them. This provides useful information to leaders within any modern company.

Leaders who have a strong will to serve others can have a better understanding of their influence with others. By raising awareness of emotional intelligence and by showing the positive influence it has on commitment, leaders can properly conduct themselves in front of others. In addition, by performing the behaviors associated with servant leadership (Goleman, 1998), leaders will begin to have a more positive, optimistic outlook on their work impact and environment (Wong, 2002). When leaders focus on emotional intelligence, they focus on positive attributes that benefit others in addition to themselves. This will have a positive effect on everyone in the workplace and in the community (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, and Hollander, 2002). Workers will find themselves more willing to follow orders by people they feel they can relate to (Schutte, 2001).

As this is happening, commitment raises and workers will strive for team harmony and balance while working together (Witt, Hilton and Hochwarter, 2001; Ellemers, De Gilder and Ven den Heuel, 1998; Cohen and Bailey, 1997). They will focus more on group orientated goals (Ellemers, De Gilder and Ven den Heuel, 1998) and alter their behaviors to better match those of the needs of others (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). As workers are more committed there will be an increase of individual performance, improvement in quality, reduction in absenteeism, and employee turnover (Bishop et al., 2000).

## Limitations and future research

This study also has several weaknesses that need to be addressed to help future researchers in their endeavors. This study found that a leader's emotional appraisal of others has positive effect on servant leadership and a leader's use of emotions has a positive effect on servant leadership. It did not, however, show that a leader's self emotional appraisal or regulation of emotions has a positive effect on servant leadership. Why is this? I believe it is because of the sample population. As students, the volunteers are taught to accept their leaders' moods and adjust accordingly. This may be due to how these Korean students view their leaders (Han, Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2009). I believe that if this survey were conducted

in a different country, different results might occur. These students are all from the management department, so they are at least somewhat knowledgeable of this topic, but some may have skewed their answers to look more favorable (Dunning, Heath, and Suls, 2004; Xie, Roy, and Chen, 2006). The volunteers were also asked to take the survey after their lessons, so some may have rushed through the questionnaire instead of taking time to read the questions and answers fully. Again, as all the volunteers are students, their answers may not reflect their actions and behaviors once they find themselves in the situations presented. The questionnaire did not reflect about past experiences, so it is possible that the volunteers may have misinterpreted the questions, i.e. what a good emotional observer is or what being capable of controlling emotions mean. This is something that future researchers should be aware of.

To remedy this, I encourage future researchers to give their questionnaires to actual office workers and to actual leaders with various experiences and backgrounds and to give examples on the survey. In this way, I believe we can get a more authentic finding.

I expect to find that in different countries, as well as with authentic workers, all aspects of emotional intelligence affect servant leadership and team commitment mediated through servant leadership. I believe that other countries value different types of emotional intelligence such as UOE and EAO to a different extent and so will rate themselves and others differently. I also believe that work experience helps dictate SL as mediating in terms of EI and that because these participants haven't had much experience working under bosses with low EI, they don't realize the importance of having a high level of EI.

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## 감성지능이 팀 몰입에 미치는 영향 : 서번트 리더십의 매개효과

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### 요 약

이 연구는 리더의 감성지능이 서번트 리더십의 근원이라는 사실을 근거로, 리더의 감성지능이 부하들의 팀 몰입에 공헌한다는 사실을 매개관계를 통해 확인하기 위한 것이다. 이를 위해 리더의 감성지능은 팀장들이 직접 측정하였고, 리더의 서번트 리더십과 팀 몰입한 팀원들이 측정하여 동일방법편의(common method bias)의 문제점을 극복하였다. 측정은, 대학교에서 팀 과제를 수행하면서 팀장과 팀원이라는 역할구분이 되어있는 대학생들을 대상으로 설문지조사로 실시하였다. 연구결과, 감성지능의 요인 가운데, 타인감성에 대한 평가만이 서번트 리더십에 의미 있는 영향을 보이고 있으며, 서번트 리더십은 팀원들의 팀 몰입에 대한 리더의 감성지능을 완전 매개하는 것으로 밝혀졌다.

**핵심주제어 :** 감성지능, 서번트 리더십, 팀 몰입

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