

Exploring the Servant Leadership, Work Engagement, and Public Service Motivation among Civil Servants' Sport Council of Ministry of Interior in the Cambodian Setting

Kimseng Sok^{1*}, Sarom Mok², Mengheang Hor³, Sothea Lim⁴

Preah Sihamoniraja Buddhist University, Phnom Penh, Cambodia^{1,2}

Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, Phnom Penh, Cambodia³

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Phnom Penh, Cambodia⁴

Email: kimsengsok168@gmail.com

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Abstract

Public mistrust and growing aspirations for legitimacy in public administration characterize Cambodia's institutional environment. This quantitative study with a non-experimental design aimed to investigate the relationships between servant leadership, work engagement, public service motivation, and healthy organizational outcomes in the Cambodian public sector within the framework of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory and the Healthy and Resilient Organizations (HERO) model, taking into account the moderating effect of the supervisor's gender. Using established instruments, this study evaluated servant leadership, public service motivation, work engagement, and organizational results in a sample of 280 civil servants from the Ministry of Interior's Sport Council selected through convenience sampling technique. The five hypotheses were validated through structural equation modeling: servant leadership was positively correlated with public service motivation ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.002$), while work engagement was positively correlated with healthy organizational outcomes ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating partial mediation effects among these variables. The supervisor's gender did not have any moderating influence on the proposed relationships. In addition to highlighting the importance of servant leadership as a crucial social resource for promoting motivation, work engagement, and organizational well-being within the particular context of Cambodian public institutions, this study offers empirical evidence on the motivational mechanisms functioning within the public sector. The findings contribute to the integration of JD-R theory and the HERO model in public administration research, providing practical implications for developing more inclusive and healthy organizations in the Cambodian public sector.

INTRODUCTION

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has diagnosed serious flaws in interinstitutional coordination, the use of evidence for decision-making, and the implementation of long-term policies, despite the fact that the Cambodian public administration has used tools like managerial performance evaluation and strategic planning over the past ten years (OECD, 2024). Additionally, there has been a persistent decline in the public's confidence in public institutions, and there is increasing social pressure to improve service quality, equity, and transparency (UNDP, 2024). Because of this, Cambodian public administration is faced with the dilemma of having to spearhead revolutionary processes while working within internal limitations that restrict its ability to react appropriately. Because of its

complexity, the Cambodian environment is especially pertinent for examining the leadership and motivational mechanisms that uphold the dedication of public sector civil servants.

Examining the work-related and personal circumstances that support the maintenance of positive motivational moods and acceptable performance in the public sector is essential given this conflict between rising institutional demands and social expectations. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, an integrative framework that explains how job demands and resources affect employee well-being, motivation, and performance, can be used to address this problem. It has proven particularly helpful in situations where organizational complexity and high pressure are present (Bakker et al., 2014, 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Van Veldhoven et al., 2020). According to this viewpoint, job resources are crucial because they mitigate the effects of demands and encourage motivational processes that support organizational outcomes and work engagement (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In addition, the Healthy and Resilient Organizations (HERO) model (Salanova et al., 2012) offers a suitable framework for determining the essential components that underlie the development and upkeep of performance and well-being inside organizations. The HERO model (Salanova et al., 2012) and JD-R theory (Tummers & Bakker, 2021) both acknowledge leadership as a crucial social resource that may support worker well-being and promote positive organizational outcomes. According to these viewpoints, motivational processes at work and the activation of positive feelings depend heavily on leadership. Because of its strong prosocial orientation and emphasis on the growth and well-being of individuals, servant leadership stands out among the other leadership philosophies that may serve this purpose.

A strategy known as “servant leadership” empowers followers to develop and realize their full potential by involving them in a variety of ways (Eva et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020). Its primary goal is human development, which is based on leaders’ moral and altruistic values (Greenleaf, 1970; Jonker & Dube, 2025). Additionally, this leadership approach considers the welfare of clients, communities, and society at large in addition to the organization (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2008). Insofar as they have a prosocial orientation and a people-centered focus, transformational, authentic, ethical, and servant leadership are all considered to be part of the group of so-called positive leadership styles (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2019). However, despite these conceptual parallels, the fundamental moral focus of moral leadership systems varies. While authentic leadership focuses on leaders’ self-awareness and self-concordance, ethical leadership stresses adherence to normative standards, and servant leadership stands out for its emphasis on fostering the growth and well-being of numerous stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization (Lemoine et al., 2019).

When it comes to the reasons why people choose to work in the public sector, the symbolic value associated with public employment as a way to serve citizens is a key component in the creation of work meaning. This value may help explain why many people continue to be highly committed even in situations when institutional tensions are present (Bakker, 2015). According to Rainey and Steinbauer (1999), this orientation has been characterized as a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humanity, as well as an individual tendency to respond to motives primarily rooted in public institutions and organizations (Perry & Wise, 1990), which is conceptualized as public service motivation. The importance of this construct is supported by empirical data,

which repeatedly links it favorably to work engagement and identifies it as a unique individual characteristic within the public sector (Borst, 2018; Borst et al., 2019; De Simone et al., 2016; Ugaddan & Park, 2017; Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022).

Work engagement is a crucial psychological state within the framework of workplace motivational processes. It is described as a pleasant, rewarding, work-related state of mind marked by vigor, devotion, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Research has demonstrated that work engagement frequently leads to favorable organizational results in addition to improving employee well-being. According to Park et al. (2020), workers who are highly engaged at work exhibit increased vigor and focus in their day-to-day work, which helps them foresee obstacles, spot process flaws, and deal with environmental demands more skillfully. According to available meta-analyses, gender's precise role in the relationship between leadership, public service motivation, and work engagement has not been thoroughly investigated, despite the fact that some studies have included it as a moderating demographic variable (Mazzetti et al., 2023). Particularly, there is still little empirical support for motivational and resource-based models; aside from Lemoine and Blum's (2019) work, few studies have specifically examined these relationships. Therefore, it is important to look at supervisor gender as a contextual factor that could influence leadership-related motivational processes.

There are significant gaps in the comprehensive knowledge of these processes, despite a wealth of research on leadership in the public sector and advancements in the study of public service motivation and job engagement from motivational frameworks like JD-R theory. Specifically, there are few empirical studies that collectively look at how servant leadership functions as a social resource that can activate particular motivational processes, like work engagement and public service motivation, and how these processes result in positive organizational outcomes. The HERO model of Healthy and Resilient Organizations offers a suitable conceptual framework for comprehending how organizational practices and resources produce healthy organizational outcomes, but there is still little empirical integration of this model with motivational models like JD-R in the public sector. Furthermore, there is yet not enough data to determine if the gender of the person holding the supervisory position affects how these resource-based motivational pathways appear, particularly in public administration settings.

The current study intends to fill these gaps by empirically investigating the connections between servant leadership, public service motivation, work engagement, and healthy organizational outcomes within Cambodian public-sector organizations using JD-R theory and the HERO model of healthy and resilient organizations. The study also investigates whether the suggested motivational pathways are moderated by the gender of the supervisor. This study's contribution is the empirical integration of JD-R theory and the HERO model within a particular institutional context Cambodian public administration by incorporating supervisor gender as a contextual dimension analyzed through a moderation logic to investigate the stability of servant leadership-related motivational processes and their relationship to the creation of healthier public organizations.

Research Hypotheses

Six research hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1. Servant leadership (SEL) is positively related to public service motivation (PSM).

H2. Public service motivation is positively related to work engagement (WEN).

H3. WEN is positively related to healthy organizational outcomes (HOOs).

H4. Public service motivation and WEN mediate the relationship between SEL and HOOs.

H5. Supervisors' gender does not moderate the relationships in the structural model; that is, the effects of SEL on public service motivation, WEN, and HOOs remain stable regardless of supervisors' gender.

Research Conceptual Framework

In order to examine the connections between servant leadership, public service motivation, work engagement, and healthy organizational outcomes in the Cambodian public sector, the current study suggests a conceptual model that combines the JD-R theory and the HERO model of Healthy and Resilient Organizations. This conceptual framework integrates SEL, PSM, WEN, and HOOs within the JD-R theory and the HERO model. It graphically depicts the theoretical relationships developed in the theoretical framework and synthesized in hypotheses H1–H5. Furthermore, one contextual moderating element is the gender of the supervisor, as presented in Figure 1 below.

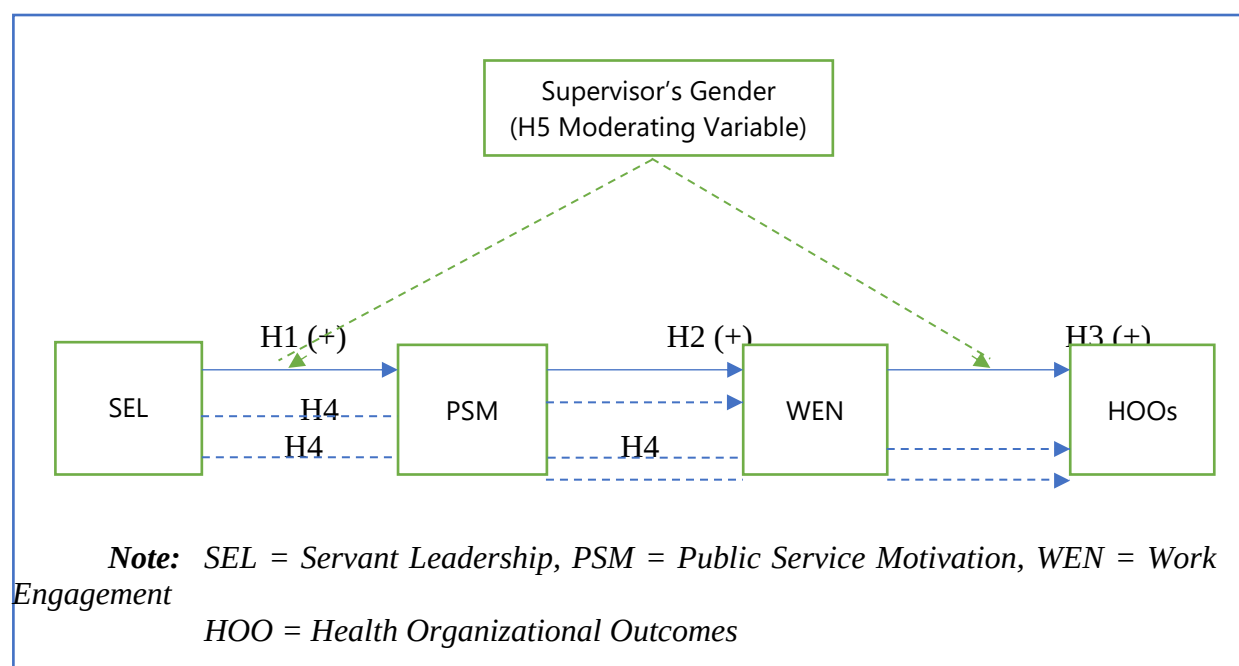


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study

Source: Researcher's Design (2024)

Theoretical Framework

One of the most popular theoretical frameworks for comprehending the mechanisms relating working conditions to motivation, well-being, and performance in various organizational contexts is JD-R theory (Mazzetti et al., 2023; Bakker et al., 2023). According to this theory, job demands and job resources are the two primary dimensions that can be used to characterize any job's features (Bakker et al., 2014). According to Demerouti et al. (2001), job demands are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational characteristics of work that necessitate prolonged physical, cognitive, and/or emotional effort and are consequently

linked to physiological and/or psychological costs. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), job resources, on the other hand, are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that have the potential to be motivating, are useful in accomplishing work objectives, assist in controlling the impact of workplace demands, and promote learning and personal development.

According to this viewpoint, JD-R theory offers a general motivating framework for comprehending how working environments affect positive psychological states and performance in addition to explaining work-related stress processes. In this paradigm, two different processes result from the interplay between job needs and task resources. According to Demerouti et al. (2001), the health-impairment process is activated when job demands are frequent or intense, demanding prolonged effort that may eventually result in numerous health issues as well as physical and mental tiredness. Conversely, the motivational process arises when workplace resources allow workers to meet their basic psychological requirements and efficiently manage job expectations, which promotes high performance and work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Together, these two processes may have an impact on performance, well-being, and health (Bakker et al., 2005).

This motivating process is especially pertinent to the current study because it makes it possible to comprehend how workplace resources are converted into favorable psychological states that support both individual and organizational functioning. Personal resources, which are people's positive assessments of their capacity to successfully influence and control their surroundings, were later added to the JD-R theory (Hobfoll et al., 2003). Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) empirically developed this extension by incorporating personal resources into the JD-R model and showing how factors like self-efficacy, optimism, and organizational-based self-esteem influence employees' perceptions of their work environment and mediate the relationship between job resources and work engagement. This inclusion is in line with psychological underpinnings that highlight how personal traits and environmental influences interact to shape human behavior (Taris & Schaufeli, 2015).

Salanova et al. (2012) developed the HERO model, which is based on the positive organizational psychology tradition and provides a method for comprehending the motivational processes that support both healthy organizational performance and occupational well-being. According to Bakker et al. (2014), Salanova et al. (2012), and Salanova (2021), the HERO model is conceptually consistent with JD-R theory from an integrative standpoint because it also highlights the role of job demands and resources in the creation of positive psychological states and healthy organizational outcomes. According to this strategy, the model emphasizes the dynamic equilibrium between job resources and demands as a basis for fostering both performance and psychosocial well-being. There are three interconnected parts to the model. Aspects of the workplace that support goal achievement, lessen the burden of job demands, and promote development and professional advancement are included in the first category of healthy organizational resources and practices. Positive emotional and motivational states that result from a sufficient interaction between job needs, organizational procedures, and job resources are referred to as "healthy employees." The third category, "healthy organizational outcomes," includes metrics like affective organizational commitment, in-role performance, and extra-role performance. These three elements work together to create a positive feedback cycle: investing in job resources and healthy practices encourages engaged workers, which in

turn improves favorable organizational outcomes (Acosta-Antognoni et al., 2013; Llorens et al., 2017; Salanova et al., 2012; Olvera et al., 2017).

According to JD-R theory, leadership is viewed as a social resource that affects psychological processes including employee well-being and the workplace. Tummers and Bakker (2021) found three ways that leadership can affect workers in a systematic review based on this framework: (1) by directly influencing job demands, job resources, and personal resources; (2) by moderating the impact of job demands and job resources on well-being; and (3) by influencing how workers actively transform their work environment, either by creating resources, making proactive adjustments, or producing negative effects that undermine their coping capacity.

In the context of the Cambodian public sector, the current study focuses on the first mechanism put forth by OECD (2024), analyzing how servant leadership functions as a social job resource that helps to activate personal resources, especially public service motivation. Accordingly, servant leadership is a relational leadership approach focused on community duty, ethical consciousness, empathy, compassion, and employee empowerment (Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2008). According to Liden et al. (2008) and Mayer (2010), the fundamental tenet of servant leadership is that individuals who practice this leadership style have an impact on organizational outcomes by promoting employee growth and well-being, particularly through meeting employees' needs. Using self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as an explanatory framework, Chiniara and Bentein (2016) investigated the psychological factors underpinning the impact of servant leadership on individual performance. Their research offers empirical proof that, via intrinsic motivating factors, servant leadership fosters improvements in task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). In a similar vein, Hameduddin and Engbers (2021) contend that employees are more likely to adopt normatively appropriate behaviors associated with higher levels of public service motivation when those in leadership or supervisory positions are seen as trustworthy role models who display behaviors focused on public service. Leaders hold a special position as reliable referent for influencing attitudes and actions at work, communicating expectations, and aligning incentives because of the status and power disparities that exist in the workplace (Hunter et al., 2013).

All things considered, the examined theoretical and empirical evidence indicates that servant leadership can function as a crucial social resource within the JD-R framework by mobilizing individual resources focused on the common good. Public service motive stands out among these as a particularly pertinent personal resource, which supports its particular investigation within the suggested theoretical framework in order to propose the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1 above.

METHOD

The current research used a cross-sectional, correlational, non-experimental design created using a quantitative methodology. This design allowed for the examination of the links suggested in the theoretical model based on a single measurement occasion and without changing the variables.

A total of 280 Cambodian public sector civil servants from the Sport Council of Ministry of Interior made up the sample. Senior and junior managers in this system are chosen through competitive public processes, creating a hybrid paradigm where political trust and

technical suitability are taken into account. Convenience sampling was used to pick this Sport Council. Participants are the civil servants with the participating the Sport Council of Ministry of Interior to be eligible. Samples completed self-report measures of work engagement and public service motivation in addition to evaluating their immediate supervisors. With servant leadership, public service motivation, work engagement, and healthy organizational outcomes as the primary variables and supervisors' gender as a moderating variable, the research model was based on the JD-R theory and the HERO model of Healthy and Resilient Organizations. According to the study's goal, the model makes the assumption that servant leadership (eight variables) performs as a social job resource that affects public service motivation (four factors), which in turn serves as a personal resource that improves work engagement (three factors). Three factors in-role performance, extra-role performance, and affective organizational commitment are used to evaluate this latter concept, which is a positive motivating state linked to beneficial organizational results.

The Servant Leadership Survey, created by van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), was used to measure servant leadership. The thirty items in this quiz are divided into eight categories: stewardship, empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, courage, forgiveness, and forgiveness. With Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.75 to 0.90, this study found adequate internal consistency indices in the initial validation. Also, the scale created by Kim et al. (2013) was validated in Cambodia (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2019) to measure public service motivation. The 16 questions in this edition are divided into four categories: self-sacrifice, compassion, commitment to public principles, and attraction to public service. With Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.70 to 0.86 across factors, the original instrument demonstrated sufficient reliability indices (Kim et al., 2013). In addition, the short form of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006a) was used to measure work engagement. Each of the three factors on the questionnaire vigor, dedication, and absorption is assessed using three items. The UWES-9 demonstrated sufficient reliability in its worldwide validation, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.85 to 0.90 across variables and nations (Schaufeli et al., 2006a). Lastly, the HEROCHECK Public questionnaire's outcomes block was used to quantify healthy organizational outcomes (Villarroel-Núñez et al., 2024). Three single-item criteria are included in this block: affective organizational commitment, extra-role performance, and in-role performance. These components encompass both the completion of essential job duties and the voluntary work done above and above what is required, as well as the emotional connection demonstrated by dedication, pride, and a desire to stay with the organization. In its Khmer validation, the instrument demonstrated sufficient validity and reliability indices (Villarroel-Núñez et al., 2024).

For data analysis, the structural equation modeling (SEM) studies were carried out using IBM AMOS (Version 24.0), whereas descriptive statistics, internal consistency estimates, and bivariate correlations were computed using SPSS (Version 27). To evaluate the data distribution, means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis were first computed for each dimension and overall scale score. According to Kline's (2012) recommendations, skewness and kurtosis levels below |2| and |7|, respectively, were deemed acceptable. Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega were used to measure internal consistency; values ≥ 0.70 were considered sufficient (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1995).

Since some dimensions did not entirely satisfy normality criteria, bivariate correlations were then calculated using Spearman's rho. To evaluate possible common method variance, employees' self-reported variables were subjected to Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The study design uses source separation for the dependent variable because supervisors reported positive organizational outcomes, which lowers the possibility of single-source bias. A SEM was estimated at the individual level in order to test the suggested theoretical model. The following indices were used to assess model fit: X^2/df , Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Good model fit was indicated by values of CFI and TLI ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA < 0.08 , and SRMR < 0.08 . Furthermore, two alternative structural model specifications were estimated: an alternative model (MA) that rearranged the variables suggested in the M1 to test the robustness of the theoretical model, and a partial mediation model (M2) that included an additional direct path between servant leadership and healthy organizational outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Each Scale Reliability

The means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis indices, and reliability coefficients for each dimension as well as the overall scores of the scales measuring servant leadership (SEL), public service motivation (PSM), work engagement (WEN), and healthy organizational outcomes (HOO) are shown in Table 1. SEL dimension consists of Empowerment (EMP), Interpersonal Acceptance (INA), Authenticity (AUT), Standing Back (STB), Courage (COU), Humanity (HUM), Social Responsibility (SOR), Accountability (ACC), and Global Servant Leadership (GSL). PSM dimension has 5 elements such as: Attractive to Public Service (APS), Commitment to Public Value (CPV), Compassion (COM), Self-sacrifice (SES), and Global Public Service Motivation (GPM). WEN dimension comprises of 4 elements: Vigor (VIG), Dedication (DED), Absorption (ABS), and Global Work Engagement (GWE). Dimension of HOOs has 4 elements: In-Role Performance (IRP), Extra-Role Performance (ERP), Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC), and Global Health Organizational Outcomes (GHO).

Table 1. Reliability of Each Scale (SEL, PSM, WEN, and HOOs)

Dimension	M	S.D.	Skewness		Kurtosis		Reliability	
			Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE	Omega	Alpha
<u>SEL</u>								
EMP	4.23	1.46	-1.01	0.12	0.408	0.24	0.95	0.95
INA	3.44	1.65	-0.30	0.12	-0.760	0.24	0.88	0.88
STB	2.80	1.47	-0.03	0.12	-0.523	0.24	0.79	0.78
COU	3.29	1.59	-0.37	0.12	-0.566	0.24	0.79	0.79
HUM	3.72	1.55	-0.59	0.12	-0.278	0.24	0.95	0.95
SOR	4.22	1.42	-0.87	0.12	0.149	0.25	0.88	0.88
AUT	4.39	0.99	-0.32	0.12	-0.358	0.25	0.56	0.51
GSL	3.78	1.10	-0.80	0.12	0.236	0.25	0.96	0.95
<u>PMS</u>								
APS	4.86	0.97	-0.36	0.12	-0.854	0.24	0.45	0.45
CPV	5.74	0.51	-5.14	0.12	44.709	0.25	0.77	0.76

Dimension	M	S.D.	Skewness		Kurtosis		Reliability	
			Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE	Omega	Alpha
COM	5.52	0.67	-2.99	0.12	14.709	0.25	0.87	0.53
GPM	5.03	0.54	-1.76	0.12	7.831	0.25	0.77	0.77
WEN								
VIG	4.33	1.09	-0.46	0.12	-0.183	0.24	0.90	0.89
DED	4.67	1.03	-0.84	0.12	0.936	0.24	0.88	0.87
ABS	3.87	1.23	-0.49	0.12	0.064	0.24	0.81	0.81
GWE	4.29	0.99	-0.53	0.12	0.2	0.24	0.92	0.92
HOOs								
IRP	5.48	0.64	-0.88	0.11	-0.297	0.29	-	-
ERP	3.68	1.35	-0.59	0.11	0.353	0.23	-	-
AOC	4.72	1.00	-0.48	0.11	-0.330	0.23		
GHO	4.63	0.72	-0.23	0.11	-0.222	0.23	0.48	0.45

Source: Researcher's Design (2024)

The overall servant leadership score was 3.78 (S.D. = 1.11), with means ranging from 2.80 (standing back) to 4.39 (accountability). While self-sacrifice had the lowest mean (M = 3.86, S.D. = 1.06), public service motivation variables demonstrated higher values, especially dedication to public values (M = 5.74, S.D. = 0.51) and compassion (M = 5.53, S.D. = 0.67). The total motivation score for public service was 5.04 (S.D. = 0.54). The overall mean for job involvement was 4.30 (S.D. = 1.00), with averages ranging from 3.88 (absorption) to 4.67 (dedication). Lastly, the overall score for healthy organizational outcomes was 4.63 (S.D. = 0.72), with means ranging from 3.68 (extra-role performance) to 5.49 (in-role performance).

With the exception of the commitment to public values and compassion dimensions, which displayed significant kurtosis values, indicating a concentration of responses at the upper end of the scale, skewness and kurtosis indices were largely within the suggested ranges (Kline, 2012). Internal reliability reached very high levels for empowerment and humility (> 0.95) and was sufficient for the majority of dimensions (omega and alpha > 0.70). These findings should be interpreted cautiously, though, as low levels of internal consistency were noted for the accountability dimension of servant leadership, as well as for attraction to public service and self-sacrifice within public service motivation omega and alpha < 0.60). The global healthy organizational outcomes index's reliability was likewise lower, which might be explained by the variety of indicators that make up this composite measure.

It is crucial to take into account that comparative evidence suggests that institutional and cultural circumstances influence the efficacy and manifestation of servant leadership. Specifically, research from Latin America indicates that servant leadership does not develop naturally in environments with higher levels of power distance and ongoing issues with institutional trust; instead, it needs to be actively facilitated through organizational practices that clearly define expectations for the leadership role, explicitly reinforce prosocial values, and legitimize these behaviors within formal management structures (Neubert et al., 2022). From this angle, the study's findings highlight how crucial it is to comprehend servant leadership as an organizational practice that can be purposefully promoted in public management, taking into consideration the organizational and cultural characteristics unique to the ASEAN setting.

Results of Variables Correlation

Global servant leadership is positively and statistically significantly correlated with global work engagement ($p = 0.406$, $p < 0.01$), global public service motivation ($p = 0.139$, $p < 0.01$), and global healthy organizational outcomes ($p = 0.167$, $p < 0.01$).

Similarly, global public service motivation was positively and significantly correlated with global work engagement ($p = 0.147$, $p < 0.01$), while its correlation with global healthy organizational outcomes was not statistically significant ($p = -0.087$, $p > 0.05$). Global work engagement, on the other hand, demonstrated weak but positive correlations with global healthy organizational outcomes ($p = 0.035$, $p > 0.05$), with more consistent correlations found between its dimensions and the particular indicators of extra-role activity and in-role performance. All things considered, the pattern of correlations offers a foundation for the ensuing structural studies and validates the direction of the linkages suggested in the theoretical model. From a theoretical standpoint, the study's findings add to the body of knowledge on public service motivation and servant leadership by empirically describing a chain of motivation that connects these concepts to positive organizational outcomes and work engagement. By including healthy organizational outcomes as a pertinent endpoint of motivational processes in Chilean public institutions, this method expands the logic of JD-R theory through the HERO model.

In this sense, servant leadership becomes a relevant social resource in the public sector since it is linked to positive motivational states like work engagement and the activation of personal resources focused on work meaning, such public service motivation. This connection is especially important in the public sector, where a key component of work identity is the drive to further the common good. Furthermore, by incorporating healthy organizational outcomes, these processes may be investigated beyond personal well-being, offering an organizational-level understanding of the impacts of servant leadership (Han et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2019). In this regard, a particularly pertinent personal resource for elucidating the activation of job engagement in public organizations is public service motivation. According to Bakker (2015), this prosocial drive enhances the JD-R model's motivational process by giving work purpose and value orientation, which makes it easier to sustainably invest effort and commitment even in situations with high demands. By coordinating personal values with the requirements and goals of the public workplace, public service motivation may serve as a crucial precondition for professional engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Hameduddin & Engbers, 2021; Schwarz et al., 2016)

Results of Analysis of Commori Method Variance

Using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) on the individual-level dataset ($n = 280$), a preliminary analysis was conducted to see whether common technique variance might be present. $AIC = 1320.192$, $RMSEA = 0.137$, $CFI = 0.652$, $NFI = 0.629$, $TLI = 0.559$, $IFI = 0.656$, and $X^2(135) = 1212.19$, $p < 0.001$, revealed that the single-factor model did not fit the data well. The fit of a model with four latent factors was compared to that of a single latent factor model due to the well-known drawbacks of Harman's single-factor test. $AIC = 433.245$, $D2(6) = 898.945$, $p < 0.001$, $RMSEA = 0.058$, $CFI = 0.940$, $NFI = 0.904$, $TLI = 0.921$, $IFI = 0.941$, $D2(129) = 313.245$, $p < 0.001$. When combined, these findings indicate that the interpretation of the ensuing studies is not significantly threatened by common method variance.

The nonsignificant loading and poor reliability of the servant leadership accountability element may weaken the construct's explanatory power. This problem, which has previously been shown in earlier studies (van Dierendonck et al., 2017), emphasizes the necessity of reevaluating its cultural significance in the context of Chile's public sector. In order to increase measurement reliability and its fit with the institutional environment examined, this subscale may be improved or replaced in subsequent iterations of the study. This element, which relates to accountability, openness, and ethical responsibility for decision-making, is especially important in settings where public trust and institutional legitimacy continue to be major obstacles. Analyzing this factor's manifestation and perception may offer important insights on the scale's cultural suitability as well as the larger role of servant leadership in fostering more open and reliable public institutions.

Results of Hypothesized Structural Model

The suggested connections between servant leadership, public service motivation, work engagement, and positive organizational outcomes were next examined at the individual level using structural equation models (SEM). The links between servant leadership, public service motivation, work engagement, and healthy organizational outcomes were experimentally tested by estimating structural equation models (SEM) at the person level.

An adequate fit to the data was demonstrated by the first comprehensive mediation model (M1): $X^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.056 [90% CI 0.048–0.063], SRMR = 0.041. These indices meet the widely recognized standards for a well-fitting model. According to the standardized direct effects, public service motivation was positively and significantly predicted by servant leadership (Beta = 0.18, $p < 0.001$), work engagement was positively and significantly predicted by healthy organizational outcomes (Beta = 0.47, $p < 0.001$), and public service motivation was positively and significantly predicted by work engagement (Beta = 0.15, $p = 0.002$). 3% of the variation in public service motivation, 2% of the variation in job engagement, and 22% of the variation in positive organizational outcomes were all explained by the model.

The low internal consistency of the psychometric results for the accountability subscale of servant leadership indicates that this dimension should be interpreted cautiously in the Cambodian setting. The coexistence of highly hierarchical formal control mechanisms with primarily vertical accountability practices is one cultural and institutional factor that may contribute to this weakness (Montecinos et al., 2020). These factors may lead to varying interpretations of what responsibility and authority delegation in servant leadership mean. The idea of holding others accountable may be seen more as a demand for control than as a behavior linked to empowerment in situations marked by a protracted crisis of institutional confidence (Mazzetti et al., 2023; Schaufeli et al., 2006b; Torrente et al., 2012). From an applied standpoint, these results encourage critical thinking about how empowerment and accountability techniques are advanced in intricate public-sector settings.

Results of Partial Mediation (M2) and Alternative Model (MA) Comparison

A partial mediation model (M2) and an alternative model (MA) were also estimated in order to assess the robustness of the suggested model. While the alternative model (MA) rearranged the structural order of the links among the variables in the model, the M2 model included an additional direct path between servant leadership and positive organizational results. The three models' fit indices, along with a comparison of models M1 and M2.

The partial mediation model outperformed the entire mediation model in terms of statistical fit, with significant differences between nested models ($D2 = 115.18$, $Ddf = 3$, $p < 0.001$). However, based on the criteria of theoretical coherence and higher parsimony in depicting the suggested links, the whole mediation model (M1) was kept as the final model. The suggested model's adequacy is further supported by the alternative model's obviously poor fit ($X^2/df = 9.20$, $RMSEA = 0.14$, $CFI = 0.65$). The structural model's findings support H1, H2, and H3 in relation to the suggested hypotheses. Additionally, hypothesis H4 is validated. The findings collectively enable the development of a sequential mediation process in line with JD-R theory and the HERO model, wherein public service motivation and work engagement are important personal resources and motivational states that link servant leadership, as a social resource, to positive organizational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Salanova et al., 2012; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

The results indicate that systematic procedures targeted at reinforcing the significance and social impact of public work may help increase public service motivation, which plays a crucial role in this environment. According to earlier research, organizational initiatives like matching work with prosocial principles, offering chances for significant contribution, and acknowledging initiatives focused on the common good can improve public service motivation (Christensen et al., 2017). In this sense, the current study's findings imply that interventions aimed at fostering servant leadership behaviors such as leadership development courses emphasizing sincerity, service orientation, and empathy may strengthen work engagement, public service motivation, and, ultimately, positive organizational outcomes.

Results of Supervisor Gender Moderation Analysis

The structural routes of the model did not differ statistically significantly between male and female supervisors, according to the multi-group study. As a result, the suggested relationships did not change based on the gender of the supervisor. These findings corroborate Hypothesis H5 by showing that the motivational pathways suggested by the model function similarly in both groups. These results imply that, in the context of Chilean public administration, the linkages suggested by the model hold true regardless of the supervisor's gender. For both men and women in supervisory positions, the motivational processes connecting leadership, public service motivation, and work engagement seem to function similarly, suggesting that the effects of servant leadership operate consistently within the organizational context under investigation. The normative orientation toward public service values that permeates many public-sector organizations may also be reflected in this pattern, where leadership performance may be more closely linked to service-oriented actions than to gendered leadership standards (Duff, 2013; Hogue, 2016).

Theoretically, the qualities of servant leadership can be used to explain the lack of a moderating gender effect. Relational, ethical, and prosocial values like humility, authenticity, concern for others, and a focus on the common good are emphasized in this leadership approach. These qualities are frequently regarded as relatively gender-neutral or, in certain situations, in line with communal role expectations traditionally associated with femininity (Barbuto & Gifford, 2010; Reynolds, 2011, 2014). Role congruity theory states that biases in the assessment of leaders may result from leadership activities that are thought to be at odds with gender role expectations. By offering a framework of leadership behaviors that incorporates communal and agentic features without perpetuating inflexible gender

dichotomies, servant leadership may thereby mitigate such role incongruity dynamics (Bakan, 1966; Broverman et al., 1972). Lemoine and Blum (2019) discovered that the impacts of servant leadership on motivational and performance-related factors were not significantly mitigated by the gender of supervisors. According to the authors, service-oriented behaviors are generally appreciated in and of themselves, regardless of the gender of the person demonstrating them. This could be a reflection of normative changes in how leadership is conceptualized and assessed in modern organizational settings.

CONCLUSION

By combining the assumptions of JD-R theory and the HERO model, this study provides empirical evidence on the motivational mechanisms linking servant leadership to positive organizational outcomes in the Chilean public sector, demonstrating that servant leadership functions as a relevant social resource capable of activating motivational processes related to work meaning and positive motivational states, including job engagement and public service motivation. However, the findings also underscore that servant leadership does not stand alone as the sole explanation for work behaviors and outcomes, as these processes are multivariate in nature, consistent with JD-R theory and the HERO model, which view performance and well-being as the result of the interaction among various job demands and resources. Additionally, this study incorporates the gender dimension and finds that supervisor gender has no significant effect on the motivational relationships examined, which carries implications for the development of more inclusive public management practices and policies. Nevertheless, the generalizability of these findings should be approached with caution given the sample's contextual limitations and the use of convenience sampling, and future research is therefore encouraged to expand to other Latin American countries while also exploring the institutional and cultural factors that may shape the expression and visibility of gender diversity within the public sector.

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