



The Role of Servant Leadership in Predicting Job Performance of Public Sector Employees: Examining the Mediation of Work Engagement and Moderation of Trust in Leader and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This paper discusses an important issue concerning the contribution of servant leadership in terms of predicting job performance based on work engagement as the mediator while trust in leader and self-efficacy serve as the moderators. In line with the social exchange theory, research puts forward the notion that the positive emotional states with reciprocated trust lead the high levels of work engagement which subsequently contribute to more impressive job performance. The study obtained data from 350 employees of the public sector in Pakistan with 320 valid responses that were analyzed using SPSS 22 and Hayes Process Macro for mediating and moderating analyses. This means that servant leadership significantly boosts work engagement, which is a mediator in its effect on job performance. Moreover, trust in the leader strengthens the relationship of servant leadership style and the employees' work engagement, and finally, the perceived self-efficacy amplifies the effect of work engagement on job performance. In this light, the findings have important implications for understanding how servant leadership proves to be an important factor in creating a strong and vibrant organizational culture that supports and fosters employee engagement, commitment, and productivity through the activation of trust in leadership and self-efficacy as critical boundary conditions. By situating the analysis within the context of Pakistan, a high power-distance culture with limited empirical exploration of its leadership dynamics, the study offers important theoretical and practical contributions. It enriches the understanding of servant leadership in underrepresented contexts and emphasizes the strategic importance of fostering trust and self-efficacy within organizational frameworks. Such findings are of great importance for managers and policymakers, since they show how these constructs can be used to effectively operate in resource-constrained and rapidly changing environments.

Keywords: Social exchange theory, self-efficacy, work engagement, trust in leader, servant leadership style, job performance

1. Background of the study

Organizations worldwide face a constantly changing environment, requiring flexibility and creativity to maintain their competitive advantage. Sudden changes in economic conditions, technological advancement, and organizational behaviors require leadership strategies that emphasize both resilience and performance (Hou et al., 2019; Ng & Clercq, 2021). In countries like Pakistan, where economic and social challenges are very serious, the success of leadership plays a critical role in redressing inequalities and handling uncertainties. Among the different leadership styles, servant leadership style is best known for its ability to place employees' well-being on par with organizational success. Servant leaders focus on instilling trust, empowerment, and meaningful interpersonal relationships, which affects the engagement and performance of the employees (Van Dierendonk, 2011; Eva et al., 2019).

Although many variables contribute to and even help increase the organizational success of a company or a department, job-related performance is considered to be the most important factor and it is dependent on leadership styles and levels of employee engagement. Servant leadership, based on social exchange theory, is a reciprocal dynamic in which leaders support employees, and employees reciprocate by contributing positively to organizational goals (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). This mutual exchange has been identified as a key predictor of job performance through work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2022; Wadud, 2022). Work engagement is a reflection of the employee's devotion, vigor, and absorption in their work due to intrinsic motivation and a supporting work environment (Kahn, 1990). In countries like Pakistan, however, with high-power distance and limited resources, the interaction between these constructs that enhance job performance has been rarely researched, hence leaving a huge gap in the extant literature.

The challenge of consistent job performance is very significant in the case of the public sector in Pakistan. The economic catastrophe that came along with this pandemic has created a need to develop leadership models that can make their environment dynamic and hence foster trust and reliability among employees while working (Takeuchi et al., 2005; Bavik et al., 2017; Hasan & Sadat, 2023). Traditional approaches always emphasize authority and strict rules, hindering creativity and employee involvement (Kundu & Vora, 2004). Servant leadership focuses on building trust and developing the employees. It might then eliminate the deficiencies mentioned above through a forum that provides room for high engagement and creativity (Liden et al., 2008). Yet, this phenomenon of servant leadership has not been appropriately researched in the Pakistani context in particular, considering its implications for job performance with intervening and moderating variables like work engagement, trust in the leadership, and perceived self-efficacy.

In this study, employees' trust in their leader and their perceived self-efficacy are identified as critical boundary conditions. Trust is conceptualized as a psychological state characterized by positive expectations of others' intentions (Rousseau et al., 1998), which strengthens the relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement. Dependable, compassionate, and supportive leaders foster a setting of psychological safety, inspiring employees to fully invest themselves in their work (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Newman et al., 2014; Farhadi, 2021). Similarly, self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (2012) as the belief in one's ability to accomplish things, is a moderator between work engagement and job performance. Employees with a relatively higher level of self-efficacy are better able to translate their engagement into measurable outcomes, making it an essential factor in understanding the dynamics of job performance. Though these factors have theoretical importance, empirical studies in developing countries are sparse and require further research.

The present study aims to bridge those identified gaps by examining how servant leadership influences job performance through work engagement and how trust in the leadership and the perceived self-efficacy play a role in these dynamics. Based on the public sector of Pakistan, this study hopes to elaborate on the mechanisms that might enhance performance under limited

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resources, economic volatility, and a high-power distance environment. The results strengthen both theoretical insight and practical use by further expanding the application of social exchange theory in a unique cultural and organizational context. The importance of this study is rooted in its capacity to enhance leadership development and organizational frameworks within Pakistan and comparable developing nations. As organizations endeavor to rebound from the disturbances caused by the pandemic, gaining insight into the factors that promote trust, engagement, and self-efficacy is critical. Servant leadership, characterized by its focus on collaboration and practices centered around employees, presents a viable approach to constructing resilient organizations that can attain sustainable growth (Van Dierendonk, 2011; Eva et al., 2019). Furthermore, this research enriches the global literature on leadership by providing context-specific insights, emphasizing the relevance of cultural and structural nuances in shaping leadership effectiveness. Ultimately, it highlights the need for positive behavioral frameworks that align leadership practices with employee well-being and organizational objectives.

2. Literature Review

This section explores the relationships among several variables of interest in the present study. These constructs form the conceptual model that details how servant leader style influences employee performance through psychological and contextual factors.

2.1. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership emphasizes the improvement of employee's needs and development instead of following organizational hierarchy (Liden et al., 2008). This form of leadership inspires trust, morality, and quality interpersonal relations and helps individual goals align with those of an organization. It makes its followers feel included, in control, and that they respect each other which leads to more devoted employees (Eva et al., 2019).

In high power distance cultures like Pakistan, where hierarchical leadership is dominant, servant leadership becomes a transformational approach to bridge organizational gaps. By fulfilling the interpersonal and emotional needs of employees, servant leaders foster an inclusive culture that focuses on well-being and performance (Van Dierendonk, 2011). Such leadership is relevant in challenging economic environments, where resource constraints necessitate innovative and people-centric management practices.

2.2. Employee Engagement

Work engagement is a psychological condition characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees show resilience and involve themselves with activities that serve to add value to success in an organization. Their state of work engagement is the product of intrinsic motivations and a facilitative work setting, often developed through favorable leadership (Kahn, 1990).

Leadership has a paramount importance in increasing work engagement. Servant leaders, by using empathetic and empowering strategies, create an environment where employees view themselves as valued and inspired to improve their performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work engagement in the current study acts as an essential mediator in the sense that it acts as a pathway through which leadership influences job performance.

2.3. Job Performance

Job performance would be the ability of staff to perform their duties toward the achievement of organizational objectives (Campbell, 1990). It could be described as the kind of task-specific competencies, behaviors, and task-related outputs that help work toward an organization's strategic intent. High job performance is said to be associated with the following: work engagement, motivation, or leadership support (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

This study defined job performance as a dependent variable affected by servant leadership, moderated by trust in the leader and self-efficacy. That is, employees who perceive their leaders as engaged and supportive tend to demonstrate greater levels of job performance, which subsequently leads to improved organizational outcomes.

2.4. Trust in Leader

Trust in a leader may be described as the employees' belief in their leader's integrity, skills, and care for their well-being (Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust is very important for creating psychological safety and cooperation in the workplace. The more consistent and compassionate leaders are, the more they tend to establish trust among employees, which in turn motivates employees to take more responsibility in their jobs (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Trust serves as a critical boundary condition, shaping the interaction between servant leadership and work engagement. When employees trust their leaders, they are likely to respond positively to leadership strategies, which enhances their commitment and psychological investment in their duties (Newman et al., 2014).

2.5. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (2012), refers to an individual's conviction in their capacity to effectively execute tasks and surmount obstacles. Individuals exhibiting elevated levels of self-efficacy demonstrate increased resilience and adaptability, traits that are essential for attaining optimal performance results.

In this study, self-efficacy mediates the work engagement with job performance. The ones who have a high degree of self-efficacy find it easier to translate their engagements into concrete outcomes. Thus, this indicates the role of self-confidence and ability in organizing the organization towards success.

2.6. Hypotheses Development

2.6.1. Servant Leadership and Work Engagement

Servant leadership fosters an environment at work, where employees can feel a nurturing and inclusive atmosphere that encourages both psychological and emotional investment (Eva et al., 2019). As servant leaders give importance to the needs of employees and also provide them with independence, they instill commitment and enthusiasm that are fundamental for work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Appreciated and inspired, the employees, who are under the guidance of servant leaders, tend to be dedicated and participate in organizational activities (Liden et al., 2008).

- H1: Servant Leadership positively influences Work Engagement.

2.6.2. Worker Engagement and Job Performance

Work engagement acts as a direct motivator of job performance by channeling employee energy and motivation into productive outcomes (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees who are engaged, characterized by their energy and resilience, are likely to exceed expectations and play a meaningful role in achieving organizational success (Kahn, 1990).

- H2: Work engagement positively affects job performance.

2.6.3. Servant Leadership and Job Performance

Servant leadership directly impacts job performance by aligning employee efforts to organizational goals. Leaders who put trust, support, and empowerment first create an environment for high performance (Eva et al., 2019). Employees under servant leadership are more accountable and committed and therefore perform better (Van Dierendonk, 2011).

- H3: Servant leadership positively affects job performance.

2.6.4. Mediation of Work Engagement

Work engagement is the mechanism through which servant leadership impacts job performance. By creating an environment that encourages psychological presence servant leadership translates to higher performance through employee engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

- H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job performance.

2.6.5. Moderation of Trust in Leader

Trust in the leader amplifies the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Employees who trust their leader will respond more positively to leadership practices and be more emotionally and cognitively present in tasks (Rousseau et al., 1998).

- H5: Trust in the leader moderates servant leadership and work engagement.

2.6.6. Moderation of Self-Efficacy

It has been shown in previous research that self-efficacy strengthens the already strong relationship between work engagement and job performance by giving employees the confidence to overcome obstacles. Employees with high self-efficacy can translate their engagement into tangible outcomes better, so individual capability is key to achieving organizational goals (Bandura, 2012).

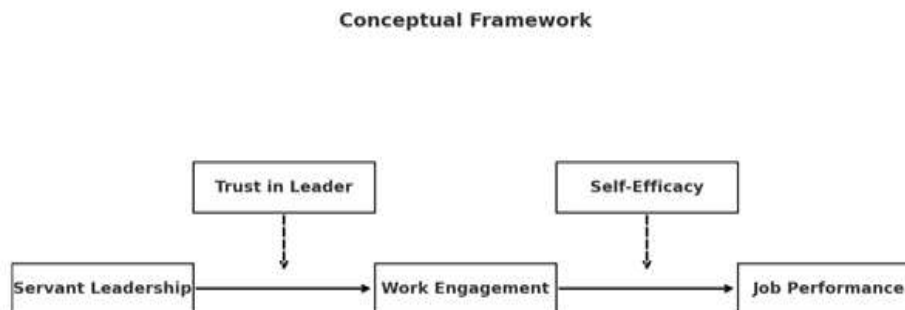
- H6: Self-efficacy moderates the effect of work engagement on job performance.

2.7. Underpinning Theory: Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) underpins this study by highlighting the reciprocal nature of relationships in organizations (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). SET states that trust, respect, and obligation drive positive exchanges between leaders and employees. Servant leadership is an example of this principle by creating a culture of mutual support, trust, and psychological safety, a virtuous cycle of engagement and performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees reciprocate supportive leadership by being more committed and productive, so the theory applies in all kinds of organizational contexts.

2.8. Conceptual Framework

The following Figure 1 shows the relationships between different variables whereas the solid arrows show are there to represent direct relationships and dotted arrows show the moderating effects. The relationship among different variables is based on Social Exchange Theory (SET).



3. Research Methodology

3.1. Population

The population for this study consists of employees working in public sector organizations in Pakistan. The public sector is relevant for this study as it faces leadership challenges due to hierarchical structures, resource constraints, and external economic pressures. Employees in this sector also experience varying levels of trust in their leaders, engagement, and self-efficacy, hence it is an ideal context to study the impact of servant leadership.

The population is diverse, including lower and higher management levels, and staff from different departments and functional areas. This will ensure that the sample will capture a wide range of perspectives on servant leadership and its effects.

3.2. Sample Size

The size of the sample was chosen through convenience sampling, a non-probability method, in which subjects are recruited as they are available and willing (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This is a fairly standard approach to organizational research when there is not enough access to a wide range of employees and random sampling isn't possible.

We recruited 350 employees from public sector organizations to take part in the study. From these, 320 valid responses were provided, so we had a high response rate and lots of data to work with. The sample size is good enough for statistically robust tests, such as regression and hypothesis testing. Participants were across the age, sex, and experience spectrums so that they were representative of the public workforce.

3.3. Sampling Technique

As already mentioned, this research used convenience sampling and subjects were chosen because they were available and willing. This is a biased approach, but it works in a company where access to staff is scarce. Participants were recruited in different public sector departments in Lahore, Pakistan so that a representative sample was taken from various organizational levels.

Convenience sampling was followed by snowball sampling to get to employees who were previously not easily reached, especially remote and high-level employees. It's a method that made sure the sample was as diverse as possible given the constraints of the research environment.

3.4. Data Collection

The primary instrument used to gather data was a structured questionnaire, which consisted of Likert and closed-ended questions. This questionnaire was designed to measure the most important constructs of the research, namely, servant leadership, work engagement, job performance, trust in the leader, and self-efficacy. Questions in the questionnaire were taken from previous scales of research to test its reliability and validity.

- **Servant Leadership:** Measured using the scale developed by Liden et al. (2008) that includes empathy, empowerment, and ethical behavior.
- **Work Engagement:** Measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002), It has three scales, namely, Vigor, dedication, and absorption.
- **Job Performance:** Measured using an adapted version of the scale proposed by Borman & Motowidlo (1997) to include task performance and contextual performance.
- **Trust in Leader:** Assessed through the instrument designed by Rousseau et al. (1998), based on how employees assess their leader's integrity and competence.
- **Self-Efficacy:** Assessed by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) with a general scale, which evaluates confidence to try to perform to successfully complete a specific task.

This survey was available both online and on paper so that those preferring either can have access. Participants had ample time to fill up the questionnaire. And guidelines were provided so as not to repeat similar questions with different wording.

3.5. Response Rate

The study achieved a high response rate of 320 valid responses collected from the 350 distributed questionnaires. This roughly represents a response rate of about 91%, considered satisfactory in organizational research. A high response rate further assures that the sample is representative, and the findings are reliable as well as valid.

3.6. Data Analysis

Data which was obtained from questionnaire forms was coded and analysed by the use of SPSS 22 software which is rich with many statistical tools for hypothesis testing and regression analysis. The data were cleaned initially to get rid of all incomplete or wrong responses and then it was subjected to descriptive statistics which summarized the sample demographics.

Hypotheses were tested by using hierarchical regression analysis. This method was used that allow testing of the direct and indirect relationships between variables while controlling for potential confounders. The regression models were built to examine the direct impact of servant leadership on job performance with a mediation effect of work engagement and a moderation effect of trust in leaders and self-efficacy.

Confirmatory factor analysis was also conducted to confirm the measurement scales that were used in this study. Therefore, it ensured that the constructs of servant leadership, work engagement, job performance, trust in the leader, and self-efficacy were properly measured and data collected were reliable.

3.7. Validity and Reliability

To guarantee the authenticity of the findings, the measurement instruments used in the research were moderated from scales, available in literature. Those scales have been already validated within an organizational context which helped tremendously to ensure that they could be applied to this particular study.

This was tested by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients which correspond to the internal consistency. All scales showed good reliability with values above the threshold of 0.70 which is in the recommended range. Thus, this fact serves as evidence that measurement instruments employed in the course of study are reliable and consistent.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted using ethical codes at all stages of the completion. Prior consents were attained from all the participants guaranteeing that they are fully informed about the research objectives and their right to discontinue their participation at any time without being penalized. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were considered because no identifying information personally was collected, as well data was kept confidential.

The research complied with the ethical guidelines set forth by an institutional review board, making certain that no participant was harmed or experienced any discomfort during the study. The commitment to ethical considerations helped uphold the legitimacy and integrity of the research.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

We began by assessing the descriptive statistics to view the demographic characteristics of the sample and the key variables we explored. Our sample consisted of 320 participants from various public sector organizations in Pakistan. Demographic data indicated that our sample was diverse regarding gender, age, job tenure, and department. Most of our participants were in the age bracket of 30-40 years (45%), followed by 52% male and 48% female.

Table 1 below shows the mean standard deviation and range for the key variables in this study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|-------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Servant Leadership (SL) | 4.32 | 0.62 | 2.50 | 5.00 |
| Work Engagement (WE) | 4.45 | 0.58 | 2.75 | 5.00 |
| Job Performance (JP) | 4.20 | 0.55 | 3.00 | 5.00 |
| Trust in Leader (TL) | 4.50 | 0.61 | 2.80 | 5.00 |
| Self-Efficacy (SE) | 4.38 | 0.60 | 3.00 | 5.00 |

The mean scores for all variables are quite high. This suggests that respondents think servant leadership practices exist in their organizations, along with positive work engagement, job performance, trust in leaders, and self-efficacy.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

We then did a Pearson correlation analysis to examine how the key variables relate to each other. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis. The correlations show that all variables have a significant connection to each other, which supports our hypotheses. Specifically, servant leadership was positively correlated with work engagement ($r = .67, p < .01$), job performance ($r = .63, p < .01$), and trust in leader ($r = .72, p < .01$). Work engagement was also positively correlated with job performance ($r = .68, p < .01$), and trust in leader was positively correlated with both work engagement ($r = .61, p < .01$) and job performance ($r = .65, p < .01$).

Table 2: Correlations among Variables

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Servant Leadership (SL) | 1 | | | | |
| 2. Work Engagement (WE) | .67** | 1 | | | |
| 3. Job Performance (JP) | .63** | .68** | 1 | | |
| 4. Trust in Leader (TL) | .72** | .61** | .65** | 1 | |
| 5. Self-Efficacy (SE) | .58** | .64** | .60** | .58** | 1 |

Note: $p < .01$

Such outcomes indicate strong positive interrelationships of servant leadership with work engagement, job performance, leader trust, and self-efficacy. These directly offer supporting evidence for the hypothesized positive interrelations among the variables.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1. Testing the Direct Effects

We applied hierarchical regression analysis to test the direct influence of servant leadership on work engagement, job performance, and employees' trust in the leader. The results from the regression analysis of the first three hypotheses are presented below.

- H1: Servant Leadership positively influences Work Engagement.

The regression analysis established that servant leadership was an important predictor of work engagement such that $\beta = .67, p < .001$ supported Hypothesis 1: employees who perceived their leaders as supportive and empowering were likely to be more highly engaged at work.

- H2: Work Engagement Influences Job Performance Positively.

Similarly, work engagement was a strong predictor of job performance ($\beta = .68, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Employees who were engaged were more likely to demonstrate higher levels of performance in their roles.

- H3: Servant Leadership positively influences Job Performance.

Servant leadership demonstrated a considerable and positive effect on job performance ($\beta = .63, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3. As the employees felt greater support and appreciation from their leaders, their job performance improved proportionally.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Direct Effects

| Predictor Variable | β | SE | t | p-value |
|--------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|---------|
| Servant Leadership → Work Engagement | .67** | 0.05 | 13.46 | < .001 |
| Work Engagement → Job Performance | .68** | 0.06 | 11.33 | < .001 |
| Servant Leadership → Job Performance | .63** | 0.05 | 12.60 | < .001 |

Note: $p < .001$

4.4. Mediation Analysis

To test the mediating role of work engagement between servant leadership and job performance, we used Model 4 from the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013). This model measures indirect effects and is commonly applied to research that examines mediation. The results showed that work engagement significantly mediated the association between servant leadership and job performance (indirect effect = .4565, SE = .0452, 95% CI = [.3678, .5486]).

This suggests that servant leadership impacts job performance both directly and indirectly through work engagement, thus supporting the conceptual model. The indirect effect was significant at the 95% confidence interval, suggesting that work engagement is a mediator through which servant leadership is translated into better job performance.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis: Servant Leadership → Work Engagement → Job Performance

| Predictor Variable | β | SE | t | p-value | Indirect Effect | 95% CI (Lower, Upper) |
|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|-------|---------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Servant Leadership → Work Engagement | .67** | 0.05 | 13.46 | < .001 | | |
| Work Engagement → Job Performance | .68** | 0.06 | 11.33 | < .001 | | |
| Indirect Effect | .4565 | 0.0452 | 10.11 | < .001 | .4565 | [.3678, .5486] |

Note: $p < .001$

4.5. Moderation Analysis

In light of our preceding analysis, we further examine if this interplay between trust in leadership and self-efficacy is also likely to be a boundary condition and possibly buffer the link between servant leadership and work engagement as well as work engagement and job performance, using a moderation analysis with PROCESS Macro employing Model 1 and Model 2 for these interactions.

4.5.1. Moderation of Trust in Leader

Trust in leader significantly moderated the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement ($\beta = .32, p < .01$). That is, at higher levels of trust, the positive effect of servant leadership on work engagement tends to be stronger. There was a significant effect of the proposed interaction of servant leadership and trust in the leader (interaction effect = .28, $p < .01$), which reveals that trust in the leader intensifies the positive effect of servant leadership on engagement.

4.5.2. Moderation of Self-Efficacy

Likewise, perceived self-efficacy significantly moderated the relationship between work engagement and job performance ($\beta = .34, p < .01$). It has shown that the effect of work engagement on job performance is stronger among workers who reportedly possess higher levels of perceived self-efficacy. Moreover, the extent of the interaction effect was significant between work engagement and self-efficacy with a reported value of .30, $p < .01$, which signifies that self-efficacy enhances the influence of work engagement toward the betterment of job performance.

Table 5: Moderation Analysis for Trust in Leader and Self-Efficacy

| Predictor | β | SE | t-value | p-value | 95% CI (Lower, Upper) |
|--|---------|------|---------|---------|-----------------------|
| Model 1: SL \times TL \rightarrow WE | | | | | |
| Servant Leadership (SL) | .50** | 0.08 | 6.25 | < .001 | [0.34, 0.66] |
| Trust in Leader (TL) | .32** | 0.09 | 3.56 | < .01 | [0.15, 0.49] |
| SL \times TL Interaction | .28** | 0.09 | 3.12 | < .01 | [0.11, 0.45] |
| Model 2: WE \times SE \rightarrow JP | | | | | |
| Work Engagement (WE) | .65** | 0.08 | 8.11 | < .001 | [0.51, 0.79] |
| Self-Efficacy (SE) | .34** | 0.10 | 3.40 | < .01 | [0.14, 0.53] |
| WE \times SE Interaction | .30** | 0.07 | 4.29 | < .001 | [0.16, 0.44] |

Note: $p < .01$

CI: Confidence Interval (95%)

SL: Servant Leadership

TL: Trust in Leader

WE: Work Engagement

JP: Job Performance

SE: Self-Efficacy

Table 5 shows the moderation effects for two interactions as given below.

- **Servant Leadership (SL) \rightarrow Work Engagement (WE):** Above, the table clearly shows how Servant Leadership directly influences Work Engagement. The coefficient is statistically significant; $\beta = 0.50, p < .001$. This implies that the higher levels of servant leadership are related to higher work engagement levels.
- **Trust in Leader (TL):** The coefficient of trust in the leader is $\beta = 0.32$, which shows that trust in the leader has a moderate effect and is indeed positively related to work engagement, the relationship of both is statistically significant as depicted by $p < .01$.
- **SL \times TL Interaction:** The interaction coefficient $\beta = 0.28$ reveals that servant leadership moderates the relationship between employees' work engagement and the level of trust developed for the leader. The stronger the level of trust developed for the leader, the stronger the linkage of servant leadership with work engagement. The interaction effect is also statistically significant at $p < .01$.
- **Work Engagement (WE) \rightarrow Job Performance (JP):** Work engagement was found to significantly influence job performance positively, with $\beta = 0.65$ at $p < .001$.
- **Self-Efficacy (SE):** Self-efficacy was an essential moderator that moderated the association of work engagement with job performance ($\beta = 0.34, p < .01$), suggesting that self-efficacy would predict higher proficiency at rendering excellent job performance in translations from engagement.
- **WE \times SE Interaction:** The interaction between work engagement and job performance, as represented by the term ($\beta = 0.30$), indicates that the relationship between these two variables is stronger for people with a higher self-efficacy. This interaction is statistically significant at $p < .001$.

The findings supported all six hypotheses. Servant leadership has positive effects on work engagement, job performance, and leader trust. In addition, work engagement was an important mediator between servant leadership and job performance, and both leader trust and self-efficacy acted as moderators of these relationships in expected ways. These results support the proposed conceptual model and underscore the importance of servant leadership in enhancing work engagement and job performance, particularly in public sector organizations.

5. Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

The main objective of the current study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership, work engagement, and job performance within which work engagement acted as a mediator and employees' trust in the leader and their perceived self-efficacy as moderators. Collected data were examined were analyzed, and the findings thereof support the hypotheses developed

for this study. Furthermore, these findings would help extend theoretical understanding and application of these variables more specifically in the public sector.

The results first revealed a strong and positive relationship between the servant leadership style and work engagement of public sector employees ($\beta = .67, p < .001$), supporting the notion that servant leadership fosters an employee involvement climate. This particular finding is very much consistent with previous research on the matter, which has shown that servant leadership style enhances employees' general well-being and motivation by focusing on their specific needs (Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonk, 2011). The rightful emphasis that managers practicing servant leadership style place on empowerment, trust, and ethical conduct fosters a strong sense of purpose and commitment within employees, subsequently enhancing their work engagement (Eva et al., 2019).

It was also concluded that work engagement significantly impacts job performance ($\beta = .68, p < .001$), indicating that engaged employees are likely to exhibit higher performance levels in their jobs. This finding is also consistent with numerous previous studies that emphasize the importance of work engagement as a crucial factor in organizational success and improved overall performance (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees who are engaged in their work reportedly have higher levels of energy, commitment, and tenacity that result in better organizational performance outcomes.

This further ascertained servant leadership has a rather strong and positive effect on job performance ($\beta = .63, p < .001$). This result shows that servant leadership benefits not only increased engagement but improves job performance directly, supporting previous studies, which have emphasized the positive impacts of servant leadership on organizational outcomes (Liden et al., 2008).

Furthermore, mediation analysis revealed that work engagement is clearly serving as a mediator in the positive relationship between servant leadership style of managers and employees' job performance (indirect effect = .4565, $p < .001$), underlining the importance of worker engagement as a link for the transformation of leadership programs into performance-related outcomes. The results provide empirical support to the hypothesis that the positive impact of servant leadership on job performance are partially due to its effect on employees' work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Lastly, the analyses of moderation effects further emphasized that the trust in leadership and self-efficacy act as critical boundary conditions for this study. More explicitly, the researchers found that trust in leadership did significantly interact with servant leadership in predicting work engagement (interaction effect = .28, $p < .01$), meaning that employees, who feel positive about their leaders and have trust in their leaders that their leaders will keep their best interests in mind, are expected to be more engaged and immersed in their work. The results of this study align with earlier research indicating that confidence in leadership significantly contributes to employee dedication and effectiveness (Rousseau et al., 1998; Brown & Treviño, 2006). In addition, perceived self-efficacy was proven to significantly moderate the connection between work engagement and job performance (interaction effect = .30, $p < .01$), implying that employees exhibiting higher levels of perceived self-efficacy are more adept at translating their engagement into improved performance outcomes (Bandura, 2012).

5.2. Implications of the Study

5.2.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the extant literature about theorizing on leadership-performance relationships by generalizing the applicability of SET to the servant leadership context. According to SET, positive exchanges between leaders and followers, based on trust and mutual respect, lead to commitment among employees and better performance (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). By exhibiting the fact that the servant leadership style of managers improves work engagement and enhances job performance through trust in the leader and perceived self-efficacy of employees, this study proves to be an exceptional example in providing empirical evidence supporting the application of SET to leadership research and practices.

This study also extends the ever-increasing body of knowledge that is interested in examining work engagement as a mediator in the links between different styles of leadership and employees' job-related performance. While the extant research has consistently shown that engagement is a performance accelerator (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), this study identifies work engagement as the basic process through which servant leadership style affects employees' job performance in the public sector. It is important because it emphasizes the role of employee engagement as both an outcome and an enhancer of effective leadership practices.

5.2.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study hold significant value because of its practical implications for organizations, particularly for the public sector. Because of the fact that servant leadership style has proven to have a strong and positive effect on both employees' work engagement and their job performance, organizations should encourage leaders in various divisions and departments to adopt the servant leadership approach to promote a more supportive, empowering work environment. By meeting employee needs, providing development opportunities, and promoting a culture of trust and collaboration, leaders can foster engagement and contribute to higher overall performance.

Moreover, the present study highlights the importance of trust in leadership and perceived self-efficacy as crucial boundary conditions. It is through the achievement of high levels of trust that organizations can function with great efficiency since it fosters not only engagement but also more effective leadership, while training programs aimed at strengthening self-efficacy help employees convert their engagement into job performance improvements. Higher self-efficacy is related to employees' confidence in their ability to make contributions toward organizational goals, and this generates higher motivation and job performance.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

Even though the study reveals crucial outcomes, it has some limitations that need to be laid out for other researchers. The first among these limitations is the reliance of this research on cross-sectional data collection which hinders the ability of researchers to effectively draw causal inferences. Although the study reveals significant relationships between the variables, the cross-sectional approach cannot conclusively assert a cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. Future research may employ a longitudinal method to better examine the causal effects of servant leadership on job performance over time.

In addition, this study employed a convenience sampling technique which is a non-random sampling technique and it may lead to bias since the sample selected may not broadly represent the total population. Participants were chosen based on their availability and the researcher's ease of access to them; this alone could limit the generalizability of the outcomes since it is

widely practiced in organizational research. Follow-up studies can utilize random sampling techniques to enhance the external validity and generalization.

All told, the study was conducted within the public sector of Pakistan, which may limit how widely the findings of this study can be generalized to other sectors or different countries. The uniqueness of a specific public sector in terms of structural systems and challenges may determine how leadership behaviors are conceived and enacted. Future studies can expand this study so that it encompasses other types of sectors and cultural systems intending to establish how consistent the findings are given all different organizational contexts.

5.4. Guidelines for Future Research

Considering the limitations imposed by the current study, quite a few future research directions are presented. Longitudinal research for subsequent studies on this topic can look to uncover the long-term results of servant leadership on the subjects being studied by examining time sequences.

Another line of inquiry might be the degree to which different leadership approaches affect work engagement and job performance. Servant leadership is effective, but other leadership styles- perhaps transformational and ethical leadership- might have the same kind of impact on employees' outcomes. Research that compares these different styles could help reveal how effective each of them is in promoting engagement and performance.

Third, future studies could explore organizational culture as a boundary condition in the relationship between different styles of leadership and several other important employee outcomes. Organizational culture is an important factor that helps in shaping necessary attitudes and behaviors among employees, and insights into its interaction with various styles of leadership may significantly contribute to improving organizational performance.

5.5. Conclusion

In summary, the current research provides strong evidence that can be useful to understand and interpret managerial implications in public organizations. This study has shown that servant leadership has a positive, strong, and significant effect on both employees' work engagement and their job performance, with work engagement being a mediator in the direct link and trust in the leader, as well as self-efficacy, acting as buffers or moderators. These findings advance the theoretical understanding of servant leadership style within the context of SET and provide useful insights to better understand the importance of employees' work engagement in achieving and sustaining higher levels of job performance. The study also provides practical implications for organizations, particularly in the public sector, that servant leadership, trust-building, and enhancing self-efficacy may lead to improved employee outcomes.

Despite its limitations, the study remains a significant contribution to the existing literature on leadership styles and employee performance, opening the avenues for further research on the longitudinal effects of different types of leadership and the role of organizational culture in shaping ideal employees' behavior.

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