

Article

Does Servant Leadership Promote Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Citizenship Behavior among Employees? A Structural Analysis

Kalpina Kumari ¹, Jawad Abbas ^{2,*}, Jinsoo Hwang ³ and Lucian Ionel Cioca ^{4,*} 

¹ Faculty of Department of Business Administration, Greenwich University, Karachi 75500, Pakistan; drkalpina@gmail.com

² Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Central Punjab, Lahore 54590, Pakistan

³ The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Sejong University, Seoul 143-747, Korea; jhwang0328@gmail.com

⁴ Faculty of Engineering, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Blv. Victoriei 10, 550024 Sibiu, Romania

* Correspondence: jawad.abbas@ucp.edu.pk (J.A.); lucian.cioca@ulbsibiu.ro (L.I.C.)

Abstract: The last two decades have seen a conspicuous rise in the importance of leadership styles. Servant Leadership (SL) is believed to be a pioneering style of leadership that aims to serve others first. Based on the Social Learning Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study investigates whether SL promotes Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) among employees. In this regard, it also examines what role the employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays between the two variables. A sample of 422 responses was obtained from the managerial and non-managerial staff service and manufacturing industries using a non-probability sampling technique. The data that was collected was analyzed using the PLS-SEM technique. The results indicated a strong positive relationship between SL and OCB. Moreover, the employees' EI was also found to mediate the relationship between the two variables partially. The analysis showed that leaders who can serve their followers' needs and expectations to the best of their abilities could promote and strengthen EI among their employees, which eventually boosted their followers' behavior's emotional and motivational aspects. This study suggests that managers adopt an SL style that fosters empathy and trust with their employees. Meeting their employees' expectations and requirements may boost their EI, which helps them attract positive energy and create an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration.

Keywords: servant leadership; emotional intelligence; organizational citizenship behavior; PLS-SEM technique; service and manufacturing industries; a structural analysis



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1. Introduction

In the current dynamic business environment, companies are anxiously looking for effective leadership, which is defined by a strong sense of ethics, so the leaders may better serve their subordinates, invest in their growth, and fulfill the notion of a shared vision in today's competitive business environment [1]. In this situation, Servant Leadership (SL) has surfaced as a fundamental concept that significantly contributes to determining employee behavior and articulating organizational values that facilitate organizational justice [2], corporate citizenship, and an individuals' performance at the workplace [3]. The concept of SL was first introduced by Greenleaf in 1970 when the concern for others and the success in leadership roles were considered two contradicting concepts. This was an emerging leadership style, where leaders prioritized the employees' interests over their motives as the most important concern for their existence.

SL also focuses on promoting integrity and self-confidence, and it strives to bring out the employees' full potential [4]. The concept of SL has been drawn from the social learning theory by Bandura [5] and the social exchange theory by Blau [6]. Greenleaf [7] asserted

that the core concept of SL is the desire to serve others where a leader establishes open and transparent lines of communication with their subordinates and empathizes with them regarding their problems. The leader remains fully aware of everyone's expectations this way, so the employees' expectations can be fulfilled [8].

A common dilemma plaguing organizations is the employees' devotion and commitment to job excellence and increasing their work efficiencies at the workplace [9] because their efforts and inclinations are the key sources of organizational success goals achievement [2,10]. When the employees are dedicated and engaged with their jobs, their behaviors are molded to eventually result in more effective and productive outputs at the workplace [11]. One type of behavior can be referred to as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Despite the staggering levels of importance and the momentum that SL has gained over the years, majorly researchers have studied the direct impact of SL on employees' behavior and organizational performance. A few studies have taken organizational commitment as a promising antecedent of SL [12,13]. Even in the extant literature, many studies have also been focused on varying leadership styles to explain their impact on job performance, employees satisfaction, or even both [14].

This study focuses on investigating the relationship between SL and employees' OCB. Considering the vital role of employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI), the authors used it as an intervening variable between SL and OCB. They researched whether EI mediates between them or not. Multiple researchers proved that SL is positively associated with employee behavior and actions [15,16], but some found this relationship to be insignificant [17,18]. Moreover, most of these types of studies were conducted in developed regions where employee relations and their preferences are already at the highest priority for their management [19,20], and rare attention is paid to developing nations, such as emerging Asian economies where business dynamics vary significantly, which warrants a detailed investigation about this phenomenon [21]. These findings from this research will be a valuable addition to the existing literature about SL, specifically from the Asian perspective.

This paper is divided into five main sections. The current section provided introduction, theoretical perspective and background of the study. In the second section, a theoretical framework, a detailed literature review and research hypotheses of the underlying relationships are being proposed. In the third and fourth section, methodology and analysis have been discussed. Finally, in the last section, the conclusion, limitations, implications and recommendations for future research have been proposed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundation of Servant Leadership

According to Spears [17], leaders who put the SL style into effect in their organizational settings inspire their subordinates to grow into leaders who place others before themselves. The leaders who prioritize others and their needs serve as role models for their subordinates at the workplace. This phenomenon follows two sociology theories: the social learning theory by Bandura [5] and the social exchange theory by Blau [6]. According to the social learning theory, a person's behavior is reshaped by their social environment. Suppose this is translated into the SL context. In that case, the leaders who prioritize their subordinate's needs by empowering them and even conducting social welfare work for the community are ideal role models for their subordinates [22]. It is observed that followers who see their leader as a source of inspiration eventually emulate their behavior to be more productive at the workplace. A subordinate who observes SL behavior would exhibit helpful behavior towards their colleagues and community members.

Regarding the social exchange theory by Blau [6], a follower who has been led by an SL concept and is treated the right way will eventually pass it on to his subordinates, which creates a legacy. Therefore, Greenleaf's SL concept states that the leaders need to be a source of serving others and then assume leadership, which separates it from the foundations of other leadership styles [23]. Primarily, SL focuses on how to serve others and not just lead

people. Hence, the SL framework lays its foundation on the basic operating principle of putting the interest of the leaders' followers before considering the leaders' preferences [24].

2.2. Servant Leadership

SL first emerged in the 1970s, and its roots date back to the seminal work of Robert Greenleaf [25]. Greenleaf conceptualized a leadership philosophy that was geared towards the self-development of people, and he wrote three articles that brought the theory of SL to the forefront, which are titled *The Servant as a Leader* (1970), *Trustees as Servants* (1972), and *The Institution as Servant* (1972). The SL style introduced the concept of an empathetic leader who needs to be a good listener, develop and foster a culture of shared learning and inclusivity, and help to spark creative insights at the workplace. It is an innate drive to serve others, followed by the will and desire to lead [26]. This form of leadership distinguishes itself from other leadership styles because the leaders consider it their duty to serve others and place their high priority needs before their own [27].

Moreover, researchers have emphasized that the leader's ability to inspire comes from the motivation to serve their followers by addressing their needs over their own desires [28]. It is also the responsibility of an SL leader to work towards the professional excellence and growth of his followers and eventually see them progress in their careers [29]. Hence, it can rightly be called the people-oriented leadership style, which also contributes positively to the work environment. Daniels et al. [30] revealed that servant leaders believe in inclusion and make unanimous decisions that enhance the quality of both the workers and the organization. Servant leaders serve as a motivational figure who has the ability to inspire and provide others with a vision to pursue, alongside winning the faith and confidence of their disciples. The power of a servant leader to develop open and clear communication channels provides the opportunity to acknowledge the follower's needs and opinions assuring that the leader and employee relationship is constantly evaluated to identify current strengths and weaknesses [31].

2.3. Emotional Intelligence (EI)

According to Karasneh and Al-Momani [32], EI is a personal characteristic that equips individuals to process large and complicated blocks of information regarding their emotional state and others. This prepares them to navigate communication that helps them understand how others think and behave [33]. EI gives people a competitive edge to control their emotions, which supports them to indulge in highly productive activities and forge meaningful relations with others [34]. Additionally, a high EI quotient enables people to be on top of their own and other peoples' emotions, manage them single-handedly, and correctly decode the intricacies beneath the various emotions and the possible emotional exchanges [35].

The employees who have been hired by an organization are constantly interacting with each other. All human interactions have an element of emotionality—an integral part of all kinds of behavior. For human interactions to be classified as an effective one, it is essential that an individual does not only understand and control his own emotions but also of others, which is termed as emotional intelligence [36]. For instance, for a manager to effectively manage his relationship with his employees, he must keep a check on his own emotional state at firsthand. Personalities who are more aware of their emotions can put forward their emotional state more comprehensively, which makes it easier for their peers to understand them at workplace [37].

2.4. Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB can be described as appropriate and flexible, and it is the type of behavior that an individual willingly depicts and has no connection with perks or positive reinforcements. However, as an entirety, it ensures the effective and efficient functioning of the organization. OCB is made of two components: the spirit of helping others, such as altruism, and a generalized sense that drives them to do well for the sake of the organization [33]. When

a person is known to engage in OCB, the benefits are usually accrued to the organization with no increased indirect costs [38].

OCB has been proven to be beneficial in enhancing organisational quality and innovation [39]. It increases job happiness, mental health, physical health, job retention, and service-oriented behaviours among employees by facilitating information exchange [40]. Displaying OCBs can also increase organisational efficiency by reducing the need for monitoring, training, and crisis management expenditures, allowing managers to focus on more critical job duties, and encouraging workers to contribute constructive comments that can help the businesses to develop [41]. OCBs are vital in generating improved levels of organisational productivity, quality, and effectiveness in general [42].

2.5. Servant Leadership and Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Modern society requires organizational management to be ethical and people-oriented. SL plays an integral role in this regard due to its profound influence on the organization's well-being and smooth functioning at both the departmental (team) and individual levels [43]. SL benefits organizations positively through several academic studies. Ehrhart [44] was among the pioneer scholars who empirically proved that SL was significantly different from transformational and leader-member exchange styles. Ehrhart said that SL is beneficial for organizations because it helps develop a fair working environment. Perkasa et al. [33] concluded that SL positively impacts the employee mindset. It also leads to higher organizational performance, improved leadership integrity, organizational commitment, and improved customer service [45,46]. Under SL, the rate of employee turnover is also known to have reduced, which is critical for high-performing organizations. Amah and Oyetuunde [47] concluded that through SL, organizational management could reduce employee turnover and inculcate loyalty in their followers.

Several empirical studies reinforced this argument, establishing the positive relationship between SL and OCB. In this context, Isabel et al. [43] proposed that the leaders' perceptions differed when their approach was more employee-oriented and prioritized the subordinates, which inevitably encouraged subordinate OCBs. Saleem et al. [3], who based their research in India, also concluded that subordinates working with a serving leader develop a passionate and empathetic personality, which eventually tend to help and care for others. A more recent development in leadership styles also revealed that SL indeed heightened the level of OCB at the workplace [48–50]. Based on the theory and empirical studies, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows, illustrated in Figure 1.

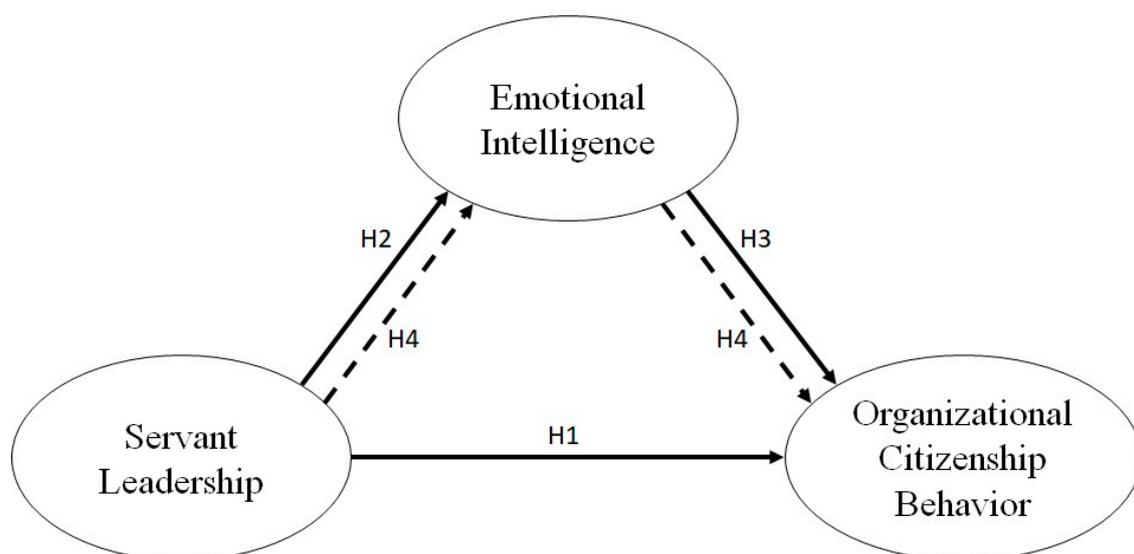


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Servant Leadership (SL) has a significant relationship with the employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).*

2.6. *Servant Leadership (SL) and Employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI)*

With more recent research on emotional intelligence and awareness in organizations, these topics are fast gaining momentum and coming to the limelight. The literature supports the importance of EI as a leader and recognizes the association between emotional intelligence and the transformational leadership style [51]. A crucial factor of leadership success in a professional setting could be attributed to EI. Several types of research were also conducted concurrently to study the relationship between leaders' EI and servant leadership (SL). EI was definitely between EI and the four prime SL qualities, including wisdom, emotional healing, organizational stewardship, and altruism [52]. Being an effective servant leader requires you to self-regulate your emotions. Hence, an SL scores well on EI and emotional maturity. Without mental and emotional wellbeing, a servant-leader might find it challenging to fulfill their emotional and mental needs.

On the contrary, where several studies clearly showed a close positive association between the leaders' EI and leadership accomplishment in a professional setting, various leadership theories also tried to examine the relationship between SL and leaders' EI at the same time, which aim to explore how possessing an SL style can lead towards a leader's emotional intelligence at the workplace [53]. However, the given research discovered a positive association between the leaders' self-rated SL and the development of their EI [54].

Additionally, different leadership theories attempted to connect the style and the nature of leadership and their resulting consequences on their followers. A significant amount of research tried to test these assumptions. Jit et al. [55] established that servant leaders have a unique perspective and approach to handling the emotional needs of their followers. They know the proper ways to relieve the emotional suffering of their followers, cultivate a sense of mental wellbeing, authorize them, and assist them in their personal and professional development. It is common to have employees diagnosed with emotional voids, which often result from emotional trauma. These employees are made to feel emotionally whole by servant leaders, who take their employee's emotional vulnerability as an opportunity to settle them. This quality of servant leaders to fill emotional voids and help people with their emotional needs is called *healing* by Spears [56]. Spears [56] suggested that when people have their aspirations shattered or have had a heartbreaking episode in a relationship, the need for emotional healing becomes all the more evident to revive spirits and heal the pain.

It can be said that orientation for emotional healing and the mental well-being of the followers is an exclusive trait associated with servant leaders, which is based on evidence from previous research. Moreover, not much empirical evidence and research were discovered to understand the thought process and mechanisms behind these servant leaders that inculcate a sense of human emotional understanding and cognitive development among their followers. Subordinates, along with the leaders, should exercise professional techniques in regards to managing emotions because it is believed that employees who do well on EI tests perform inadvertently better at the workplace and also make noteworthy contributions to the organization they work for [57]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is postulated to study the given relationship of SL and the employees' EI in-depth.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Servant leadership has a significant relationship with the employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI).*

2.7. *Employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)*

EI and OCB can inspire varying behavioral patterns that determine the success of an organization. According to Udayar et al. [58], EI directly impacts individuals' performance, so equipping emotionally intelligent people with a competitive advantage in a professional

setting is necessary. Leaders and subordinates should exercise professional techniques in managing emotions in a workplace.

EI could have a more profound effect on performance than a person's IQ [59], and it is a considerably more significant determinant to separate and rate individual performances in the form of *stars* as opposed to assessing via academic performances [60]. Duong et al. [61] further debated that expertise and IQ are just two of the many factors contributing to individual performances. They concluded that higher levels of EI, along with these two given factors, are equally essential to enhance the performance of employees within the organizational setup. It is believed that employees who do well on EI tests perform inadvertently better at the workplace and make noteworthy contributions to the organization they work for, which is primarily due to their OCB.

The ability to perceive, regulate, and utilize a person's emotions is positively associated with task performance [62,63], along with a decrease in counterproductive developmental job experiences. According to Dirican and Erdil [64], OCB is directly linked with interpersonal interaction, and it is driven by the same motivational factors that drive emotional management. Moreover, employees who manage their emotions well implement wiser coping strategies, and they are more fulfilled and abundant regarding social relationships. Emotionally stable employees can be expected to be more empathetic [65] and are less likely to engage in arguments or feuds with their colleagues because they can easily control their behavior ([66]).

Personalities that rate higher EI are more adept at identifying and appreciating formal and informal workplace requirements and behavioral expectations. Individuals with high EI are suggestive of being sensitive towards the workplace. They are more likely to be involved in compliance citizenship behaviors designed for the organization's overall welfare [67]. Similarly, research conducted in this regard showed that employees who exhibit a higher degree of EI are known to perform better on the job with increased job satisfaction and can uplift the firm's overall profitability. Researchers also examined the relationship between EI and other social relationships in the workplace. It was discovered that a higher EI dramatically reduces the number of conflicts amongst the employees at the workplace [68]. Kotsou et al. [69] concluded that EI has a significant effect on health, relationships, and work/academic performance through their systematic literature review.

A high degree of EI also means a considerable amount of situational and environmental awareness with a particular organization. This includes a general understanding of organizational goals and the behavior needed to achieve those goals. Employees with higher EI tend to harbor empathy for the institution, which facilitates the widespread adoption of an organizational viewpoint that eventually translates into beneficial actions for the organization [70]. The relationship between EI and organizational commitment amongst municipality employees was investigated by Amjad [71]. The results reinforced the positive relationship between EI elements and organizational commitment. Zeidan [72] debated that it is essential to understand the individual traits when analyzing turnover intentions. Hence, the researcher resorted to a meta-analysis to better understand how correlated personality characteristics and turnover intentions. His research considered several personality characteristics: agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, an open-minded approach to experience, and emotional consistency to function. The study concluded that turnover intentions are primarily shaped by emotional stability/consistency, amongst other personal traits.

It can be argued that employees with high EI are in a better position to understand their feelings and react in a much more responsible way than employees with a low EI due to their capability to switch from a negative to a positive mood. Similarly, this enables them to maintain their positive state of mind. They are more likely to be engaged in positive discretionary behaviors even by going beyond their formal job requirements that promote effectiveness in organizational functioning. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been proposed, based on the discussion above.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *The employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI) has a significant relationship with Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).*

2.8. Mediating Role of the Employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI)

In contrast to the formulation of Hypothesis 1, which establishes a direct impact, the previous studies also highlight an indirect correlation between SL and OCB. Several variables, such as organizational justice [73], leader-member exchange [74], and the role of trust in a leader [75], have been known to mediate the relationship between SL and OCB. The conclusions of a meta-analysis study piloted by Ja'afaru Bambale [76] proposed that further investigations could consider the employees' EI variable as a mediator in the effect of SL on OCB. However, rare attention is paid to exploring the impact of SL on OCB with the mediating development of the employees' EI. However, this study focused on the employees' EI compared to the other EI leaders' EI constructs. This is because the development of the employees' EI can be a solid variable to measure the outcome of SL [77].

Wu et al. [78] proposed that a leader who inevitably has a higher competence level, credibility, and is focused on his subordinates' needs and emotional welfare has a higher chance of teaching a sensitivity for human emotions and cognitive understanding amongst his followers. This argument is in line with the two theories, including the Social Learning Theory by Bandura [5] and the Social Exchange Theory by Blau [6]. These theories state that positive stimulus influences positive attitude, which implies that a positive stimulus that emanates from serving leaders is a source of encouragement for subordinates' EI to understand their emotions and others' emotion in a more positive perspective. Therefore, based on the given discussion from the given theories and the empirical-based findings, the current hypothesis intends to strengthen further the role of employees' EI as a mediator in the effect of SL on OCB, so the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *The employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI) significantly mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership (SL) and the employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).*

3. Methodology

3.1. Target Population and Sampling

The deductive approach, which positivist philosophers highly advocate, forms the basis of this research. The authors followed a survey strategy related to the deductive method. The target population includes employees working in service and manufacturing industries in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad cities of Pakistan. The authors distributed 981 questionnaires, which followed the non-probability convenience sampling technique. The given sampling technique is also considered an ideal approach when you don't have access to the entire population [79]. The data was collected from employees with a minimum of one year of work experience to ensure that the employee had spent sufficient time in the organization to answer the given questions on the questionnaire regarding their supervisor's SL style and EI and whether OCB was performed at the workplace. See Table 1 for detailed demographic information about the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Particulars	Description	Values	Percentage
Total Responses	Manufacturing	173	41%
	Services	249	59%
Gender	Female	215	51%
	Male	207	49%
	Prefer not to say	4	1%
Age	Less than 20	135	32%
	20–30	203	48%
	31–40	59	14%
	41–50	8	2%
	50+	13	3%
Years of experience	Less than 5	131	31%
	5–10	207	49%
	11–15	68	16%
	16–20	6	1.50%
	More than 20	11	2.60%
Position within the organization	Operational staff	165	39%
	Junior management	152	36%
	Middle management	97	23%
	Top management	9	2.08%
Organizational status	Public	194	46%
	Private	228	54%

3.2. Data Collection Method

Standardized self-administered questionnaires were distributed by email to 981 respondents. Due to COVID-19, it was difficult to approach the employees individually, and outsiders were also not allowed to enter the company. Only 245 filled questionnaires were returned after four weeks at first. To collect the data from the remaining respondents, polite reminder emails were sent, and 210 more responses were effectively received. After removing the unusable questionnaires, which were excluded during the data screening process due to incomplete or unviable responses, 422 useable questionnaires were obtained with a response rate of 43%. The given response rate is an indirect indication of the relevance and rigor of a study regarding the respondents' opinion if the response rate is moderate. Finally, 422 completed responses were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS v. 3 software. The process for the data collection took around twelve weeks. Furthermore, the participants were asked to give feedback on different given statements about their supervisor's SL style, EI, and OCB by choosing the number as close as possible to their opinion as per the given scale.

3.3. Measurement

The items were selected from the validated questionnaires used in the previous research studies. Also, they were presented in English because it is the official language of business organizations in Pakistan. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part contained information about the participants' demographics, which was followed by measures for SL, the employees' EI, and the employees' OCB. The survey scales used in this study comprised 33 items related to the three constructs.

3.3.1. Servant Leadership (SL)

7-items were used to measure servant leadership, which were recently refined by Liden et al. [80]. In addition to the present study, this scale was adopted and modified in previous research. Hence, this justified the rationale for adopting this scale in the present study. The Cronbach's alpha of the overall scale was 0.80 in the given research. Examples

of sample items include my manager telling me if something work-related is going wrong, and my manager prioritizes my career development.

3.3.2. Employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI)

16-items were used to measure Emotional Intelligence (EI), which were developed by Wong et al. [81]. The EI variable comprised four subscales, which included self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, use of emotions, and regulation of emotions. Each subscale was measured using four items. Cronbach's alpha of the overall scale was reported to be 0.924 in the given study. Examples of the sample questions include *I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time*, and *I always know my friends' emotions by their behavior*.

3.3.3. Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Podsakoff et al. [82]. The overall reliability of the 10-item scale was 0.843 in this study. Examples of sample questions include *I believe in giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay*, and *I consume a lot of time complaining about trivial matters*.

3.4. Reliability and Validity

The initial questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts who specialized in human resource management and specifically with the leadership domain before distributing the link among the respondents to assess the content and face validity. They thoroughly reviewed the content of the questionnaire and the extent that it was likely to measure the study variables, which included SL, EI, and OCB. Most of the reviewers provided positive comments, minor modifications were made to the instrument used for the pilot study, and the same method was implemented for the comprehensive study.

Before conducting the comprehensive survey, the authors performed a pilot study to test the questionnaires' feasibility, clarity, and appropriateness according to Hinkin's [83] recommendation. The pre-tests were designed and developed to ensure that the measures were logically consistent, complete, and valid. The internal reliability of the study and the research instrument for the pilot study was measured using Cronbach's Alpha (α). The pilot test among 45 respondents revealed that the Cronbach alpha for all the constructs exceeded the acceptable range of 0.7. These figures showed that the scales used in this research are consistent and reliable. Additionally, the pilot study results suggested that the proposed questionnaire instrument is understandable and clear.

3.5. Analytical Approach

The PLS-SEM technique was used to analyze the data. PLS-SEM has gained significant attention across numerous fields, such as human resource management, strategic management, accounting, operations management, management information systems, marketing, supply chain management, hospitality, and tourism [84,85]. Hair et al. [84] argued that PLS-SEM is the most admirable technique when examining complex latent variables models. According to Hair et al. [86], investigating complex higher-order models has high predictive power. PLS-SEM offers the advantages of reviewing latent constructs through path analysis, and it provides an accentuated explanation of the variance independent variables while assessing the structural model [87]. There are two models where PLS-SEM analyzes data. The first is the measurement model, which provides information about the relationship between the observed and the latent variables. The second is a structural model, which examines the latent variables' relationships [87].

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed via a two-stage measurement and structural model. Cronbach alpha (CA) coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the constructs, and the composite reliability (CR) was used to check the measurement reliability of each construct.

Result and Interpretation

For the measurement model, descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha coefficient, and composite reliability analysis were performed to analyze the relationships among the latent variables. They indicated a significant positive relationship among all the variables illustrated in Table 2. According to Peterson [88], if Cronbach's alpha value is more significant than 0.7, it is recommended for acceptance. The composite reliability of all measurements reflected values greater than 0.7, so it is accepted.

Table 2. Factor Loading, Mean, SD, CA, CR, AVE.

Variables	Items	Loading	Mean	SD	CA	CR	AVE
Servant Leadership	SL 2	0.656	0.356	0.048	0.843	0.881	0.555
	SL 3	0.724					
	SL 4	0.760					
	SL 5	0.830					
	SL 6	0.752					
	SL 7	0.732					
	Emotional Intelligence	EI 1					
EI 4		0.648					
EI 5		0.730					
EI 6		0.620					
EI 7		0.805					
EI 8		0.737					
EI 10		0.765					
EI 11		0.763					
EI 12		0.694					
EI 13		0.740					
EI 14		0.739					
EI 15		0.786					
EI 16		0.663					
Organization Citizenship Behavior	OCB 1	0.685	0.469	0.035	0.843	0.881	0.521
	OCB 2	0.805					
	OCB 3	0.817					
	OCB 4	0.778					
	OCB 5	0.648					
	OCB 7	0.748					
	OCB 8	0.826					

Note: SD = Standard Deviation, CA = Cronbach Alpha, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, CR = Composite Reliability Items SL1, EI2, EI3, EI8, OCB6, OCB9 and OCB10 were deleted due to low loadings.

Furthermore, the authors examined the discriminant and convergent validities to ensure that all the constructs are significantly different. The convergent validity was examined through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). If the AVE value is more significant than 0.4, it should be accepted, which is according to Hu and Bentler (1998). The AVE analysis indicated values for all constructs greater than 0.5. The results for this measurement are also shown in Table 2. Also, suppose the inter-item correlation is found below. In that case, it signifies the existence of different domains origin for the items, which deletion is required to reduce the errors and unreliability [88]. According to Hu and Bentler [89] and Byrne [90], the items with loadings less than 0.40 should be removed. After deleting items SL1, EI2, EI3, EI8, OCB6, OCB9, and OCB10, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients were greater than the recommended level of 0.6 or higher. Table 3 indicates the Fornell–Larcker criterion matrix. The AVE squared roots for each measurement are higher than its correlation with the other latent variables, so an adequate discriminant validity is also fulfilled [91]. The discriminant validity was attained because the result for every row or column of the constructs did not exceed the value in the diagonal.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Discriminant validity).

Variables	EI	OCB	SL
EI	0.722		
OCB	0.121	0.722	
SL	0.262	0.595	0.745

Note: EI, Emotional intelligence; OCB, Organizational citizenship behavior; SL, Servant Leadership.

A structural model was used to evaluate the total variance or R^2 , the P-value assessment, the T-statistic assessment, and the beta assessment. Table 4 shows the path coefficients (β) with their respective t-statistic, p-values, and R^2 values. The path analysis demonstrated that none of the control variables, including age, gender, and position, significantly affected OCB. As shown in Table 4, the three paths show significant positive relationships among the latent variables. The highest positive significant path relationship was between SL and OCB ($\beta = 0.275$, $t = 2.412$, and p -value = 0.003). SL and EI also indicated a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.232$, $t = 2.208$, and p -value = 0.0070). Similarly, EI and OCB also presented a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.233$, $t = 2.246$, and p -value = 0.008). However, the least positive significant path relationship was identified between EI as a mediator between SL and OCB ($\beta = 0.029$, $t = 2.141$, and $p < 0.05$). Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are fully supported. However, H4 is only partially supported.

Table 4. Testing of Hypotheses.

Variables	β	T-Statistic	p -Value	Result
SL toward OCB	0.275	2.412	0.003	Supported
SL toward EI	0.232	2.208	0.007	Supported
EI toward OCB	0.233	2.246	0.008	Supported
EI b/w SL and OCB	0.201	2.141	0.019	Partially Supported

To determine the mediating role of EI between SL and OCB, this study used direct, indirect, and total effect measurements via the bootstrapping technique by using a PLS-SEM analysis (Kline, 2010, Fritz et al., 2012). Furthermore, the PLS algorithm was adopted to obtain coefficient values.

The direct effect testing of SL on OCB indicated a path coefficient value of 0.605, which indicated that SL significantly and positively influences OCB. Furthermore, it also shows the indirect effect of SL on OCB through EI has a coefficient value of 0.290. This means that the impact of EI is significant.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This research was conducted to examine the relationship between SL and OCB through the mediating role of the employees' EI. The results show that SL has a significant positive impact on the employees' OCB. The finding is consistent with the prior studies that linked SL to the employees' engagement, dedication, loyalty, better performance, and initiative service behavior, which identifies it as an essential factor to induce OCB in employees [17,92]. The results fit with the social exchange theory, which emphasizes the reciprocal nature of SL. This suggests that when employees perceive that their leaders put their needs and interests above everything else and prioritize their development and empowerment, they readily exhibit discretionary behavior to return the favor, which is in line with the social exchange theory. Furthermore, the results also substantiate the previous studies in other sectors conducted in different cultural contexts. Also, they highlight the significance of implementing servant leadership within an organization to motivate the employees to engage in extra-role performance through the exhibition of OCB.

Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was discovered between SL and the employees' EI, which aligns with the hypothesis. This can be explained in light of the past studies, which indicate the positive effects of servant leadership on the employees' overall psychological and emotional well-being [93,94]. EI, empathy, and compassion

towards the employees have been identified as the peculiar characteristics of servant leaders, which help them better understand and address their employees' emotions and feelings. Consequently, the previous research suggests that servant leadership facilitates the emotional healings of employees, which nurtures their emotional wellbeing [95,96]. Furthermore, it has been previously argued that EI and wellbeing are correlated. The studies showed that people with high EI have a positive mood, high self-esteem, greater optimism, and satisfaction [97,98]. In regards to our findings and the previous studies, it is reasonable to conclude that servant leadership enhances the employees' EI and overall emotional wellbeing.

Moreover, our study finds that the employees' EI is positively related to the employees' OCB. The findings from this study build on the existing empirical evidence about EI as a predictor of the employees' engagement, dedication, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance [99]. Emotionally intelligent people aware of their emotions can better regulate their emotions and develop strategies to cope with their negative feelings and stress. Consequently, they are more resilient, keep themselves motivated at work, and are unlikely to experience burnout. Additionally, emotionally intelligent people also have a better understanding of the emotional needs of others, and they are reportedly more empathetic towards others in their relationships. Thus, they contribute to OCB by developing a healthy working environment.

In addition to the direct effect hypotheses, our study further hypothesized the indirect effect of servant leadership on OCB through employees' EI. The result of the study showed that EI partially mediated the positive relationship between servant leadership and OCB. Several previous studies have examined the indirect relationship between servant leadership and OCB through various other mediating variables. These studies enhanced our understanding of the relationship between servant leadership and OCB by exploring the underlying mechanism by which servant leadership boosts employee OCB. Our study further extends the understanding of the relationship between servant leadership and OCB, indicating the vital role of employees' EI, which can significantly activate a higher level of employees' OCB at the workplace.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

The current study makes threefold contributions to the existing literature about servant leadership. Firstly, it expands the positive effects of servant leadership in Pakistan's manufacturing and service industry. A substantial body of empirical research was produced over the last decade about the relationship between servant leadership and OCB, but the number of studies conducted in the Pakistani context is scarce [92,100]. Thus, this study adds further evidence to the prior studies that were conducted in different cultural contexts, and it validates the assumption that when the leaders prioritize the interests of the employees as opposed to their interests and that the interests of the organization. The employees display OCB by going beyond formal roles, and they become more dedicated, engaged, and committed to organizational goals.

Secondly, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first that specifically investigates the relationship between servant leadership and the employees' EI. Some researchers have previously examined the link between servant leadership and a leader's EI. The findings from these studies suggest a strong positive relationship between servant leadership and the EI of the leaders [101,102]. EI is identified as one of the distinctive characteristics of servant leaders. Similarly, the past studies researched the association between the employees' EI and OCB and found them positively linked. Also, some prior empirical studies reported the positive effects of servant leadership on the employees' overall emotional and mental health [93,96,103]. However, none of these studies specifically examined the relationship between servant leadership and the employees' EI. Thus, our study extends the application of servant leadership by understanding its positive influence on the employees' EI.

Finally, our last contribution arises from incorporating the employees' EI as a mediating variable to understand the mechanism where servant leaders cultivate OCB) among employees. The indirect effects of servant leadership via the employees' EI were not previously examined. The present study establishes the employees' EI as a mechanism where servant leadership transmits its effects. The mediating role of the employees' EI reveals that exercising servant leadership may play an essential role in improving the employees' EI, which may, in turn, enhance the employees' OCB and result in increased organizational performance. Our research provides empirical evidence to support Poon's [104,105] conceptualized model for servant leadership, self-efficacy, and mentorship. The proposed model links servant leadership to mentorship suggests that servant leaders may facilitate the employees' transformation and personal and professional development. Thus, this study has added to the body of knowledge by providing evidence about the mediating role of the employees' EI between servant leadership and the employees' OCB.

5.2. Practical Contributions

The findings of this study also have practical implications that are helpful for the management practices in general and the Pakistani context in particular. First, the results reassure that the leadership style impacts the employees' productivity in an organization. The study identified servant leadership as an effective and efficient leadership style to enhance the employees' OCB), thus improving productivity [106]. Therefore, it has been suggested that servant leadership be promoted, and various measures should be taken to implement this approach within an organization. It is even more critical in the Pakistani case. The organizations are primarily hierarchically structured due to the tolerance of a high distance power culture. The decision-making process is often very centralized, and the employees are less empowered [107]. There has been a general lack of democratic organizational practices with more autocratic behavior on leadership. The earlier studies indicated that autocratic leadership is negatively related to the employees' wellbeing, sense of safety, and motivation, which impairs the employees' performance. Thus, a shift towards a more democratic and services-based leadership approach is crucial to enhancing employees' productivity and organizational performance. To meet this criterion, it is recommended that the training and development initiatives should be developed and implemented for all the management levels to help them learn servant leadership skills.

Second, the current study demonstrates that EI leads the employees towards high-level OCB. The scholars have a strong consensus based on empirical research that EI can be developed. Therefore, organizations need to design ongoing comprehensive EI programs specifically for employees who are low in regards to EI to improve their EI and foster a high level of OCB. Organizations often prioritize the development of EI in managerial positions. However, it is argued that the training and development of employees in non-managerial positions are equally important.

5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

This study provides a deeper insight into the mechanisms through which servant leadership is related to employee OCB (i.e., employee emotional intelligence). The past researches have studied the link between servant leadership and emotional intelligence of leaders but no past research studied the link between servant leadership and emotional intelligence of employees. Thus, this study, for the first time, empirically examined the role of servant leadership in activating employees' emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the indirect effects of servant leadership on employee OCB via employees' emotional intelligence were also not examined earlier. The present study identified the employees' emotional intelligence as a mechanism that mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employee OCB. However, the study has limitations that should be acknowledged and considered when interpreting its findings.

First, the data that was used in this study was only collected from the employees working in the service and manufacturing industries that are located in three Pakistani

cities, which included Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, so the generalizability of this study is limited in regards to other organizations and cultural contexts. Therefore, similar research should be conducted in different industrial and cultural contexts to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

The second limitation involves the cross-sectional nature of the study. Several pieces of data for various variables were collected at the same time. Therefore, the relationship among the variables must be interpreted as causal with caution. For example, the followers with already high levels of EI might rate the servant leadership of their supervisors more favorably. Hence, the research with a longitudinal design may be conducted to address this limitation and strengthen the causal inferences. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that the results of our model are consistent with the theoretical predictions, which are based on extant research.

Finally, to our best knowledge, this is the first study investigating the relationship between servant leadership and the employees' EI and identifying a positive link between them, which was previously mentioned. Thus, there is a need for more empirical research to explore the relationship between servant leadership and the employees' EI in various contexts using different samples and methods to determine whether the results of this research can be reasonably extrapolated to other contexts. Moreover, a longitudinal study in the future can be helpful to test the role of servant leadership to enhance the employees' EI.

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