

# Servant Leadership and Employee Well-being in Sustainable Organizations: A Self-Efficacy Perspective

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## Abstract

Sustainability becomes a key focus in both the public and corporate sectors as a societal goal. Organisational concerns about the well-being of their employees are growing exponentially in sustainable organizations because maintaining the vibrancy of the surrounding environment is valuable for an employee's physical health and reduces feelings of stress in the workplace. Eminent research in the field of management has also identified the role of leadership in achieving organisational sustainability. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of servant leadership orientation-being (integrity, humility and servanthood) on the well-being of employees through the mediating role of self-efficacy in sustainable organizations. Data were collected from 260 supervisor-employee dyads working in public and private banks through stratified sampling. The findings of this study indicate a robust relationship between servant leadership and employee well-being, which is mediated through self-efficacy. Recommendations can be expanded by including other servant leadership factors related to people, tasks, and process orientations in future research to improve employees' well-being.

**Keywords:** Sustainable organizations, Servant leadership, Employee well-being, Self-efficacy

## 1 Introduction

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The fundamental basis of sustainability has been recognised and will continue to establish the integration of various characteristics and levels of sustainability in organizations. Management faces several challenges in defining sustainability at the organisational level to align business objectives with sustainability, focusing on stakeholder engagement and managing resource constraints (Mirchandani & Ikerd, 2008). Various models can be used to assess the opportunities and risks associated with integrating sustainability in the banking sector. Based on driven values, these models link sustainability with the public mission customer requirements, introducing a new strategy in banks and aligning sustainability strategies associated with the events (Weber, 2005). The banking sector is a “domain of services” that focuses on combining new technologies, product diversification, faster assessment of risk and credit, and human resources management as a priority that leads the banking sector to the heights of excellence. Effective leadership is also critical in achieving financial performance and the apex of success in the organization (Cherian & Farouq, 2013).

The extant literature shows servant leadership significantly affects employees and businesses (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Servant leadership has developed as a necessary approach to leadership because it fosters integrity, emphasizes helping others, and focuses on unlocking the full potential of followers (Liden et al., 2015). It assumes the role of a “servant” to fulfil the needs of others (Russell & Stone, 2002). Servant leadership influences the well-being and functioning of the organization both individually and globally (Isabel et al., 2021). It focuses not only on providing services to employees but also on enhancing their well-being. Employee well-being is critical to the organisation and communities (Maula-Bakhsh & Raziq, 2016). Previous researchers found that both the physical and psychological work environment influence the well-being of employees (Gilbreth et al., 2004), and the role of leadership is one of the vital psychological factors that impact their well-being (Sparks et al., 2001). Servant leaders display empathetic behaviour toward their subordinates to create emotional stability, which leads to their employees' psychological well-being (Qureshi et al., 2023).

The servant leadership style also focuses primarily on the empowerment and growth of followers (Choudhary et al., 2013). It possesses the unique aspects of enhancing followers' skills to help them develop and prosper and provides guidance and motivation for employees to achieve their goals. Servant leadership improves employees' personal skills, knowledge and abilities and increases their self-efficacy beliefs (Ji & Yoon, 2021; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Self-efficacy is an individual's judgment of their competencies to perform a given task successfully within a particular context (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The relationship between leadership and self-efficacy is well documented in the literature (Irving, 2005); however, there is a lack of plausibility in the association between servant leadership and self-efficacy, particularly in the banking industry (Zeeshan et al., 2021).

In social cognitive theory, Bandura (1999) focuses on an association between self-efficacy and employee well-being while realizing the meaning of self-reflection. Furthermore, employee self-efficacy is an antecedent of work-related well-being (van Seggelen-Damen & van Dam, 2016). The current study, by investigating the unique relationship of servant leadership to employee well-being, would contribute to the body of literature in the South Asian context. Moreover, this study adds to the body of knowledge in the servant leadership literature. It illustrates that the mediating role of self-efficacy plays a significant part in the relationship between servant leadership and employee well-being.

## 2 Theoretical Framework



### 2.1 Linking Servant Leadership and Employee well-being

Servant leadership represents the behaviors of leaders characterized by humility, empowering others, stewardship, making others responsible for their work and concern for others (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, [2011](#)). Servant leadership is based on a concept that enhances employees' well-being and services delivery to them (Maula-Bakhsh & Raziq, [2016](#)). Servant leadership is an evolving phenomenon described as the leadership that leads by serving (Hoch et al., [2018](#)). Ample evidence has shown that leadership significantly influences employees' well-being, performance, and behaviour (Inceoglet et al., [2019](#)). Servant leadership is about putting the well-being of their followers first by serving them (Hassan et al., [2022](#); Hoch et al., [2018](#)). Servant leaders seek to create a supportive and empowering work environment to encourage employees to internalize their motivation to produce eudaemonic well-being (Chen & Li, 2013). Enhanced work engagement and reduced burnout are associated with servant leadership, which is related to employee well-being (Kaltiainen & Hakanen, [2022](#)).

The fulfilment of well-being and motivation can be accomplished through fundamental psychological needs, including relatedness, autonomy, and competence, facilitated by servant leadership (van Dierendonck et al., [2009](#)). It has been generally observed that imbalance in emotional health, not achieving the desired result, difficulties, and traumas lead to employee discomfort, and this loss of well-being is detrimental to the workplace environment and harms the organization's progress. However, positive emotions and human resource growth can be produced through the follower-centered approach to leadership, which is the foundation of servant leadership (Maula-Bakhsh & Raziq, [2016](#)). Therefore, we postulate that:

**H1:** Servant Leadership is significantly related to Employee Well-being

### 2.2 Linking Servant Leadership and Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is "beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's evaluation of their capacity to effectively execute and control the necessary actions to complete a particular activity (Newman et al., [2018](#)). The concept of self-efficacy has gained significant prominence and widespread recognition within academic circles. Numerous empirical research has documented a significant association between self-efficacy and other crucial outcomes and behaviours, including creativity (Cai et al., [2021](#); Gong et al., [2020](#)), innovative team performance (Park et al., [2021](#)), and innovative behaviour at work (Newman et al., 2018). Employee self-efficacy is vital in generating performance against predetermined goals and competing with competitors (Na-Nan & Sanamthong, [2019](#)).

It has been argued in the literature that the role of leadership is pertinent in predicting self-efficacy because it provides role clarity and social support to employees (Chen & Bliese, [2002](#)). Contemporary research has advocated that leadership styles substantially affect employees' creative self-efficacy (Akbari et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2021), and servant leadership has a prominent influence on employees' creative self-efficacy. Servant leadership is advantageous as it

promotes confidence and competence in individuals, enabling them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Additionally, servant leadership has a notable influence on the creative self-efficacy of teams (Yang et al., 2017). Using a servant leadership approach facilitates the provision of service, motivation, and encouragement towards fostering creativity in employee performance, ultimately leading to attaining organizational objectives. (Bande et al., 2016), asserted that servant leadership can positively affect employee self-efficacy. Employees feel empowered and display positive behavior in organizations under the supervision of a servant leader (Donia et al., 2016). Servant leaders' care about the development of their followers, they focus on their competence by realizing their goals, needs and abilities. Servant leadership fosters better results among followers, hence boosting their self-efficacy (Walumbwa et al., 2010). Thus, we can postulate that:

**H2:** Servant Leadership is significantly related to Self-Efficacy

### 2.3 Linking Self-Efficacy and Employee Well-being

Employee self-efficacy is a significant determinant in fostering work-related well-being, encompassing job satisfaction and employee health (Luthans et al., 2007). Unlike their low-salve counterparts, employees with high self-efficacy demonstrate enhanced task performance, the ability to establish ambitious goals, exert control over their actions, and exhibit proactive work behaviour (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy is important for the well-being of employees because it involves the self-regulation process and the motivational approach, and it also involves the management of stress processes (Hobfoll, 2002). Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy believe in their abilities and can face challenges and stressful situations with assurance (Cattellino et al., 2023). Employee well-being has been defined in many ways over the years. It has been defined as employees' satisfaction with their work and working life. It also includes personal factors such as the characteristics of individuals, their emotional intelligence, level of perception and psychological factors that can cause stress that influence the employee's well-being. It (employee well-being) encompasses three main components, i.e. psychological well-being, subjective well-being and well-being related to the workplace based on mental and physical health (Cignitas et al., 2021).

The extant literature found a systematic association between self-efficacy and employee well-being. High self-efficacy produces a positive impact on the well-being of employees, that is, job satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007), Subjective well-being (Avey et al., 2009; Caprara & Steca, 2006), and low self-efficacy is related to symptoms of exhaustion, depression and anxiety (Kashdan & Roberts, 2004; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Employees with high self-efficacy report less emotional exhaustion than those with low self-efficacy (Betoret, 2006; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Well-being is about experiencing positive emotions, less negative moods, and having life satisfaction. It is not only related to the absence of exhaustion and depression, but it is also a state of maintenance of complete physical and social well-being. Extant studies have established that high self-efficacy favours well-being and self-esteem, improves physical conditions and environmental adaptation, regulates stress, prompts recovery from ailments, and increases workplace well-being (Çakar, 2012). The role of self-efficacy in the well-being of employees is widely acknowledged. The present study posits the following hypothesis:

**H3:** There exists a strong relationship between self-efficacy and employee well-being.

### 2.4 Linking Servant Leadership and Employee Well-being through the Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

Servant leadership is a leadership approach that facilitates and enables followers to achieve their maximum capabilities (Liden et al., 2008). They allow individuals to attain their objectives and cultivate novel proficiencies (Walumbwa et al., 2010). When employees are provided with assistance and opportunities, they experience a sense of empowerment, leading to a rise in their

self-efficacy (Qiu et al., [2020](#)).

The present study employed the Conservation of Resources Theory as the theoretical framework to underpin our arguments regarding the association between servant leadership and employee well-being through the mediating role of self-efficacy. According to COR theory, individuals are frequently motivated to obtain, maintain, and allocate resources, such as favorable working conditions, personal attributes, and social support, to alleviate psychological stress (Hobfoll, [1989](#)). When individuals are deprived of resources, they may experience psychological distress, prompting them to seek ways to acquire these resources to restore psychological equilibrium (Hobfoll, [2001](#)). Self-efficacy has been found to mitigate job-related anxieties and alleviate work-related stress, enabling individuals to access more resources that can be deployed within the workplace (McCarthy et al., [2016](#)). Servant leaders, in contrast, demonstrate compassion and alleviate the emotional distress experienced by their followers (Barbuto Jr & Wheeler, [2006](#)), which reduces their stress and anxiety.

There is a strong correlation between self-efficacy and working conditions, specifically factors such as independence, social support, and mutual assistance (Lee & Ashforth, [1996](#)). Bandura ([2001](#), p. 10) suggested that individuals can engage in purposeful actions and critically evaluate their functioning. Servant leadership facilitates employee resource acquisition by fostering personal growth, granting them the requisite autonomy in decision-making to complete duties, and establishing a supportive social network (Spears & Lawrence, [2002](#)). Servant leadership plays a pivotal role in establishing and cultivating a professional setting wherein individuals can attain favorable emotional health and overall well-being (Jit et al., [2017](#)). Additionally, the Social Cognitive Theory explains the correlation between self-efficacy and the overall well-being of employees, emphasizing the need for self-reflection. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H4:** Servant Leadership is significantly related to Employee Well-being through Self-Efficacy.

### 3 Research Methodology

This section explicitly discusses the purpose of the study, the sample size, the instrumentation, and the data collection procedures. This section also addresses the empirical results of the analysis that has been carried out to test the hypotheses that have been formulated in light of the literature review.

#### 3.1 Sample and Procedure

The population of the current study was the employees working in managerial positions at different public and private sector banks in Lahore, Punjab. Stratified sampling was used for a broad stratum of foreign-owned and locally-owned banks. The researchers presented the purpose of the investigation and requested their permission to contribute in the research study. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires on servant leadership, general self-efficacy, and employee well-being. At time 1, the supervisor's (servant leadership orientation-being) data were collected. At Time 2, the subordinate employees were asked to rate their self-efficacy and well-being. Separating the questionnaires with missing and partial information, 260 were identified as suitable for data analysis.

#### 3.2 Measures

The questionnaire design was informed by the constructs employed and adopted by previous researchers in their investigations.

##### *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership was measured using a scale developed by Page and Wong ([2000](#)). The three factors based upon orientation-being (integrity, humility and servanthood) related to what kind of leader is, of servant leadership was used. The scale has 30 items, 9 items are of integrity, 10 items for humility and 11 items for servanthood respectively. The Likert-type measure used in this study

was evaluated on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale established a high level of dependability, as indicated by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.87.

**Employee well-being**

Employee well-being has been measured using the “Mental Health Continuum-short form” (MHC\_SF) developed by Keyes (2009). The scale consists of a total of 14 components. The first three items on the scale pertain to hedonic well-being, while items four to eight pertain to eudaimonic well-being in the social domain (Social well-being). Lastly, the items from nine to fourteen pertain to eudaimonic well-being in the psychological domain (psychological well-being). The current study found that the reliability of the employee well-being scale was  $\alpha=0.927$ . The items were assessed using a rating scale from 1 (never) to 5 (every day).

**General Self-efficacy**

The measurement of general self-efficacy was conducted using a scale that was designed by (G. Chen et al., 2001). The scale is comprised of a total of eight items. The scale utilized in this study was a 5-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated a high level of dependability, as indicated by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.87.

**4 Data Analysis and Results**

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess that our study variables had appropriate discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1, the results of CFA demonstrated that the hypothesized three-factor model (i.e., servant leadership, employee self-efficacy, and employee well-being) had an acceptable fit ( $\chi^2 = 3574.052$ ,  $df = 1271$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.064) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Moreover, the fit of the three-factor model was significantly better than a two-factor model which combined employee self-efficacy and employee well-being on one factor ( $\chi^2 = 4646.247$ ,  $df = 1273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.68, TLI = 0.65, RMSEA = 0.101) and a two-factor model which combined servant leadership and employee well-being on one factor ( $\chi^2 = 5847.128$ ,  $df = 1273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.48, TLI = 0.45, RMSEA = 0.113). In addition, all factor loadings were statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

**Table 1.** Comparisons of Measurement Models

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	TLI	CFI
Three-factor model	3574.052***	1271		2.812	0.064	0.90	0.92
Two-factor model <sup>a</sup>	4646.247***	1273	1072.195***	3.650	0.101	0.65	0.68
Two-factor model <sup>b</sup>	5847.128***	1273	2273.076***	4.310	0.113	0.45	0.48
One-factor model	5754.071***	1274	2180.019***	4.517	0.117	0.42	0.44

CFI comparative fit index, RMSEA “root-mean-square error of approximation”,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*

A two-factor model combines employee self-efficacy and employee well-being

b Two-factor model combines servant leadership and employee well-being

**4.1 Descriptive Data**

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations between variables. As shown in the table, servant leadership is positively correlated with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Employee self-efficacy positively correlates with employee well-being ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). All correlation estimates are below 0.80, which suggests that multicollinearity was not a major confound (Kline, 2015).

**Table 2.** Descriptive Data

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Servant Leadership	3.72	0.54	<b>(.91)</b>		
2. Employee Self-efficacy	3.89	0.60	.56**	<b>(.84)</b>	
3. Employee Well-being	3.82	0.73	.42**	.43**	<b>(.92)</b>

#### 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

##### *Hypotheses Testing of the Main Effect*

Table 3 shows that hypothesis 1 predicted that servant leadership is positively related to employee well-being ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It also shows that servant leadership is positively associated with employee self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.62$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .01$ ) as predicted in hypothesis 2. Moreover, employee well-being is positively related to self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < .01$ ), supporting hypothesis 3. Thus, Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 are well supported.

##### *Mediation effect of Employee Self-Efficacy*

The Hayes (2013) Process (5,000 resamples) used bootstrapping approach to calculate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to assess hypothesized indirect (Hypothesis 4) relationship (Marmolejo & Puukka, 2006) around indirect effects (Model 4) with SPSS. The exclusion of zero in bootstrap CI signifies mediation effects. The results exposed a substantial positive indirect influence of servant leadership on employee well-being via employee self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI (bias-corrected confidence intervals) = 0.12-0.35), thus, supported Hypothesis 4.

**Table 3.** Regression results for Employee Self-Efficacy and Employee Well -being

Variables	Employee Self-efficacy			Employee Well-being		
	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Servant Leadership	.62**	.06	[.51,.73]	.34**	.09	[.17, .52]
Self-Efficacy				.36**	.08	[.20, .52]
R <sup>2</sup>	0.32			0.23		
	F (1, 258) = 119.56, p < .001			F (2, 257) = 38.82, p < .001		

N = 260. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000, \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

#### 5 Discussion and Conclusion

The primary research inquiry in this study focused on examining the correlation between servant leadership and employee well-being within sustainable firms. This was followed by investigating whether the employees' self-efficacy mediated this relationship. Using quantitative statistical methods, the study examined the correlation between servant leadership, employee well-being, and self-efficacy. The hypotheses were tested using Hayes Process. The study's findings indicate a strong mediating role of general self-efficacy in the relationship between servant leadership and employee well-being. The study's quantitative results suggest that servant leadership considerably impacts employee well-being by cultivating self-efficacy.

To achieve sustainability in organizations, the focus on employee well-being is gaining interest and the role of servant leaders can be a positive practice prevalent in organizations to contribute towards sustainability. Our study contributes to the literature on servant leadership and the employee well-being relationship by posing some new avenues, that is, through the mediation model. Servant leaders care about the needs and interests of their followers, which promotes their well-being by giving them a sense of psychological safety and trust in the workplace (Liden et al., 2015; Yoshida et al., 2014). Consequently, this care and concern improve the well-being of employees. According to (Hale & Fields, 2007) servant leadership focuses on developing followers to increase their ability to perform tasks using creative approaches and assuming greater

responsibilities at work. Servant leaders are willing to allow their followers to enhance their abilities and achieve their goals (Walumbwa et al., 2010). In the theory of self-determination, it is postulated that, servant leadership is associated with favorable outcomes, such as increased well-being (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022). Thus, the result of the current study indicates that the role of servant leadership is pertinent to improve the well-being of employees through their self-efficacy.

### 5.1 Limitations and Future Implications

We admit that this study has certain limitations. First, the self-reported measure of servant leadership can create biasness (the data were collected from the employees on leadership position) that can be avoided by gathering information and evaluating from followers as well. Secondly, the data collection was cross-sectional in nature and limits the ability of researchers to analyze the long-term effects of servant leadership on the well-being of their employees. Future research may conduct a longitudinal study to apprehend the trend of the relationships examined in the current study over a long period of time for better results. Moreover, comparing foreign-owned and locally-owned banks would also allow for better speculation and provide interesting information on the variables under investigation missing in the current study.

The results of this study can be taken as a basis for further development of theory building and concept development within the service industry to improve organizational sustainability and performance. Our study suggests that the role of servant leaders supports employee well-being in the workplace. We are positive that future research can expand on these findings and provide more practical advice to HR managers on creating sustainability by focusing on employee well-being in the workplace.

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