Original Article

How Do Servant Leaders Affect Performance in Not-for-Profit Sector? The Mediating Role of Interactional Justice in Servant Leadership and Performance Link

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Abstract

Servant leadership, an emerging theory of leadership, is mainly characterized by leaders' altruistic, ethical, and spiritual concern for their followers. In accordance with the gaps in the current literature, this study was an attempt to contribute to servant leadership research by empirically testing its relationship to performance (task performance and OCB) with interactional justice as a mediator in this relationship. A convenience sampling technique was used to collect data from (N=399) not-for-profit (NGO) representatives and found that interactional justice mediates the relationship between servant leadership and task performance and OCB.

Keywords: Interactional justice, OCB, Servant leadership, Task performance

INTRODUCTION

Leaders can and do make a difference in elevating and uplifting their followers and organizations. That's probably one reason why leadership has been one of the most extensively researched processes in organizational behavior and management (VanMeter, Chonko, Grisaffe, & Goad, 2016). Leaders are actively engaged with their followers and try their best to keep them energized and motivated. One such leadership theory that emphasizes followers and their needs is servant leadership. Servant leadership is characterized by its focus on followers and other stakeholders. The concept of servant leadership was coined five decades ago by Greenleaf (1970, 1977) who defined it as a leadership style which "begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 27). Servant leaders are filled with humility and never consider themselves any better or superior to their followers (Stone et al., 2004). Servant leaders put forth the interests of their followers above their self-interests and act as ethical role models for their followers (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008).

Servant leaders are known for their high ethical standards and deep concern for the development of their followers (Ehrhart, 2004). Servant leaders not only show concern for their followers but also are actively engaged in behaviors that benefit a wide range of stakeholders including customers, families, and the wider community (Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2008). Being a promising field of research, servant leadership has attracted the interest of some researchers recently (Langhof & Guldenbuerg, 2020). Many empirical studies have been undertaken to validate this multidimensional leadership theory in recent years. Servant leadership has been conceptualized at the individual level of analysis. In the most recent systematic literature review undertaken by Coetzer et al. (2017), servant leadership has been found

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to be positively related to work engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, innovative behavior, organizational commitment, trust, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, person-job fit, person-organizational fit, LMX and work-life balance and negatively related to turnover intentions on individual level.

Servant leadership is still considered at the early stage of theoretical development (Liden et al., 2014). Researchers feel that servant leadership theory is "under-defined with no consensus on its definition or theoretical framework" (Parris & Peachey, 2013; p. 383; Coetzer et al., 2017). There is a need to extend research on servant leadership because this construct is still under-researched as compared to other well-established leadership theories like transformational and charismatic leadership (Langhof & Guldenbuerg, 2020; Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017; Panaccio et al., 2015). Although servant leadership has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners alike in is recent years, it is still considered as an under-researched construct (Langhof & Güldenberg, 2020). Lee et al. (2020) stated that although there is a proliferation of research on servant leadership, we still lack clarity on establishing the theoretical pathways that explain the effects of this construct. Hunter (2013) noted that there has been a relatively small body of empirical investigations conducted up to this point in time, aimed at scrutinizing the connection between servant leadership and its effects, spanning across both individual and team levels. In a similar vein, Parris and Peachey (2013) observed that a considerable chunk of the existing scholarship concerning servant leadership has predominantly centered around the development of theoretical constructs or the refinement of the conceptual framework that encompasses the servant leadership construct.

Many researchers still feel that the servant leadership construct needs to be investigated empirically both at individual and team levels in various settings and contexts and settings (see for example: Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2014; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Although the term servant leadership emerged in the literature almost five decades ago through a landmark essay by Greenleaf (1970), actual empirical studies about this construct started very recently. Moreover, almost 90% of the empirical studies in the field are undertaken in the West and North America (Parris & Peachey, 2013). There is a dire need that more and more empirical studies be undertaken in other contexts and cultures so that servant leadership can be established as a universal construct (Langhof & Güldenberg, 2020; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Moreover, some recent studies in the field have highlighted the need of testing multiple and competing mediators in order to gain an insight into the pathways of indirect effects of servant leadership and more clearly establishing nomological network of this emerging construct (see for example: Eva et al., 2019; Langhof & Güldenberg, 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

In order to fill these gaps in the literature, this study attempts to empirically investigate servant leadership through a novel mediation framework in a new cultural and sectoral context. This study, thus, would go a long way in enhancing the existing conceptual understanding of this construct and would contribute to the current body of knowledge of servant leadership.

The present research aims at further deepening our understanding regarding servant leadership by empirically testing a unique mediation framework in a unique context. More specifically, the aim of this study was:

- To empirically examine the possible relationship between servant leadership and outcome variables including task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

- To empirically examine the mediating role of the interactional justice component of organizational justice perceptions in the possible relationship between servant leadership and outcome variables including task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

This study expands the current research in at least two ways: First, while servant leadership construct has been researched with many individual level outcomes in previous studies (see Coetzer et al. (2017) for an updated and comprehensive list), the current study is an original effort in examining the relationship between servant leadership and employees' job-related outcomes (task performance, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) with interactional justice as a mediator in this relationship. Second, this study is being conducted in not-for-profit sector (including NGOs, INGOs, Trusts, Foundations etc.) whereas previous research has rarely taken into consideration this sector with regards to research on servant leadership construct. The current study, thus, adds value to the servant leadership construct considered still in its early stage of development. Third, this study is being conducted in the unique geographical and cultural context of the Balochistan province of Pakistan. While most of the research on servant leadership is conducted in the Western context, this study validates servant leadership as a universal construct

equally applicable to the South Asian context.

Servant Leadership

The term servant leadership was coined by Robert Greenleaf after reading Hesse (1956) remarkable novel Journey to the East. Greenleaf (1970) introduced servant leadership in his essay The Servant as Leader as a way of life rather than a management technique. According to Greenleaf (1977), servant leadership begins with "the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (p. 7). Greenleaf (1977) considered servant leadership not an end per se but an inward lifelong journey. Servant leadership has thus been defined in many ways by researchers in the past four decades. What makes servant leadership distinct from other leadership constructs is its primary focus is on serving others. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) states that servant leaders are distinguished by both their 'doing' (serving others) and by their 'being' (self-concept of being a servant) and this combination ultimately aspire them to lead. Servant leaders possess strong character and take on the role as well as the nature of a servant (Jaworski, 1997). Though the construct of servant leadership is relatively new, its roots and practice date way back to ancient times and civilizations (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Keith, 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Kurth (2003) argues that founders of all the world's great religions and ancient thinkers have teachings relevant to the concept of servant leadership. Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad, Buddha and Confucius have teachings emphasizing this concept. Jesus Christ's washing of the feet of his disciples and Prophet Muhammad's active participation in the digging of trench as a defense line against enemies alongside his companions in Medina can be regarded as the ultimate examples of servant leadership.

The majority of servant leadership research is believed to be based on Greenleaf's work but there is still no consensus on the exact definition of this construct among the researchers (Parris & Peachey, 2013; VanMeter et al., 2016; Coetzer et al., 2017). The very reason that servant leaders are defined by their character and their commitment to serve others, poses a challenge to the researchers to define the construct and develop a theoretical model that encompasses Greenleaf's message effectively (Proser, 2010). One of the protégés of Greenleaf, Spears (1995), extended his work and concluded that servant leaders possess ten distinct traits including empathy, listening, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, stewardship, foresight, commitment to the growth of people, and community building. Further extending the work of Greenleaf, Laub (1998) conceptualized servant leadership as "an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader" (p. 25). Laub's (1998) conceptual model of servant leadership had six characteristics including personal development, valuing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership).

During the past two decades (between the years 2000-2020), a stream of research on servant leadership (both empirical and conceptual) emerged. Servant leadership was conceptualized, and its measures were developed. Some of the prominent measures developed during this time include in chronological order: Russel and Stone (2002); Page and Wong's (2000); Patterson (2003); Ehrhart (2004); Barbuto and Wheeler (2006); Liden et al. (2008); Sendjaya et al. (2008); van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010); Liden et al. (2015); van Dierendonck et al. (2017); and Sendjaya et al. (2018) to name few. In recent years more and more researchers have shown interest in empirically testing servant leadership. A number of empirical studies emerged (though still not sufficient) in the past two decades clarifying this construct further. Recent empirical studies reveal that on an individual level, servant leadership has a positive relationship with work engagement (De Clercq et al., 2014; De Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2014; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2015); organizational commitment (Bobbio et al., 2012; Chinomona et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Zhou & Miao, 2014); organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Bobbio et al., 2012; Panaccio et al., 2014); innovative behavior (Liden et al., 2014; Neubert et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2014); job satisfaction (Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015; Jones, 2012; Mehta & Pillay, 2011; Chung et al., 2010; Sturm, 2009); self-efficacy (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Tang et al., 2015), person-job-fit (Carter & Baghurst, 2013); person-organizational-fit (Jaramillo et al., 2009), leader-member exchange (Hanse et al., 2015; Newman et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013); trust (Chatbury et al., 2011; Chinomona et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2014).

Servant Leadership and Task Performance

Researchers have bifurcated performance as in-role and extra role. In-role performance, such as task performance are behaviors that are part of the job description of an employee and are also recognized by an organization's reward system (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Williams & Anderson, 1991). Servant leadership establishes a critical mechanism in the workplace in order to safeguard ethical standards in an

organization while also promoting performance (Farida et al., 2020). Previous research in the field reveals that there is a positive link between servant leadership and employees' task or in-role performance (see for example: Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Farida et al., 2020; Liden et al., 2015).

Servant leaders affect the task performance of their followers differently as compared to their counterparts (for example transformational leaders or charismatic leaders). This is because servant leaders primarily focus on the fulfilling the needs and interests of their followers whereas transformational leaders focus their energies on achieving the organizational goals (Liden et al., 2015). This focus of servant leaders, according to Yang and Gu (2017), assist their followers flourish and grow in their work context ultimately enhancing the task performance of their subordinates. Moreover, servant leaders empower their subordinates by providing them with control to identify and solve organizational problems (Panaccio et al., 2015). This empowerment gives the followers of servant leaders a sense of liberty to take risks and be creative in whatever way they can to perform their duties and responsibilities prescribed in their job description.

Extending these findings, we propose that it is more likely that servant leadership would enhance employees' task performance. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership is positively related to employees' task performance.

Servant Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to all those performance behaviors that are not usually found in the formal job descriptions of employees and that directly or indirectly support the organization's psychological as well as social environment (Organ, 1997). OCB falls under the extra-role behavior of performance dimension (Katz, 1964). Usually discretionary in nature, extra-role behavior has no direct link to the formal reward system of an organization (Organ, 1997). OCB results in many benefits to the organizations including increase in customer satisfaction and organizational productivity; and reduction in turnover intentions and absenteeism of employees (Podsakoff et al., 2009). Previous research in the field reveals that there is a positive link between servant leadership and employees' OCB (see for example: Bobbio et al., 2012; Farida et al., 2020; Liden et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2014; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Graham (1995) argues that servant leaders encourage a kind of moral reasoning in their followers ultimately enhancing their citizenship behavior. Servant leaders are known for their special emphases on engaging and developing all the stakeholders (beyond their followers) and giving back to society (Sendjaya et al. 2019). In return, the followers of servant leaders reciprocate this act and respond with a similar attitude and behavior to uplift their communities and societies (Newman et al., 2017).

Since servant leaders are characterized by their focus on the growth of their followers in and of themselves (Graham, 1991) and they put the interests of their followers ahead of their own (Wheeler, 2006), it's most likely that the followers of a servant leader will be engaged in pro-social and pro-organizational behaviors that go beyond the normal call for duty. Extending these findings, we propose that it is more likely that servant leadership would enhance employees' organizational citizenship behavior. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership is positively related to employees' OCB.

Interactional Justice as a Mediator between Servant Leadership and Task Performance

Research on organizational justice attempts to "describe and explain the role of fairness as a consideration in the workplace" (Greenberg, 1990, p. 400). Organizational justice refers to the fairness of workplace outcomes, procedures and interactions, as perceived by employees of an organization (Baldwin, 2006). Researchers have used the terms 'fairness' and 'justice' interchangeably. Organizational justice has previously been categorized as distributive, procedural and interactional justice as its three dimensions (Colquitt et al., 2001). Distributive justice is mainly concerned with the way employees perceive fairness of reward allocations. Procedural justice is mainly focused with how employees perceive the fairness of reward allocation process. And interactional justice is mainly concerned with the way people receive interpersonal treatment while organizational procedures are being implemented (Colquitt et al., 2001). In this study, we focus on interactional justice dimension of organizational justice perceptions. Fairness or justice, according to Baldwin (2006), is a subjective construct mainly capturing the fundamental elements of a particular social structure. Previous research has found that organizational justice perceptions are positively linked with model behaviors and negatively linked with misconduct or

misbehavior (Martinson et al., 2010).

Servant leaders are known for their integrity and high ethical standards as well as their focus on the needs of their followers over and above their own needs (Liden et al., 2008; Russell, 2001). Servant leaders embody the values of honesty and equality among their followers (Russell, 2001). That's one reason servant leaders, unlike other leaders (like transformational, charismatic etc.) are expected to remain fair and just in their treatment of the followers. This is exactly what Mayer et al. (2008) stated. Fairness or justice is a primary concern of servant leaders because they are extremely sensitive to needs of their followers, hence it can be expected that they would do their best to treat their subordinates in the most considerate and dignified manner possible (Mayer et al., 2008). This fair treatment would ultimately enhance followers' commitment towards their job and the organization. It is, therefore, expected that servant leadership would engender commitment which, in turn, would result in enhanced performance of the followers. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Interactional justice mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employees' task performance.

Interactional Justice as a Mediator between Servant Leadership and OCB

Unlike the traditional top-down leadership approaches, servant leaders are keener towards promoting collaboration, empathizing with followers, building trust and encouraging collaboration among team members to assist them develop and grow personally and professionally (Schwepker, 2016). Previous research supports the relationship between servant leadership and fairness in reward allocation, particularly the procedural justice dimension (Ehrhart, 2004; Mayer et al., 2008; and Walumbwa et al., 2010 can be referred to as examples). Along similar lines, Mayer et al. (2008), servant leaders emphasize fairness for three main reasons: First and foremost, servant leaders, because of their sensitivity towards their subordinates, would do their best to treat their followers in the most considerate and dignified manner possible. That's why it is very likely that a servant leader would consider the individual situation of each of the subordinates to ensure the fairness of rewards, procedures, and other allied interactions in a given setup. Secondly, because of their ethical nature, servant leaders, by their very nature, exhibit ethical values and these values are reflected in whatever decisions they make. Subsequently, fairness would be given prime importance while developing or defining subordinate expected inputs and outcomes. Thirdly, servant leaders focus heavily on the growth and well-being of their subordinates. This characteristic of servant leaders goes a long way in aligning the reward system of the organization with the development and well-being of individual followers. Since servant leaders also strive to form an individual connection with each follower (Hunter et al., 2013), this study focuses on the mediating role of the interactional justice dimension of organizational justice perceptions in the possible relationship between servant leadership and various organizational outcomes. The link between servant leadership and interactional justice has already been established in previous research (see Kool & van Dierendonck (2012) as an example).

According to Hunter et al. (2013), two main social influence theories that form the basis of servant leadership behaviors are Blau's (1964) social exchange theory and the renowned theory of Bandura's (1977) known as social learning theory. The main premise of social learning theory is that the values, behaviors and attitudes of role models in an environment form the basis of learning of individuals – mainly through modeling of role models' behaviors (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Followers have a natural tendency to mimic the behaviors of their leaders (Wood & Bandura, 1989). This is specially the case when followers see their leaders as credible and trustworthy role models (Hunter et al., 2013). Since servant leaders, because of having altruistic motivations, are perceived by their followers as credible role models (Brown et al., 2005), they tend to be innately driven to serve in the humblest manner without expecting to be served in return. Consequently, this humble service of servant leaders is often imitated by their followers (Graham, 1991). Such behaviors of servant leaders are thus reciprocated by the followers by returning the service as explained by social exchange theory of (Blau, 1964).

From this discussion, it can be presumed that it is through this social influence process that servant leaders inspire their followers to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors. This is very much in line with Greenleaf's (1991, p.13-14) which states, "Do they, while being served, become . . . more likely themselves to become servants?" Hunter et al. (2013) suggests that, through the social influence process, service behavior would perpetuate at the individual level to inspire followers to reciprocate by serving other stakeholders and remain fair and engaged with the organization. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: Interactional justice mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employees' OCB.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents and Procedure

Respondents were drawn from the not-for-profit organizations operating in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. We used a convenient sampling technique to collect data. We collected our data through the administration of survey questionnaires, with participants willingly choosing to participate in the survey. To gather this data, we distributed questionnaires to the study's participants. Prior to their completion, our research team offered a detailed explanation of the study's goals and the content of the questionnaires. Furthermore, participants were assured of the strict confidentiality of their responses to encourage open and honest feedback from the respondents. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed amongst the staff of various not-for-profit organizations operating in the province of Balochistan including NGOs, INGOs, Trusts, Foundations etc. The employees were from diverse backgrounds including project/program staff and operation workers. A total of 399 respondents returned the duly filled questionnaires.

Measures

Servant Leadership

In our study, we employed the assessment tool created by Liden et al. (2008) to gauge servant-leadership qualities. This particular scale comprises 28 items and is widely recognized as one of the most commonly utilized instruments for appraising servant leadership. To assess their immediate supervisors, study participants were requested to rate them on a seven-point Likert scale. This scale spanned from 1, signifying "strongly disagree," to 7, indicating "strongly agree." Sample items include: "My immediate supervisor emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .96 in the current study.

Task Performance

We assessed task performance utilizing a scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991), comprising five items. Employees themselves provided the evaluations of their task performance, which were based on their own reports (self-reported). To carry out this assessment, we employed a 7-point Likert scale, with values spanning from 1, signifying "strongly disagree," to 7, signifying "strongly agree." Sample items include: "I fulfill the responsibilities specified in my job description." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .90 in the current study.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was measured using the 5-item scale of Podsakoff and Mackenzie (1994). Employees themselves provided the evaluations of their OCB, which were based on their own reports (self-reported). To carry out this assessment, we employed a 7-point Likert scale, with values spanning from 1, signifying "strongly disagree," to 7, signifying "strongly agree." Sample items include: "I willingly take time out of my busy schedule to help others." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .84 in the current study.

Interactional Justice

Moorman's (1991) 8-item measure was used to measure interactional justice. It was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .92 in the current study.

Data Analysis

The study commenced with an initial analysis utilizing IBM-SPSS, employing various statistical approaches to scrutinize the data. Initially, a frequency distribution of respondents' profiles was generated and presented in Table I. Rigorous attention was devoted to the coding and editing processes to ensure the precision of the data. Subsequently, data screening procedures were implemented to address concerns related to missing data, outliers, and normality assessment. During the data collection phase, missing data instances exceeding 15% in the questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. For questionnaires with missing data below 15%, the missing values were inputted using the mean value. Univariate outliers were identified using Z-scores, while multivariate outliers were detected through

the application of the Mahalanobis distance method. Notably, the analysis indicated an absence of both univariate and multivariate outliers, obviating the need for their removal. Furthermore, univariate and multivariate normality were assessed using skewness and kurtosis methods. The outcomes of the Skewness and Kurtosis tests fell within the acceptable range of three to seven, signifying the absence of significant normality deviations. Lastly, a common method variance (CMV) test was performed to validate our findings. This entailed the application of both Harman's single-factor test in SPSS and the random number variable test in SmartPLS to ensure the robustness of our analysis results.

Table I
Respondents Profile

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	140	35.1%
Male	259	64.9%
Total	399	100.0%
Age		
18-25	63	15.8%
26-35	218	54.6%
36-45	91	22.8%
46-55	24	6.0%
56 or above	3	0.8%
Total	399	100%
Education		
Bachelor's degree	83	20.8%
Master's degree	285	71.4%
PhD	31	7.8%
Total	399	100%
Experience With Current Boss		
1-3	250	62.7%
4-6	106	26.6%
7-10	32	8.0%
11-20	9	2.3%
31 or above	2	0.5%
Total	399	100%
Experience		
1-3	101	25.3%
4-6	78	19.5%
7-10	100	25.1%
11-20	57	14.3%
21-30	36	9.0%
31 or above	27	6.8%
Total	399	100%

After conducting a thorough preliminary analysis, ensuring the fulfillment of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) assumptions, our research employed a two-step methodology. Specifically, we employed the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to evaluate the validity, reliability, and path relationships within our hypotheses. Our choice of SEM methodology aligns with previous research conducted by Hair et al. (2019, 2021, 2022) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), who have emphasized its efficacy in examining model relationships. SEM serves as a robust statistical tool for the comprehensive analysis of intricate interconnections among variables. In the evaluation of PLS-SEM theory, we adopted a two-step process, encompassing both measurement and structural models, in accordance with the framework delineated by Hair et al. (2019), Hair et al. (2021), and Henseler et al. (2009).

Assessment of Measurement Model

To ensure a thorough evaluation of the measurement model's validity and reliability, researchers must conduct a comprehensive examination that includes assessing the reliability of individual items, and internal consistency, as well as examining convergence and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2009). Scrutinizing these essential aspects with great care allows researchers to establish a reliable and valid measurement model. Ensuring the reliability of individual items is fundamental to the accuracy and consistency of the measurement model. As recommended by Hair et al. (2021), evaluating the outer loadings of each item is crucial. Ideally, loadings should exceed 0.708, with items between 0.40 and 0.70 retained unless they compromise validity (Hair et al., 2021). In this study, all latent variables exceeded the threshold, meeting the individual item reliability criteria. For internal consistency, we used three tests: Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (rhoc), and rho_A, (Hair et ail., 2021; Bagozzi & Yi's, 1988). All values in Table 1 met the 0.7 thresholds, confirming strong internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Convergent validity was established using the average

variance extracted (AVE) test, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). AVE scores exceeding 0.50, in line with Hair (2019) and Chin (1998), were found in all constructs (Chin, 1998). This validates the adequacy of convergent validity (Chin, 1998).

In the evaluation of discriminant validity, our research applied the established criteria Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) and Fornell and Larcker (1981). It is imperative that the AVE value surpasses the threshold of 0.5, and additionally, the square root of the AVE must exceed the inter-latent variable correlations in order to affirm the presence of discriminant validity as per Fornell and Larcker's guidelines. Furthermore, in accordance with the HTMT criterion, an acceptable threshold lies above .85 or .90. Our empirical results, meticulously presented in Tables III and IV, incontrovertibly demonstrate the fulfillment of these discriminant validity criteria. Specifically, the square root of the AVE unequivocally surpasses the inter-latent variable correlations, attesting to the robustness of discriminant validity in our study. Moreover, the HTMT values substantially exceed the recommended threshold (> .90), further corroborating the commendable level of discriminant validity in all our measurement constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural Model Assessment (Hypothesis Testing)

After confirming the construct's reliability and validity, the subsequent phase entails a thorough exploration of the model's internal structure. Notably, the utilization of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) algorithm, which operates independently of the variance-covariance matrix, assumes paramount importance in evaluating the model's predictive capabilities. In a recent publication by Hair et al. (2022), an all-encompassing guide has been presented for the assessment of the structural model. This comprehensive framework encompasses various essential steps, including the scrutiny of collinearity issues, the determination of the significance and magnitude of path coefficients, the examination of determination coefficients (R^2 and f^2), and the evaluation of out-of-sample predictive performance through the employment of the PLSpredict method. The following sections will expound upon each of these critical steps in meticulous detail.

In the first phase of assessing the structural model, we examine potential collinearity issues using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). In our comprehensive examination, it becomes evident that all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values observed in our study are consistently below the widely accepted threshold of 5. This observation conveys that the issue of collinearity does not emerge as a substantive concern in the context of our research. To evaluate the statistical significance of path coefficients, we employ a rigorous bootstrapping method with 5000 resamples, utilizing a dataset that consists of 399 observations. This approach aligns with the established methodologies outlined in the research of Hair et al. (2022, 2021, 2019) and Henseler et al. (2009). We present comprehensive structural model estimates and relevant statistics, including those related to the mediating variable, in Table V and Figure I. Table V presents the results of hypothesis testing using path coefficients, examining both direct and indirect relationships in a research study.

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): The relationship between Servant Leadership and Task Performance is statistically significant. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.434, with a standard error of 0.040. The T-value is 10.777, and the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating strong support for H_1. Hypothesis 2 (H_2): The relationship between Servant Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior is also statistically significant. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.446, with a standard error of 0.039. The T-value is 11.429, and the p-value is less than 0.001, providing strong support for H_2. Hypothesis 3 (H_3): This hypothesis explores the indirect relationship between Servant Leadership and Task Performance through the mediator Interactional Justice. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.520, with a standard error of 0.065. The T-value is 8.001, and the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating that Servant Leadership has a significant indirect effect on Task Performance through Interactional Justice. After adding a mediator, the direct relationship becomes insignificant which shows a full mediating effect. Hypothesis 4 (H_4): Similar to H_3, this hypothesis examines the indirect relationship between Servant Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior through Interactional Justice. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.443, with a standard error of 0.071. The T-value is 6.277, and the p-value is less than 0.001, demonstrating a significant indirect effect of Servant Leadership on Organizational Citizenship Behavior through Interactional Justice. After adding a mediator, the direct relationship becomes insignificant which shows a full mediating effect.

In summary, all four hypotheses (H_1, H_2, H_3, and H_4) are supported by the data, indicating significant relationships between Servant Leadership, Task Performance, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, and the mediating factor of Interactional Justice. These findings suggest that Servant Leadership positively

influences both Task Performance and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, either directly or indirectly through the mediation of Interactional Justice.
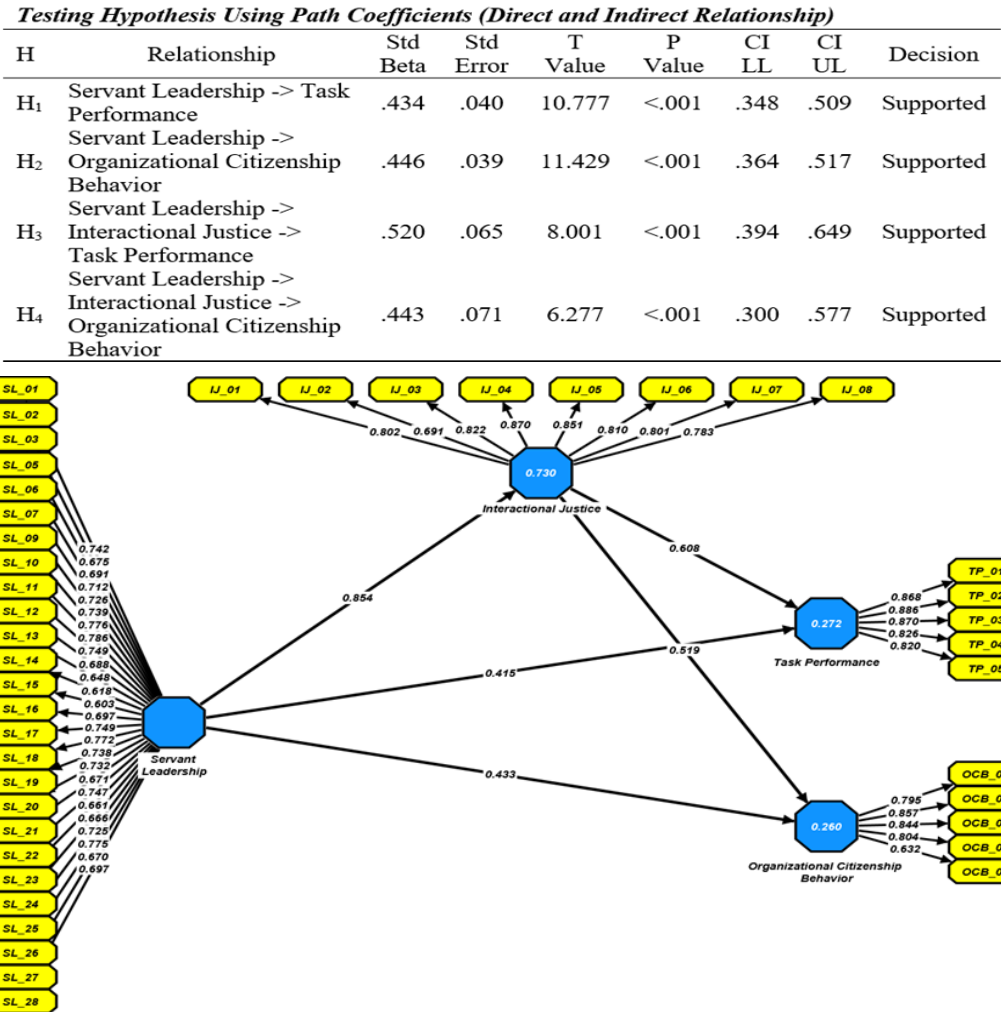
Testing Hypothesis Using Path Coefficients (Direct and Indirect Relationship)

H	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	T Value	P Value	CI LL	CI UL	Decision
H_1	Servant Leadership -> Task Performance	.434	.040	10.777	<.001	.348	.509	Supported
H_2	Servant Leadership -> Organizational Citizenship Behavior	.446	.039	11.429	<.001	.364	.517	Supported
H_3	Servant Leadership -> Interactional Justice -> Task Performance	.520	.065	8.001	<.001	.394	.649	Supported
H_4	Servant Leadership -> Interactional Justice -> Organizational Citizenship Behavior	.443	.071	6.277	<.001	.300	.577	Supported

Fig. I. Study Model with Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficients and T-value)

In the realm of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), evaluating a model's ability to explain phenomena is vital. Key metrics, such as R^2 and f^2 values, are crucial for this assessment. R^2 measures the portion of the variation in dependent variables explained by predictor variables, with different benchmarks proposed by Falk and Miller (1992) and Chin (1998). In our study, the R^2 value of 0.260 (organizational citizenship) and 0.272 (task performance) suggest moderate explanatory power. Additionally, the influence of excluding specific independent variables on the dependent variable, measured by the f^2 statistic, is examined. Effect sizes are categorized as small, medium, or large by Cohen (1988) and Kenny (2016). Notably, all effect sizes (.248 and .232) in our study indicate a large impact, underscoring the model's substantial practical implications. Lastly, we evaluated our model's predictive performance using the blindfolding method (Hair et al., 2022; 2021). While many researchers typically rely on the R^2 metric to assess predictive strength, this approach has limitations as pointed out by Shmueli and Koppius (2011) and Hair et al. (2022). R^2 measures only in-sample explanatory power and doesn't address out-of-sample prediction. To overcome this limitation, we utilized PLSpredict (Hair et al., 2022; 2021) to evaluate out-of-sample prediction. Our analysis revealed that the root-mean-square error (RMSE) for the PLS path model was significantly lower than that of the naive LM model in the majority of dependent variables items (refer to Table VI), indicating a satisfactory level of predictive accuracy in our model.

Discussion

There are several implications of this study, both theoretical and practical, that extend our understanding of servant leadership and how it relates to some other important organizational constructs. Our study established that servant leadership was positively associated, at the individual level, with both task performance and OCB. Previous academic research on servant leadership has produced similar results (Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2008; Neubert et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2014; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

The outcomes of our current study also align with the theories put forth by Blau (1964) in his social exchange theory and Gouldner (1960) in his model of reciprocity. A core tenet of servant leadership posits that servant leaders prioritize the act of serving and nurturing others (Greenleaf, 1977). Graham (1991) suggests that subordinates tend to emulate the behaviors of their superiors by taking on the role of servant leaders themselves. According to Neubert et al. (2008) and Liden et al. (2014), individuals who find their leaders' qualities appealing are more likely to mimic and adopt the behaviors demonstrated by these leaders. Servant leaders are renowned for possessing a spectrum of desirable attributes, including empathy, a genuine concern for others, and unwavering integrity. These traits exert a considerable influence on both the followers and the overall performance outcomes. Not only do servant leaders enhance their subordinates' task performance, but they also motivate them to surpass expectations and engage in extra-role or organizational citizenship behavior.

Furthermore, our study also offers evidence that interactional justice acts as a comprehensive mediator in the link between servant leadership and task performance. The study's findings highlight the significant role of interactional justice in regulating the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Previous studies have consistently been testing interactional justice as a mediator among various leadership constructs and different job-related outcomes. In some recent studies interactional justice has been found to be fully as well as partially mediating the relationship between servant leadership and outcome variables including work engagement, productivity, job satisfaction, trust and performance at group as well as individual level (see for example: Ehrhart, 2004; Hunter et al., 2013; Mayer, Bardes & Piccolo, 2008; Liden, 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010;).

Our study approved the previous research findings with interactional justice mediating the relationship between servant leadership and task performance as well as the relationship between servant leadership and OCB at individual level. The obvious description of this relationship may be that servant leaders tend to be altruistic and fair, inherently (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Additionally, servant leaders place a strong emphasis on treating their followers with dignity and respect. As a result, their followers respond by putting in extra effort, going beyond their primary job duties, and aiming to make contributions that extend beyond their formal roles. This, in turn, fosters their own growth as servant leaders because they model their behavior after their leaders.

CONCLUSION

This study resulted in some empirical insights into the burgeoning area of servant leadership in a totally new cultural and environmental context. Not surprisingly, the results of this study turned out to be in line with previous research studies undertaken in other cultural and environmental contexts around the globe. The outcomes of this research have shown and confirmed that practicing servant leadership has a positive influence on enhancing employee performance. It achieves this by cultivating an organizational environment marked by politeness, fairness, and a willingness to give, regardless of cultural, contextual, or situational variables.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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