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Article

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Servant Leadership and Psychological Well-being: A Philosophical Perspective and the Role of Religiosity and Power Distance Orientation

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a vital challenge to traditional leadership practices. The virtual workplace is changing the way people are accustomed to working. Despite flexibility regarding time and space with the advent of digital technologies, employees face several psychological problems while working remotely. Servant leadership is one of the possible solutions to address this issue, but there is a question mark on servant leadership effectiveness in high power distance cultures. However, the closeness of servant leadership to religious beliefs can make it effective in such cultures. This research addresses the philosophy of servant leadership theory and employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test a theoretical model to determine how servant leaders can positively impact employees working distantly. This research reveals that servant leadership helps employees cope with occupational and perceived stress and maintains their work-life balance by ensuring their psychological wellbeing. This research also finds that the

compatibility of servant leadership with religiosity makes it more effective irrespective of cultural differences.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Power Distance, Religiosity, Psychological Well-being, Occupational Stress, Perceived Stress, Work-life Balance, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

COVID-19 pandemic has posed a vital challenge to leadership (Dirani et al., 2020). The leadership crisis due to COVID-19 is widespread in leadership theory and practice (Tourish, 2020). It is projected that 70% of the workforce will work remotely by 2025 (Castrillon, 2020). A recent survey reveals that 74% of managers will be working remotely on a permanent basis even after covid-19 (Staff, 2020). During the lockdown, a number of physical activities have been shifted online. Virtual work is now a norm, and the traditional workplace has become digital (Potter, 2020). The digital workplace is changing how individuals and companies work (Winterfeldt & Roestel, 2019). Although there has been ease or flexibility concerning time and space with digital technologies, several problems are arising, such as loneliness, increased miscommunication, distractions at home, and difficulty working in a team (Lusinski, 2019). In addition, there is increased pressure to continuously be online and remain connected with the office while working from home (Cijan et al., 2019). This situation confronts employees with several psychological challenges, such as generalized stress, perceived job insecurity, isolation or quarantine, job-related stress, and work-life imbalance (Ganson et al., 2021; Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Said & El-Shafei, 2021). Although servant leadership has emerged as a mainstream character-driven leadership approach (Qureshi et al., 2019), it is not clear to what extent servant leadership (SL) remains effective in remote-working conditions and helps employees healing the psychological issues arising due to the pandemic. This research attempts to address this burning issue.

1.2 Motivation for the Study

Addressing the question of the effectiveness of servant leadership practices during the COVID-19 crisis, the issue that requires scholars' attention is the best culture fit for this leadership approach. Despite the fact that servant leadership has many great outcomes for people and organizations (Lu et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2017), The results of various studies exhibit a lack of consistency within cultures characterized by a high power distance (PD) orientation. (Donia et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2021). Most of the research addressing servant leadership has been conducted in the united states (Bavik, 2020), where power distance orientation is low ("Country Comparison," 2021; Harun et al., 2021). It is claimed that servant leadership is more suited to cultures with low power distance orientation (Eva et al., 2019). Furthermore, several studies have called for future research considering power distance as a moderator (Bavik, 2020; Elche et al., 2020). This research aims to address this call for future research.

1.3 Research Gap

Some recent studies by Wang *et al.* (2022) and Qureshi *et al.* (2019) addressing servant leadership have yielded findings that do not provide support for the notion of power distance playing a moderating role, while the latter suggested that high religiosity could be the probable cause. The study of Qureshi *et al.* (2019) also suggested that religiosity seems to be more compatible with servant leadership as they both share some common characteristics. Still, there is little empirical evidence available to support this claim. In line with this argument, the notion that the idea of servant leadership is rooted in religion and that servant leadership shares several characteristics with what most divine religions teach has gained little attention from the research community (Brownell, 2010; Davis & Winn, 2017). Therefore, it is more likely that high religiosity mitigates the effect of high power distance and servant leaders work in harmony with religion. Since power distance and religiosity are moderately high in Pakistan (Hassan, 1987; Khilji, 2002; Qureshi, 2018), this research attempts to address the issue in question and fills this gap. Furthermore, the effectiveness of servant leadership during a crisis and the extent to which servant leadership is capable of addressing psychological issues arising because of pandemics like COVID-19 are yet to be validated through empirical evidence. This research attempts to fill this gap in existing literature.

1.4 Research Objective

This research aims to evaluate how servant leadership addresses different psychological issues employees faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study assesses how servant leadership affects workers' psychological well-being, occupational stress, perceived stress, and work-life balance. Furthermore, this research measures the moderating influence of power distance orientation and religiosity. Moreover, this research also ascertains whether religiosity mitigates the effect of power distance orientation.

1.5 Theoretical Linkage among Main Concepts

This study is the first to examine the philosophical foundations of servant leadership theory, hence contributing to the ontology of servant leadership. Under the boundary conditions of COVID-19, this research is the first of its kind to test the influence of servant leadership on different psychological outcomes that employees face during the pandemic. Addressing the call for future research from prominent scholars, such as (Bavik, 2020; Eva *et al.*, 2019), this study evaluates servant leadership in high-power, high-religiosity cultures using conservation of resource theory and self-determination theory. Furthermore, this research incorporates social information-processing theory to support the moderating role of PD and religiosity. In doing so, this research makes a novel endeavor and examines if high religiosity mitigates the influence of high power and adds new knowledge to the existing literature.

1.6 Significance

The findings of this research will be helpful for practitioners to understand the leadership approach that can minimize or eliminate the adverse psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees working remotely or under stressful conditions. In addition, this research can help leaders understand the role of religiosity in ensuring employees' psychological well-being. Furthermore, this research will also help elaborate on whether servant leadership is a universal approach irrespective of the cultural context or works better in cultures with high or low power distance. Furthermore, the literature addressing the philosophical underpinning of servant leadership theory will help open a new horizon for theoreticians to continue induction and add new facets to the theory.

2. Literature Review

Throughout history, the concept of leadership has been associated with individuals who possess dynamic character and have the ability to significantly influence the trajectory of historical events (Yukl, 2013). The notion of leadership has undergone changes and developments throughout its history (Zhu et al., 2019). In the past century, leadership has received significant attention from academicians worldwide, resulting in its widespread use in the intellectual community, particularly in business (Northouse, 2016). Leadership is widely recognized as a crucial element for individuals and nations and a fundamental requirement for achieving organizational success (McCaffery, 2018).

Leadership can be conceptualized as a dynamic process in which an individual, known as the leader, exerts influence over others with the aim of attaining a shared objective. (Yukl, 1989). It is expected from a leader to serve others to achieve the common goal rather than being served (Williams, 2015). Notwithstanding the expectations, business leaders started demonstrating self-serving behaviors in some cases. Specifically, this reality was unleashed during the introspection of the global financial crisis when it was revealed that most of the decisions and judgments made by leaders from the well-known organization were either self-serving or serving the interests of the elite minority (Liu et al., 2017; Sendjaya et al., 2008).

The leadership with compromised morality raised questions and drew back the attention of the intellectual community to the philosophy of Peter F. Drucker, who had emphasized the moral code of conduct for business leaders (Kurzynski, 2012). During the global financial crisis, the high-profile scandals identified the devastating consequences of leaders' unethical decision-making on employees and organizations (Ahmad & Gao, 2018). Organizational integrity is now believed to be associated with leader's integrity (van Eeden Jones & Lasthuizen, 2018). Consequently, people-centric, ethical leadership approaches are what organizations are looking for after the global financial crisis. (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

2.1 *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership (SL) is one of the character-driven leadership approaches that emerged to address ethical dilemmas that leaders face during their professional life (Dinh et al., 2014). It is a people-orientated approach (Atiq, 2020) that accompanies proactive action-driven leadership (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). Based on the seminal work and definition of Robert K. Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 2007), the most recent servant leadership definition states that a servant leader is an individual who places a high emphasis on addressing the needs and interests of their followers on an individual level. , encourages them to look beyond themselves and serve the greater good of the organization and the community at large (Eva et al., 2019). This definition covers the motives and mindset of a servant leader who is determined to serve individuals, organizations, and communities. Servant leadership is widely recognized for its positive associations with outcomes related to people and organizations (Neubert et al., 2022).

2.2 *Servant Leadership Philosophy*

In ancient Greek philosophy, Aristotle is one of the prominent figures emphasizing human character. His viewpoint on leaders' character is based on virtue ethics. In medieval philosophy, Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the significance of ethics in human life. His ethical doctrine was founded on Christianity (Geisler, 1999). In the era of Renaissance and Revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant are prominent figures, and their work on human character is of great value. Rousseau stresses compassion and empathy and opposes selfishness in society (Buckingham et al., 2015). Kant believes in the dignity and respect of a person and shares several commonalities with the idea of servant leadership. He argues against the instrumental view of leadership. Kant treats all human beings equally sovereign in society or organization, calling it the 'kingdom of ends' (Immanuel, 1785). Bowie (2000) argues that servant leadership theory is egalitarian and fulfills Kant's categorical imperative, and thus Kant will endorse it on ethical grounds. In his categorical imperative of universal law, Kant stresses that any action to be ethical must become a universal law (Kant & Ellington, 1994). This maxim is much relevant to servant leaders who prioritize their own and their followers' development in terms of becoming wiser, more autonomous, and servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970).

In modern contemporary philosophy, Peter F. Drucker's views on management remind us of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Aristotle's virtue ethics were proposed around 2500 years ago without considering modern management complexities. However, Peter F. Drucker stressed upon a leader's vision, character, integrity, and community orientation with a thorough understanding of these complexities (Kurzynski, 2012). Since ethics and virtues are strongly connected to servant leadership. The servant leadership paradigm, which also encourages leaders to be people-oriented, is consistent with Drucker's insistence that managers prioritize the well-being of their subordinates (Zhang et al., 2012). Drucker does not consider the organization a separate entity but a micro-society (Drucker, 1993), and

according to him, the moral code of conduct that governs society is no different for business leaders (Drucker, 2013). According to Drucker, individuals demonstrating high-level moral integrity deserve leadership positions as their decisions significantly impact individuals and society (Drucker, 2000). Drucker also accentuates in Nicomachean Ethics that it is the responsibility of an organization to fulfill individuals' social needs, which is in harmony with the servant leadership theory. Therefore, it can be asserted that the attributes of SL have been the subject of interest among prominent philosophers throughout the history.

2.3 Servant Leadership and Psychological Well-being

The COVID-19 crisis has brought forth several leadership challenges, including its impact on employees' mental health (De Sousa et al., 2020, p. 19). Employees have experienced isolation and remained distant from their colleagues (Wang et al., 2021). This research draws on the Conservation of Resource (CoR) Theory, which posits that people are inclined to keep and safeguard resources essential to their life. This includes physical, social, and psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Servant leaders ensure these resources' availability and protection through their caring behavior and focus on developing their followers (Gregory Stone et al., 2004). In addition, servant leaders provide psychological empowerment to their followers (Khan et al., 2021), which contributes to employees' psychological well-being. Servant leaders' actions make employees feel safe and secure (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Iqbal et al., 2020), thus fulfilling employees' innate needs of safety and security (Aryee et al., 2007). Therefore, this study contends people working with servant leaders are more likely to experience psychological well-being and thus propose the following hypothesis.

- H₁: SL positively affects the psychological well-being of employees

2.4 Servant Leadership, Perceived Stress and Occupational Stress

It is also observed that work-from-home (WFH) increases the imbalance between work and family life, resulting in low levels of employee satisfaction with themselves and their work (Nakrošienė et al., 2019), consequently leading to increased perceived stress. Lack of proper space to work and distraction by family members are common factors affecting employee effectiveness (Wang et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2020), which can result in increased occupational stress. This research draws on the Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to explain how servant leaders help employees deal with the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic such as perceived stress and occupational stress. Self-determination theory (SDT) proposes that individuals get motivated when their innate needs are fulfilled. Servant leaders exhibit empathy towards their subordinates, thereby serving as a catalyst for their emotional healing (Barbuto et al., 2006). This act of empathy demonstrates their concern for their followers' well-being (Ehrhart, 2004) and cultivates a sense of community (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Servant leaders also give special attention to employees' needs and make employees' lives more meaningful. Since leadership is considered pivotal in providing conditions within an organization where employees' needs

can be fulfilled (Brière et al., 2020), servant leadership is an appropriate approach for providing such conditions. Based on these arguments, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

- H_{2a}: SL negatively affects occupational stress.
- H_{2b}: Psychological well-being mediates the influence of SL on employees' occupational stress.
- H_{3a}: SL negatively influences employees' perceived stress
- H_{3b}: Psychological well-being mediates the influence of SL on employees' perceived stress.

2.5 Servant Leadership and Work-life Balance

Furthermore, there was a significant increase in workload and work-family conflict during the COVID-19 epidemic (Allen et al., 2021) and compromised psychological well-being of employees (Grover et al., 2020). One of the social needs that Self-determination theory (SDT) addresses is the need of relatedness. Servant leaders build a sense of community within an organization where people are in social contact with others (Glenn & Cuerdo, 2016), thus fulfilling their followers' social needs. Literature suggests that fulfillment of psychological needs increases individuals' psychological well-being. They experience enhanced psychological health and are less likely to suffer from problems (Cheval et al., 2017; Raabe et al., 2020), such as work-family conflict. CoR theory shows that need fulfillment improves employees' mental health and work-life balance (Xiao et al., 2023). Therefore, it is argued that employees working with servant leaders experience social need fulfillment and are less likely to experience work-life imbalance.

- H_{4a}: SL positively affects employees' work-life balance.
- H_{4b}: Psychological well-being mediates the influence of SL on employees' work-life balance.

2.6 Servant Leadership and Power Distance Orientation

Several studies have indicated that servant leadership best fits low power distance cultures (Eva et al., 2019; Hannay, 2009; Yang et al., 2017). Nonetheless, some studies have claimed that servant leadership is a universal approach irrespective of cultural values (Bavik, 2020; Hannay, 2009; Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). Power distance is a cultural value that is defined as "the degree of inequality among people which the population of a country considers as normal: from relatively equal (that is, low power distance) to extremely unequal (high power distance)" (Hofstede, 1993). The literature in favor of the claim that servant leadership is more appropriate in low power distance culture derives energy from the fact that employees working in high power distance settings are less likely to show sensitivity towards how they are treated by their leaders and are more prone to accept hierarchical differences with submissive obedience. (Farh et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2021). Indeed, in contrast to this view, some studies found servant leadership as effective in high

power distance cultures as it is in cultures with low power distance orientation (Iqbal et al., 2020; Qureshi et al., 2019).

This research further draws on Social Information-processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) to support the moderating role of religiosity and power distance. This theory postulates that individuals assess the norms, atmosphere, and social context before making any decision or taking any action (Hsiung & Tsai, 2017). This theory also suggests that social and environmental factors determine the effectiveness of leaders through their interaction with leadership style (Lu et al., 2021). Therefore, this study suggests the presence of high or low power distance as the social context that influences the effectiveness of servant leadership practices. Thus following hypothesis is proposed based on studied literature and theoretical support.

- H₅: PDO moderates the influence of SL on psychological well-being so that the influence of SL is diluted.

2.7 *Servant Leadership, Religiosity and Power Distance*

Religiosity refers to an organized, community-oriented system of beliefs, practices, and rituals that take an individual closer to God (Koenig, 2012). Religious teachings are based on morality, ethics, and virtues (Mannion, 2017), while these characteristics are closely linked to servant leadership theory (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The tenet of servant leadership is based on the inspiration from the story *The Journey to the East*, which was based on Christian values (Frick, 2004). Scholars in the recent past have turned their attention to the link between servant leadership and religiosity (Abbas et al., 2020; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). The reason why scholars started endeavoring the relationship between servant leadership and religion lies in the character flaw of business leaders that was evident in the case of the meltdown of several organizations during the global financial crisis, where the lack of ethical content in leadership practices is strongly linked to the fall of these businesses (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008).

The word "servant" appears 1,300 times in the Bible, and servant leadership undoubtedly shares several characteristics with Christianity. Some scholars believe servant leadership is not a Christian theory (Kimotho, 2019). However, this assertion is based on qualitative data and lacks empirical evidence. Servant leadership practices are closer to and more compatible with what most divine religions teach, such as Christianity and Islam (Wallace, 2007). For example, Quran and Bible both stress to tend to those around us (The Holy Quran, 1987; Matthew 22:39-40), and service to the community is one of the hallmarks of Islamic teachings (Bagheri & Alali, 2018). According to Islam, one should like the same for others what he likes for himself (Bukhari, 1994). These are some examples that shed light on the commonalities between religious teachings and servant leadership practices (Khan et al., 2015).

Religiosity significantly affects how leaders behave and practice their leadership (Hage & Posner, 2015). In addition, a recent study has revealed a positive association between

religiosity and COVID-19 related anxiety (Kranz *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, (Lu *et al.*, 2019) examined servant leadership effectiveness in a religious atmosphere and argued on the basis of Social Information Processing Theory, postulating that social context plays an essential role in understanding the words or actions of others and that social and environmental factors determine the effectiveness of leaders through their interaction with leadership style. They find a strong association between religiosity and servant leadership.

Literature suggests that high power distance is more effective in low religious settings. In other words, the presence of religiosity in society does not allow power distance to moderate any relation among different variables. Most of the studies supporting the moderating role of high PD are low in the religious index. For example, China has a high-power distance culture (Hofstede, 2018) with comparatively low religiosity (Lew *et al.*, 2018). A GALLUP survey also revealed that Pakistan has more religious dominance than Turkey and India. According to a PEW research survey, Pakistan has the highest rank in Asia regarding religious orientation, and religion is the *sine qua non* for its natives (Hackett, 2018). Therefore, it can be inferred that servant leadership is compatible with the religious orientation of society, and religiosity is the possible cause of mitigating the moderation of power distance. Consequently, this paper argues that servant leadership is relevant in high power distance cultures with high religiosity. In other words, religiosity mitigates the moderating influence of PD in such a manner that PD no more moderates the effect of servant leadership. However, this testable statement is yet to be examined in this study.

The social information-processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) is used in this study to support the moderating effects of religiosity and power distance. This theory postulates that individuals assess the norms, atmosphere, and social context before making any decision or taking any action (Hsiung & Tsai, 2017). This theory also suggests that social and environmental factors determine the effectiveness of leaders through their interaction with leadership style (Lu *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this study suggests the presence of high or low power distance as the social context that influences the effectiveness of servant leadership practices. The following research hypothesis is proposed based on studied literature and theoretical support:

- H₆: Religiosity moderates the moderating effect of PDO such that PDO no more moderates the influence of SL on employees' psychological well-being.

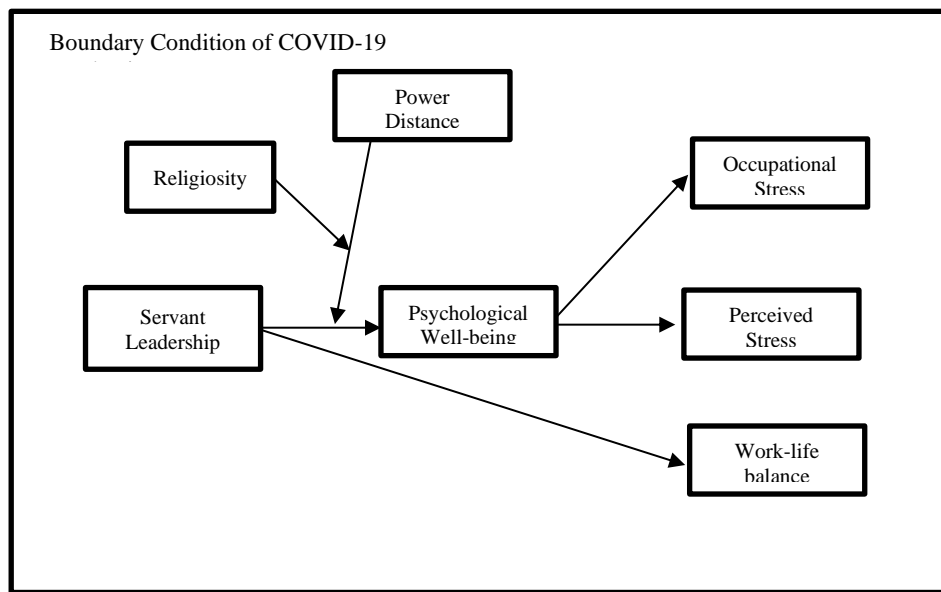


Figure 1: Research Model

Figure 1 represents a hypothesized model suggesting that servant leadership improves employees' psychological well-being, resulting in decreased occupational and perceived stress among employees. It also indicates that servant leadership ensures work-life balance for employees. Figure 1 further proposes that power distance, through moderation, can weaken the influence of servant leadership on employees' psychological well-being. However, religiosity can dilute the moderating effect of power distance in a way that servant leadership remains effective under religiosity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design & Research Paradigm

Quantitative research is best for this study since it evaluates the cause-effect relationship between variables (Creswell, 2013). This research follows post-positivism, which holds that reality is represented by cause-effect relationship that can be measured and presented numerically. In post-positivism, reality is not totally independent of the observer, unlike positivism, which is better for natural science disciplines (Henn et al., 2009; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

3.2 Population

All the private sector organizations of Pakistan from the service sector are part of the target population for this study. Since the bureaucratic system is prevalent in public sector organizations, servant leadership's relevance is not appropriate in this setting. Therefore,

leaders and their immediate followers from the private sector organizations are suitable for this study population. Worldwide, the service sector has been worst devastated by the COVID-19 epidemic, followed by the manufacturing and agriculture sectors (Cook & Grimshaw, 2021; Keogh-Brown et al., 2020; UNIDO, 2020; Xiang et al., 2021). Most of the employees working from home belong to service sectors (Giebel et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2021; Su et al., 2022), and the industry that has been hit the hardest due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the hospitality and tourism (Karim et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2021, p. 19). Therefore, this research encompasses the employees and their immediate supervisors within the hospitality and tourism sector. However, Hospitals have implemented remote working arrangements as an exceptional measure in response to the overwhelming patient load and the unique nature of the services they offer amidst the ongoing pandemic. (Miller et al., 2020; Quigley et al., 2021). Therefore, respondents from hospitals are out of the scope of this study.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

This research employs the purposive sampling technique to gather dyadic data from respondents (Inclusive of leaders and their immediate followers). As a procedural remedy, dyadic data helps to minimize common method bias. Moreover, the purposive sampling technique is one of the most common non-probability techniques in which a sample is drawn non-randomly (Passer, 2014). This sampling, employing a comparatively smaller sample size, enables a researcher to select the best-suited respondents for study objectives. (Saunders, 2011). Krause (2019) also asserts that random sampling is problematic and thus cannot be applied logically to social science research. Therefore, non-probability sampling remains appropriate and holds reasonable justification for this research.

The determination of an appropriate sample size is a topic that lacks consensus among scholars and researchers. This study follows the approach suggested by Shieh (2009) and Wolf et al. (2013), who suggest a sample of minimum 460 respondents in order to obtain an adequate model-fit for moderated mediation. Diverse individuals from all economic sectors (agriculture, manufacturing, and service sectors) were surveyed to collect data. Clark & Creswell (2014) suggest that the generalizability of the results is compromised if the response rate is below 60%. Therefore, to obtain at least 460 responses, 657 questionnaires were floated. Interestingly, 474 completely filled responses were received, which was better than expected.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

Covariance-based structural equation model (CB-SEM) and Partial Least Square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) are the two primary statistical methods used for the structural equation model that dominates practice in the social sciences (Hair et al., 2021). AMOS is used for CB-SEM (Dash & Paul, 2021). Smart-PLS is the most popular software for the PLS-SEM. There are several prerequisites for the application of both techniques.

For CB-SEM, each latent construct used in the model must have at least three items, and the data used for theory testing must be normal. While the PLS-SEM makes no assumptions about the normality of the data, it can also accommodate latent constructs consisting of a single item. However, Smart PLS has a problem with model fitness, whereas AMOS does not (Dash & Paul, 2021; Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, CB-SEM is given preference when the aim is to test a theory (Astrachan et al., 2014). It also provides comprehensive model fit indices which are missing in PLS-SEM (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). Finally, CB-SEM is often given consideration when moderation and interaction effects are estimated (Cheah et al., 2020). Since this study is based on theory testing and evaluates the compound moderating effect CB-SEM via AMOS is preferable for achieving a fitted model with reliable and flawless results.

The analysis of data will involve the utilization of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a statistical technique that integrates both measurement and structural models (Keith, 2014) and includes regression and factor analyses (Hox & Bechger, 1998). SEM is used to tests various regression equations at the same time (Lomax & Schumacker, 2012). SEM consists of both measurement and structural models (Keith, 2014). It is possible to test several hypothesized theoretical models through SEM defining different constructs and interrelation among them (Lomax & Schumacker, 2012). This research follows 5-steps approach to perform SEM that includes i) specification of research model, ii) identification of the hypothesized model, iii) model estimation, iv) evaluation of the proposed model, and v) model modification if necessary (Pituch & Stevens, 2015). This study accumulates dyadic data from both leaders and their direct subordinates to avoid common method bias as a methodological remedy. This study uses AMOS 24 for data analysis and performs different statistical tests, such as validity, reliability, common latent factor test and CFA using the covariance-based Structured Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) approach. CB-SEM provides model fit indices that help determine model acceptability (Dash & Paul, 2021) and provide better results when testing moderation with latent variables containing continuous data (Cheah et al., 2020). This research uses the common latent factor technique to address the Common Method Bias (CMB) (Gaskin, 2012). The problem of CBM is common when the data of all the independent and dependent variables are obtained from the same respondents, which is prevalent in data collection through a self-administered questionnaire (Kock et al., 2021).

3.5 Measures

The questionnaire developed for this study is based on frequently used adopted measures with established validity and adequate reliability. For servant leadership, this study employs 7-item scale developed by Liden et al. (2014). For religiosity, this study uses the 16-item scale developed by Dali et al. (2019) with two sub-dimensions (belief, 6-items & commitment and practice, 10-items). Power Distance has been measured by 8-item scale of Earley & Erez (1997). For psychological well-being, the 5-item scale of psychological general well-being by the WHO-5 has been employed. Furthermore, occupational stress,

perceived stress and work-life balance have been measured with 6-item scale by Lait & Wallace (2002), 3-item scale of (Haar, 2013), and 10-item perceived stress scale by Campo-Arias et al. (2020) respectively.

4. Data analysis and Results

4.1 Respondents' Profile

Respondents' age falls between 20 to 58 years, with a Mean of 32 and a Standard Deviation of 8.24. The male-female ration is 320-154, while there are 96 unmarried and 378 married respondents. The experience of respondents within a single organization is between 2 to 25 years, with a Mean of 4.6 and a Standard Deviation of 5.6. The leader - follower ratio is 90 and 384, respectively, accounting for 19% of leaders and 81% of followers.

4.2 Construct Validity & Reliability

Construct validity refers to the extent to which a latent construct is a true reflection of its items and its assessment is one of the basic objectives of SEM (Hair et al., 2014). This research follows the criteria of assessing construct validity through discriminant and convergent validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Convergent validity confirms that all the items in a latent construct reflect that specific latent construct only (Bryman & Bell, 2015), while discriminant validity is the measure of the uniqueness of the latent constructs from the rest of other constructs used in the study (Kline, 2015). To ascertain convergent and discriminant validity, this study follows the method suggested by Hair et al., (2010) using CR, AVE and MSV. Moreover, this research follows cutoff criteria of Hu & Bentler (1999) to ascertain construct validity ($CR > 0.7$, $AVE > 0.5$ and $CR > AVE$) for convergent validity; and $AVE > MSV$ and $\sqrt{AVE} > r$ of each pair for discriminant validity. Moreover, reliability is a measure of the measurement scale's internal consistency (Zikmund et al., 2013). Chronbach's alpha has been regarded as the most common measure of reliability for decades (Bonett & Wright, 2015; Field, 2013). However, some scholars have raised concerns regarding Chronbach's alpha's accuracy (Raykov, 1998). Consequently, an improved and more accurate reliability measure was introduced, which is known as composite reliability (Peterson & Kim, 2013). The present study employs composite reliability (CR) as a means to assess the internal consistency of the collected data. The results of the Master Validity Tool by Gaskin & Lim (2016) for AMOS are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Correlation and Convergent & Discriminant Validity

	M	SD	CR	AVE	MSV	SL	PWB	PS	OS	WLB	BL	CPD	PDO
SL	3.543	0.878	0.869	0.527	0.256	0.726							
PWB	3.493	0.929	0.867	0.566	0.362	0.466 ***	0.752						
PS	1.972	0.982	0.954	0.679	0.564	-0.444 ***	-0.484 ***	0.824					
OS	2.326	1.017	0.890	0.575	0.324	-0.361 ***	-0.319 ***	0.541 ***	0.758				
WLB	3.880	0.584	0.714	0.558	0.006	0.079	-0.041	0.079	0.052	0.747			
BL	3.585	1.006	0.930	0.688	0.256	0.506 ***	0.397 ***	-0.503 ***	-0.494 ***	-0.070	0.830		
CPD	3.539	0.938	0.935	0.590	0.564	0.485 ***	0.601 ***	-0.751 ***	-0.569 ***	0.002	0.501 ***	0.768	
PDO	3.677	0.659	0.834	0.503	0.010	0.005	0.072	-0.036	0.012	0.023	0.099 †	-0.006	0.709

Significance of Correlations: † $p < .100$, * $p < .050$, ** $p < .010$, *** $p < .001$

The results in Table 1 indicate adequate internal consistency of the data ($CR > 0.7$), providing confidence that the interpretation of the instruments used in the study remains consistent across different cultures (Field, 2013). Additionally, these findings helped prevent the occurrence of inaccurate Cronbach's alpha values that could have arisen due to item homogeneity and covariance of error terms (Raykov, 1998). Furthermore, similarly, the result fulfills the requirements of construct validity through convergent validity ($CR > 0.7$, $AVE > 0.5$ and $CR > AVE$) and discriminant validity ($AVE > MSV$ and $\sqrt{AVE} > r$ of each pair in the diagonal). Results confirming construct validity provide theoretical support for measuring instruments used in the study (Gaur & Gaur, 2009). In addition, results confirmed convergent validity since factor loadings items ranged from 0.602 to 0.924. However, few items were removed to provide support to the idea that all the items in the instruments measure the proposed concept well (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and that all the latent variables are specifically related to their factors (Cheah et al., 2018). The confirmation of discriminant validity further substantiates the distinctiveness and exclusivity of the constructs employed in this research (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

4.3 Common Method Bias (CMB)

This study employs procedural and statistical remedies to address common method bias (CMB). The use of dyadic data, maintaining the anonymity of the respondents and changing the order of the statements in the questionnaire are part of the procedural remedies. Statistically, CBM can result in either inflation or deflation in the correlation among measured or observed variables (Spector et al., 2019). This study employs the common latent factor approach (Podsakoff et al., 2012) to address the issue of CMB using AMOS. This method includes the creation of a common latent factor that measures the shared variance of all the measures. Common shared variance is assessed by comparing the standardized regression weights of all the observed variables with and without latent factor. The difference of less than 20% indicates that common method bias does not affect the data (Gaskin, 2012). The results of comparison reveals that the difference is less than 0.2 for all the observed variables except for the two items (BL1 = 0.44, BL2 = .43) out of six of the 'belief', which is a sub-construct of religiosity. Overall, the items affected by CMB account for only 12.5% of all the items of religiosity, which is negligible. Therefore, we can deduce that there is no CMB in the data.

4.4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This study performs CFA to evaluate the goodness of the postulated model (Huck, 2012), which is a flexible statistical approach, and a type of SEM to test a theory (Brown, 2015). CFA evaluates how well-observed data represents the theoretical model (Gallagher & Brown, 2013). Assessment of the measurement and structural models is part of SEM (Keith, 2014) where latent variables and their corresponding items represent the measurement model while the cause-effect relationship among latent variables represents the structural model (Byrne, 2016).

4.4.1 CFA for Measurement Model

Before testing a structure model based on hypotheses, a measurement model based on a theory or set of theories must be specified (model specification) to evaluate if the observed variables (items) reflect their relative latent construct through their corresponding sub-construct (if any) (Byrne, 2016). The specified model contains only two sub-constructs (belief; and commitment and practice) under one latent construct Religiosity. Belief consists of 6-items, while commitment and practice consist of 10-items. The rest of the constructs in the specified model are first-order constructs.

For a model to be valid, SEM requires an over-identified model (model identification). When a model is over-identified, it's possible that there are several different solutions to each estimate of a parameter (Hair et al., 2014). Over-identification occurs when a model's degree of freedom is non-zero and positive (Kline, 2011). Model fit summary shows 1153 degree of freedom, which satisfied model identification requirements.

Model estimation is followed by model identification, which refers to obtaining estimates of each parameter. This is possible by calculating unknown parameters' values and their related error (Weston & Gore, 2006). This research follows Maximum Likelihood (ML) for estimating the model. Byrne (2016) has described the criteria to estimate a model that includes i) Feasibility of parameter estimates (determines the consistency of individual parameters with the underlying theory and goodness of the fit of each parameter). ii) Appropriateness of standard error (determines accuracy or precision in parameter estimation). iii) Statistical significance of parameter estimates (analyses unstandardized estimates of path coefficients through Critical Ratio, i.e., z-scores that should be less than 1.96 with $p < .05$). Results show that all the parameter estimates are of proper sign and sizes, showing feasibility and consistency of all the parameter estimates with the underlying theory. None of the standard errors are excessively small or excessively large. Further, the Critical Ratio (z-score) of all the path coefficients is less than 1.96 ($p < .05$).

After obtaining an adequate model estimation, model evaluation is carried out (Weston & Gore, 2006). This study uses model fit measures suggested by Hair et al. (2014) that include RMSEA, SRMR, χ^2 and χ^2/df (Absolute fit index), CFI and TLI (Incremental fit index) and PNFI and PCFI (Parsimony fit Index). Scholars prefer reporting Relative Chi Square (χ^2/df) instead of Chi Square (χ^2) due to its sensitivity to the sample size (Iacobucci, 2010).

As shown in Table 2, the model fit indices show the adequate model fit for the measurement model having RMSEA = 0.49, χ^2/df = 2.14, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, PNFI = .81, and PCFI = 0.86 were all within their range (Collier, 2020).

Table 2: Model-fit Indices of the Measurement Model

	RMSEA	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	PNFI	PCFI
Recommended Values	$\leq .08$	≤ 3.0	$\geq .90$	$\geq .90$	$\geq .50$	$\geq .50$
Measurement Model	0.49	2.14	.92	.91	.81	.86

Collier (2020)

4.4.2 CFA for Structural Model

The structural or path model in the study is specified based on the hypothesized causal relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables (Byrne, 2016). All the constructs in the specified model are first-order constructs except the religiosity, which is a second-order construct comprising Belief (6-items) and Commitment & Practice (10-items). The model is over-identified with non-zero positive degree of freedom (1519), which satisfies the requirements of model identification (Kline, 2011). Using the Maximum Likelihood estimation, this study finds all the parameter estimates with adequate signs and sizes. The standard error associated with all the parameters are adequate (neither too high nor too small) with significant path coefficient ($p \leq .05$) and critical ratio (z-score > 1.96)

(Weston & Gore, 2006). After obtaining acceptable values for model estimation, this study uses model fit measure recommended by Hair et al. (2014).

As shown in Table 3, the model fit indices show the adequate model fit for the structural model having RMSEA = 0.05, χ^2/df = 2.14, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.91, PNFI = .0.80 and PCFI = 0.86 were all within their range (Collier, 2020).

Table 3: Model-fit Indices of the Structural Model

	RMSEA	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	PNFI	PCFI
Recommended Values	≤ .08	≤ 3.0	≥ .90	≥ .90	≥ .50	≥ .50
Structural model	0.05	2.14	.91	.91	.80	.86

Figure 2 shows the structural relationship between endogenous and exogenous constructs and R2 values. Moreover, the figure also displays a few correlated error terms. The R2 value of PDO = 0.01, PWB = 0.30, WLB = .020, PS = 0.28 and OS = 0.13. The R2 values of PWB and PS are substantial since they are greater than 0.25, whereas the R2 value of WLB and OS are moderate since they are greater than 0.10; finally, the R2 of PDO is weak since it is closed to 0 (Cohen, 1988).

To improve the model fit indices, we correlated a few error terms having higher values within constructs, i.e., e13 with e15, e14 with e15, e26 with 27, e26 with 28, and e27 with e 28 as recommended by (collier, 2020).

Servant Leadership and Psychological Well-being

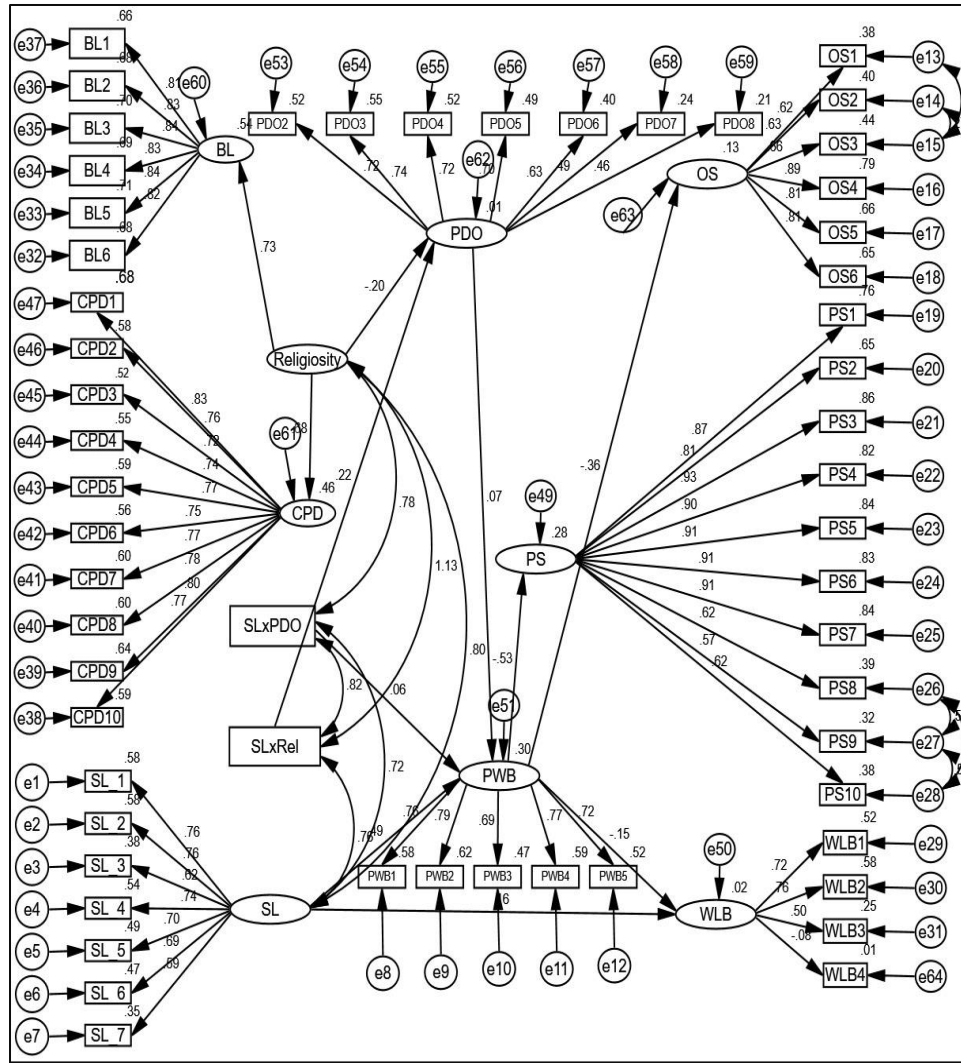


Figure 2: Structural Model

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing and Mediation Analysis

Hypotheses	Path	β	Significance	Support
H1	SL -> PWB	0.578	< 0.001	Yes
H2a (direct effect)	SL -> OS	-0.378	< 0.001	Yes
H2b (indirect effect)	SL -> PWB -> OS	-0.050	=0.147	No
H3a (direct effect)	SL -> PS	-0.495	< 0.001	Yes
H3b (indirect effect)	SL -> PWB -> PS	-0.162	< 0.001	Yes
H4a (direct effect)	SL -> WLB	0.940	=0.063	No
H4b (indirect effect)	SL -> PWB -> WLB	-0.500	=0.046	Yes
H5	SL*PDO -> PWB	0.381	=0.821	No
H6	SL*Rel -> PDO	0.018	=0.014	Yes

SL= Servant leadership, PWB=Psychological wellbeing of employees, OS= Employees' occupational stress, PS= Employees' perceived stress, WLB=Employees' work-life balance, Rel=Religiosity

4.5 Results of Hypotheses Testing

The result of the hypotheses testing is given in Table 4. The hypothesis H1 is supported ($\beta = .578$, $p < .001$), suggesting that servant leadership has a positive influence in promoting the psychological well-being of employees. The β value of H1= 0.578 shows that an increase of one unit in servant leadership is associated with a 0.578-unit increase in employees' psychological well-being, keeping other things constant. Therefore, managers should focus on increasing the effect of servant leadership if they want to enhance the psychological well-being of employees.

Hypothesis H2a: is supported ($\beta = -0.378$, $p < .001$), depicting that servant leadership reduces employees' occupational stress. The β value of H2a = -0.378 suggests that with one unit increase in servant leadership employees, occupational stress reduces by 0.378 units keeping other things constant. In contrast, hypothesis H2b: is not supported ($\beta = -0.378$, $p = 0.147$), suggesting that there is no indirect effect between servant leadership and employees' occupational stress via the psychological well-being of employees. Since the direct path is significant in hypothesis H2a and the indirect path in H2b is not significant, it shows no mediation effect of the psychological well-being of employees between servant leadership and employees' occupational stress. Therefore, managers should focus on increasing the effect of servant leadership if they want to reduce the employees' occupational stress.

Hypothesis H3a: is supported ($\beta = -0.495$, $p < .001$), depicting that servant leadership reduces employees' perceived stress. The β value of H3a = -0.495 suggests that one unit increase in servant leadership reduces employees' perceived stress reduces by 0.495 units

keeping other things constant. In addition, Hypothesis H3b: ($\beta = -0.162$, $p < .001$) is also supported, proposing the presence of a middleman association between servant leadership and employees perceived of stress, which is facilitated by the psychological well-being of employees. Since both direct and indirect paths are significant, it could be said that it's a partial mediation. However, the β value direct path is higher than the β value of the indirect path; therefore, managers should focus on reducing employees' perceived stress by increasing the effect of servant leadership.

Hypotheses H4a is not supported ($\beta = -0.940$, $p < .063$), depicting that servant leadership does not affect the work-life balance of employees. However, hypothesis H4b is supported ($\beta = -0.500$, $p < .046$), suggesting that there is an indirect effect of servant leadership on employees' work-life balance via the psychological well-being of employees. Since the direct path is not significant and indirect path is significant, therefore, it could be called as full mediation. Therefore, managers should focus on servant leadership because it will have an impact on workers' mental health, which in turn will have an impact on their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

The result of moderation analysis suggested that Hypothesis H5 is not supported since the P value of SL x PDO \rightarrow PWB = 0.381 is greater than $P=0.05$, suggesting that power distance orientation of employees does not weakens the relationship between servant leadership and their psychological well-being. In contrast, Hypothesis H7 was supported since the p-value, SL x REL \rightarrow PDO = 0.018 is less than the cutoff value of 0.05, indicating that religiosity moderates the impact of power distance orientation on servant leadership by diminishing power distance orientation's moderating effect.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research are in line with the studies conducted by Clarence et al. (2021) and Swanson et al. (2022) that support the role of servant leadership in predicting the psychological well-being of employees. This finding also supports the role of CoR, SDT, and SIPT theories, asserting that servant leaders' focus on the need fulfillment of their employees creates the perception of resourcefulness. In contrast, empowering employees ensures their innate need fulfillment. Furthermore, the sense of safety and security created by servant leaders provides a conducive environment for employees to maintain their psychological well-being. Employees with enriched work experience do not come across any occupational stress as a consequence (Cheval et al., 2017; Raabe et al., 2020). This study's findings align with the results of the study conducted by Najam & Mustamil (2022), which uses the conservation of resource theory to investigate the connection between servant leadership and psychological resilience and find strong support for the same, suggesting that servant leadership better help employees in coping with adversities by strengthening their psychological capital. However, servant leadership practice does not necessarily rely on the psychological well-being of employees; rather, their servant behavior itself is sufficient to ensure the absence of occupational stress. The study conducted by Kaltainen & Hakanen (2022) affirms this assertion and finds empirical

support in favor of servant leadership's role in improving employees' well-being and decreasing work-related stress. Further, the absence of perceived stress is related to the presence of psychological well-being of employees, indicating that the need fulfillment, sense of safety and security, and the sense of community within an organization created by servant leaders decreases the possibility of perceived stress (Glenn & Cuero, 2016). This study's findings are also compatible with the results of study by Jiménez-Estévez et al. (2023), which reveals that servant leaders, during COVID-19 pandemic, elevate employees' well-being by fulfilling employees' needs. Hence affirmed that servant leadership is a more appropriate approach during crises.

The research findings suggest a dearth of empirical evidence that substantiates the connection between servant leadership and work-life balance. However, this relationship is supported by the mediation of psychological well-being, indicating that employees do not have an objective measurement of work-life balance from their leaders, possibly because of not in contact with top leadership very often and hence draw the clue of work-life balance from the provision of support that they perceive (Lamprinou et al., 2021, p. 19). This finding confirms that the ethical tone from the top comprising of serving behavior helps employees maintain their psychological well-being (Teimouri et al., 2018), eventually reducing the likelihood of different types of stress. Furthermore, there is no support in this study for the moderation of PDO in decreasing the influence of servant leadership. The findings of the study conducted by Nemati et al. (2022) contrast the results of this study on one side with a significant moderating effect of power distance orientation but support the claim of this study on the other that power distance does not remain effective under different moderating conditions such as religiosity. These results confirm why Wang et al. (2022) could not find any moderating effect of power distance when analyzing collective data from Canada, the US, China, Brazil, and Pakistan. Power distance is a cultural value that does not operate in isolation and is subject to be affected by other variables. As hypothesized, the religious orientation of the society significantly affects how leaders behave and practice their leadership (Hage & Posner, 2015); specifically, the compatibility of servant leadership with religiosity in many respects proves the role of Social Information Processing Theory. The presence of religiosity in society complements servant leadership practices rather than contradicting them. A recent study's findings affirm servant leadership's relevance and effectiveness in countries like Pakistan, where it helps bring harmony among people working together (Jan et al., 2022). This finding negates the argument that servant leadership is not a religious theory (Kimotho, 2019). Similarly, it can be argued that the commonality between servant leadership and Islam, such as respecting and being kind to others, treating others equally, being fair in relations, and helping others (Khan, 2012; The Holy Quran, 1987; Greenleaf, 2002; Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012), provide strong evidence to claim that servant leadership works more effectively in cultures with the high religious orientation that does not allow any other cultural value that contradicts religious values to affect leadership practices.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research Direction

However, like every research endeavor, this research is subject to some limitations in making such strong claims. For example, cross-sectional data cannot supersede the findings of a longitudinal study or meta-analysis. This research required pure or extended replications to validate the claims of this study. Moreover, meta-analysis can also be helpful in legitimizing the finding of this study. Future research considering the influence of religiosity on cultural values other than power distance can provide more clarity on the overwhelming influence of religious beliefs. A comparative analysis between religious and non-religious societies can also provide a more precise picture of how contextual factors, along with religiosity, affect the effectiveness of servant leadership across the globe. In this realm, instead of considering each cultural variable separately, future research might incorporate the cumulative effect of all relevant cultural dimensions (Neubert et al., 2022). On the theoretical front, the work on servant leadership theory can be extended based on Social Learning Theory, as considered by Nauman et al. (2022), which can help followers develop themselves as servant leaders. Future research can also delve into experimental research design considering servant leadership intervention. This study focuses on collecting data from private sector organizations. A comparative study between public and private sector organizations can reveal whether servant leadership remains as effective in public sector organizations that work under the strict bureaucratic structure as it is in private sector organizations. This future direction is based on the findings of Setyaningrum et al. (2023), which was undertaken in the healthcare industry and revealed a clear correlation between servant leadership and work-life balance. This suggests that any mediating factor may not influence servant leadership practices and can directly affect different outcomes depending on the context. Finally, a study examining the effect of servant leadership training programs can help understand whether servant leadership is an approach that can be learned and developed in high power distance cultures or is not more than a theoretical concept.

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