

The effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction: The mediating role of work engagement

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Abstract

Human resources are an important factor in the success of an organization, including government institutions. This study aims to analyse the effect of servant leadership on employee job satisfaction and work engagement, the influence of work engagement on job satisfaction, and the mediating role of work engagement at the influence of servant leadership on job satisfaction at the Department of Transportation of Bangli Regency-Bali Province-Indonesia. The study employed a quantitative associative approach using a saturated sampling technique involving 85 civil servant and non-civil servant employees. Data were collected through questionnaires and analysed using Partial Least Square (PLS). The results showed that servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on both job satisfaction and work engagement. In addition, work engagement also has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction and is able to mediate the effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction. These findings indicate that the implementation of service-oriented leadership and employee empowerment can improve work engagement and employee job satisfaction at this institution.

Keywords: Servant leadership; Work engagement; Job satisfaction

1. Introduction

Human resources (HR) are a strategic factor in determining organizational success, including within government institutions. HR serves not only as an organizational asset but also as the primary driving force in achieving organizational goals (Armstrong, 2011). Therefore, organizations need to pay attention to employees' psychological well-being, one important aspect of which is job satisfaction, as it reflects the extent to which employees feel comfortable and satisfied with their work (Harahap & Khair, 2020). A high level of job satisfaction can foster positive attitudes and improve employee performance (Akhsinudin et al., 2024).

Based on the results of a preliminary survey conducted among employees of the Bangli Regency Transportation Office, job dissatisfaction was still evident in relation to workload, salary, promotion opportunities, and communication with supervisors. One of the factors influencing job satisfaction is leadership style. Servant Leadership is a leadership approach that emphasizes serving others while prioritizing employees' needs and personal development (McQuade et al., 2020). Leaders who practice Servant Leadership tend to provide support and genuine concern for their employees, thereby enhancing job satisfaction (Jiang & Wei, 2024). Previous studies have also demonstrated that Servant Leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction (Iswati et al., 2025; Westbrook & Peterson, 2022).

In addition to leadership, work engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing job satisfaction. Work engagement refers to employees' physical, cognitive, and emotional attachment to their work (Kahn, 1990). Employees with high levels of work engagement tend to demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and full involvement in their job responsibilities

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(Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004). Studies by Humaini et al. (2024) and Wandira and Andriana (2025) found that work engagement has a positive influence on job satisfaction. Furthermore, work engagement has been shown to mediate the relationship between Servant Leadership and job satisfaction (Wati & Warsindah, 2022).

Based on the identified phenomenon and previous research, this study aims to analyze the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between Servant Leadership and employee job satisfaction at the Bangli Regency Transportation Office.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory was developed by Homans (1961) and Blau (1964) to explain reciprocal relationships in social interactions within organizations. The theory proposes that individuals are more likely to respond positively when they receive fair treatment, support, and attention from the organization (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In organizational settings, positive social exchange relationships enhance employees' trust, loyalty, work engagement, and job satisfaction (Robert, 2018). From this perspective, leaders who provide support and demonstrate genuine concern for employees encourage them to reciprocate through positive work attitudes and behaviors, including higher work engagement and job satisfaction (Sharif et al., 2024). Previous studies have also shown that servant leadership positively influences both work engagement and employee job satisfaction (Eva et al., 2019; Nugroho et al., 2024).

2.2. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an individual's positive emotional state toward their job when it fulfills their expectations and needs (Locke, 1974; Luthans, 2011). Job satisfaction is influenced by work engagement and servant leadership (Humaini et al., 2024; Huning et al., 2020). The indicators used to measure job satisfaction include the job itself, salary, promotion opportunities, supervision, and co-workers (Widiastuti & Dewi, 2025).

2.3. Work Engagement

Work engagement is a positive psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work engagement has a positive effect on job satisfaction and is influenced by Servant Leadership (Mascarenhas et al., 2022; Rahal & Farmanesh, 2024). It is measured using three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Gašić & Berber, 2016).

2.4. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes serving and developing employees (Greenleaf, 1977). This leadership approach has been found to positively influence both work engagement and job satisfaction (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Westbrook & Peterson, 2022). The indicators used to measure Servant Leadership include love, humility, vision, trust, and empowerment (Dennis & Bocarnea, as cited in Monica & Partina, 2024).

2.5. Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory proposed by Blau (1964), which explains that relationships within organizations are formed through reciprocal social exchanges. Employees who receive positive treatment from the organization or their leaders are likely to reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviors. In this study, servant leadership is viewed as a leadership style characterized by service, support, and employee development, which enhances both work engagement and job satisfaction. Employees with high levels of work engagement are more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and satisfaction with their work. Therefore, work engagement is proposed as a mediating variable in the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction.

2.6. Research Model

This study employs servant leadership as the exogenous variable, work engagement as the mediating variable, and job satisfaction as the endogenous variable.

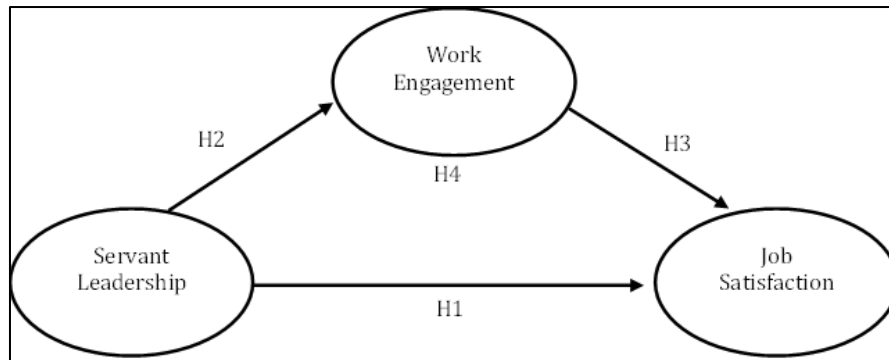


Figure 1 Research Concept

2.7. Research Hypotheses

- H1: Servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Huning et al., 2020).
- H2: Servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement (Ozturk et al., 2021; Rahal & Farmanesh, 2024).
- H3: Work engagement has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction (Rai & Maheswari, 2021; Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024).
- H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction (Wati & Warsindah, 2022; Ahdinita & Setyaningrum, 2024).

3. Research method

This study employed a quantitative associative research approach to examine the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between Servant Leadership and job satisfaction (Sugiyono, 2022). The research was conducted at the Bangli Regency Transportation Office, located at Jalan Merdeka No. 71, Bangli, Bali Province, Indonesia. The scope of the study included Servant Leadership as the independent variable, work engagement as the mediating variable, and job satisfaction as the dependent variable.

The study population consisted of all civil servants and non-civil servants totaling 85 employees. A saturated sampling technique was applied, meaning that the entire population was included as research respondents.

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from primary and secondary sources. Data were collected through a survey using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. Servant leadership was measured using the indicators of love, humility, vision, trust, and empowerment (Monica & Partina, 2024). Work engagement was assessed based on the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Gašić & Berber, 2023), while job satisfaction was measured through the dimensions of the work itself, salary, promotion opportunities, supervision, and co-workers (Widiastuti & Dewi, 2025).

The research instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability testing. Data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS–SEM) approach (Ghozali, 2021). The measurement model (outer model) and structural model (inner model) were assessed to evaluate the quality of the model. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure with a significance level of 5%. In addition, mediation analysis was performed to examine the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between Servant Leadership and job satisfaction.

4. Result

Based on the research results, the majority of respondents were male (73 people, or 85.9%), while 12 respondents were female (14.1%). This indicates that employees at the Bangli Regency Transportation Agency are still predominantly male. This situation may be influenced by the nature of work in the transportation sector, which is heavily related to field operations, traffic supervision, and other technical activities that generally involve a greater number of male workers.

In terms of position, the largest number of respondents were in the staff category, with 35 people (41.2%), while the smallest number of respondents were in the Head of Agency and Secretary of Agency positions, with only one person each (1.2%). These results indicate that the majority of respondents are executive employees directly involved in the day-to-day operational and administrative activities within the Bangli Regency Transportation Agency. Meanwhile, the number of structural officials is smaller because these positions are limited within the government organizational structure.

Based on education, the majority of respondents (41, or 48.2%), had a bachelor's degree (S-1), while the smallest number (1.2%) had a diploma (D-1). This indicates that most employees have a sufficiently high level of education and align with the job competency requirements of government agencies. The high number of undergraduate employees indicates that the Bangli Regency Transportation Agency is supported by human resources with strong academic credentials to carry out their duties and provide public services.

In terms of employee status, the largest number of respondents were administrative (contract) staff, with 35 employees (41.2%), while the smallest number were part-time PPPK (PPPK) staff, with 16 employees (18.8%). These results indicate that the Bangli Regency Transportation Agency still utilizes contract workers to support operational and administrative activities. This situation indicates a significant workforce need to support public services and organizational activities.

Based on placement sector, the majority of respondents were from the Traffic Division (31, or 36.5%), while the smallest number were from the Lake Batur Crossing Technical Implementation Unit (UPTD), with 3 employees (3.5%). The high number of employees in the Traffic Division indicates that this division plays a crucial role in carrying out the duties of the Bangli Regency Transportation Agency, particularly in traffic regulation, supervision, and service. Meanwhile, the small number of respondents in the Transportation Agency category is generally due to the fact that more employees are assigned to specific technical areas.

In terms of length of service, the majority of respondents (39 people, or 45.9%) had 1–5 years of service, while the fewest respondents were in the 11–15 and 26–30 year categories, with one person (1.2%) each. These results indicate that the majority of employees in the Bangli Regency Transportation Agency are relatively new. This could indicate an increase in staff in recent years. However, there are also employees with more than 20 years of service, indicating sufficient work experience and a solid understanding of the organization to support the agency's duties.

Table 1 First-Order Validity and Reliability Testing: Evaluation of Outer Loading Values, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Dimension	Indicator Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Compassion (X.1)	X.1.1	0.959	0.959	0.973	0.924
	X.1.2	0.957			
	X.1.3	0.967			
Humility (X.2)	X.2.1	0.955	0.955	0.971	0.917
	X.2.2	0.959			
	X.2.3	0.958			
Visionary (X.3)	X.3.1	0.947	0.946	0.966	0.903
	X.3.2	0.953			
	X.3.3	0.951			
Trust (X.4)	X.4.1	0.980	0.960	0.980	0.962
	X.4.2	0.981			
Empowerment (X.5)	X.5.1	0.948	0.945	0.965	0.901
	X.5.2	0.949			
	X.5.3	0.951			

Energy/Passion (Z.1)	Z.1.1	0.954	0.971	0.979	0.920
	Z.1.2	0.956			
	Z.1.3	0.958			
	Z.1.4	0.967			
Dedication/Devotion (Z.2)	Z.2.1	0.974	0.959	0.973	0.924
	Z.2.2	0.958			
	Z.2.3	0.952			
Absorption/Enjoyment (Z.3)	Z.3.1	0.958	0.958	0.973	0.923
	Z.3.2	0.966			
	Z.3.3	0.958			
The Work Itself (Y.1)	Y.1.1	0.975	0.948	0.975	0.951
	Y.1.2	0.975			
Salary/Wages (Y.2)	Y.2.1	0.950	0.956	0.972	0.919
	Y.2.2	0.961			
	Y.2.3	0.966			
Promotion (Y.3)	Y.3.1	0.971	0.942	0.972	0.946
	Y.3.2	0.974			
Supervision (Y.4)	Y.4.1	0.976	0.950	0.976	0.952
	Y.4.2	0.975			
Coworkers (Y.5)	Y.5.1	0.954	0.958	0.973	0.922
	Y.5.2	0.964			
	Y.5.3	0.962			

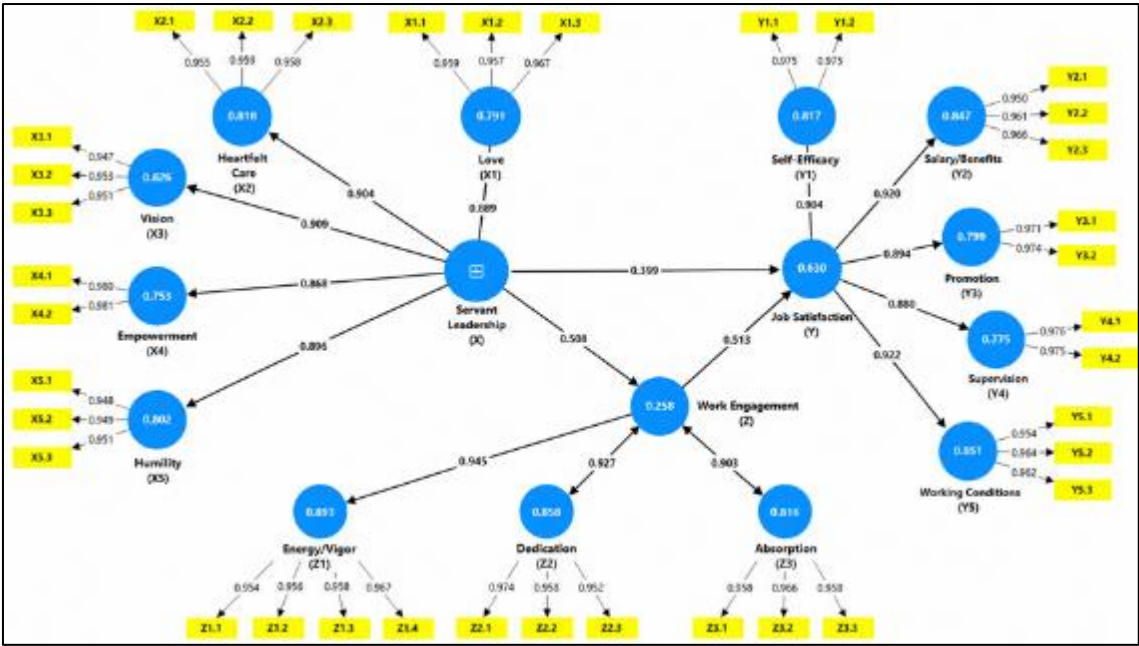


Figure 2 Outer Loading

Based on the results of the first-order validity and reliability tests in Table 1, all indicator items in each dimension demonstrated an outer loading value above 0.70. This indicates that each indicator makes a strong contribution to reflecting its respective construct or dimension. Therefore, all indicators used in this study can be considered to meet the indicator validity criteria.

Overall, the test results in Table 1 indicate that all indicators in each dimension have outer loading values greater than 0.70, thus all indicators can be considered valid. Furthermore, all Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values were above 0.70, indicating that all constructs have a good level of internal reliability. The AVE values for all dimensions were also above 0.50, thus concluding that all constructs have met the criteria for convergent validity. Therefore, the first-order measurement model in this study has met the validity and reliability requirements and can proceed to the next stage of analysis.

Table 2 Validity and Reliability Testing of the Second Order Stage: Evaluation of Outer Loading Values, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Dimension	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Work Engagement (Z)	Energy/Passion (Z.1)	0.929	0.916	0.947	0.856
	Dedication/Devotion (Z.2)	0.932			
	Absorption/Enthusiasm (Z.3)	0.914			
Servant Leadership (X)	Compassion (X1)	0.884	0.937	0.952	0.798
	Humility (X2)	0.900			
	Visionary (X3)	0.907			
	Trust (X4)	0.879			
	Empowerment (X5)	0.894			
Job Satisfaction (Y)	The Work Itself (Y.1)	0.912	0.945	0.958	0.819
	Salary/Wages (Y.2)	0.909			
	Promotion (Y.3)	0.904			
	Supervision (Y.4)	0.889			
	Coworkers (Y.5)	0.911			

Source: processed data, 2026

Based on Table 2, the results of the second-order validity and reliability tests indicate that all dimensions within each variable have Outer Loading values above 0.70. This indicates that each dimension adequately represents the second-order construct. Furthermore, all Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values met the recommended criteria: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability greater than 0.70, and AVE greater than 0.50. Therefore, the second-order measurement model can be declared valid and reliable.

For the work engagement (Z) variable, the energy/enthusiasm, dedication/devotion, and absorption/enjoyment dimensions had Outer Loading values of 0.929, 0.932, and 0.914, respectively. All values are above the minimum threshold of 0.70, thus validly representing the work engagement variable. The highest outer loading value is found in the dedication/devotion dimension (Z.2) at 0.932, indicating that this dimension is the strongest representation in shaping work engagement. Furthermore, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.916 and a Composite Reliability of 0.947 indicate that the Work Engagement variable has excellent internal consistency. The AVE value of 0.856 also indicates that this variable meets convergent validity criteria.

Furthermore, for the servant leadership variable (X), the outer loading values for all dimensions range from 0.879 to 0.907. The compassion dimension has an outer loading value of 0.884, humility 0.900, visionary 0.907, Trust 0.879, and

empowerment 0.894. All these values indicate that all five dimensions have a strong contribution in representing the Servant Leadership variable. The highest outer loading value is found in the visionary dimension (X3) at 0.907, making this dimension the most dominant in reflecting servant leadership in this research model. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.937 and a composite reliability of 0.952 indicate that this variable has excellent reliability. Furthermore, the AVE value of 0.798 indicates that convergent validity for the servant leadership variable has been met.

For the job satisfaction variable (Y), all dimensions also have outer loading values above 0.70. The Work itself dimension has an outer loading value of 0.912, salary/wages 0.909, promotion 0.904, supervision 0.889, and coworkers 0.911. These results indicate that all dimensions adequately represent the job satisfaction variable. The highest outer loading value was found in the work itself (Y.1) dimension at 0.912, followed by coworkers (Y.5) at 0.911, and salary/wages (Y.2) at 0.909. This indicates that these three dimensions contribute relatively strongly to job satisfaction. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.945 and a Composite Reliability of 0.958 indicate that the job satisfaction variable has very high internal reliability. Meanwhile, the AVE value of 0.819 indicates that this variable meets convergent validity criteria.

Overall, the test results in Table 5.7 indicate that all dimensions of the servant leadership (X), work engagement (Z), and job satisfaction (Y) variables have high outer loading values, above 0.70. Furthermore, all Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability values are above 0.70, and all AVE values are above 0.50. Thus, it can be concluded that the second-order measurement model has met the criteria of indicator validity, internal reliability, and convergent validity. These results indicate that the dimensions used in this study are capable of forming a second-order construct in a valid and reliable manner, thus making the model worthy of proceeding to the next testing stage.

Table 3 Path Analysis Results

	<i>Original sample (O)</i>	<i>Sample mean (M)</i>	<i>Standard deviation (STDEV)</i>	<i>T statistic s (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P cross-sectional</i>	<i>R-Squares</i>	<i>Q-Squares</i>	<i>Model Fit (SRMR)</i>
Servant Leadership (X) -> Job Satisfaction (Y)	0.396	0.405	0.177	2.235	0.025	0.262	0.213	0.038
Servant Leadership (X) -> Work Engagement (Z)	0.512	0.522	0.138	3.721	0	0.634	0.508	
Job Engagement (Z) -> Job Satisfaction (Y)	0.517	0.514	0.181	2.858	0.004			
Servant Leadership (X) -> Job Engagement (Z) -> Job Satisfaction (Y)	0.265	0.266	0.121	2.181	0.029			

4.1. Hypothesis Testing Results

Based on the results presented in Table 3, all relationships among the variables in the research model exhibit T-statistics greater than 1.96 and p-values below 0.05. These findings indicate that all proposed hypotheses are supported. Furthermore, all original sample estimates are positive, indicating that the relationships among the variables are positive.

The effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction yielded a path coefficient of 0.396, a T-statistic of 2.235, and a p-value of 0.025. Since the t-statistic exceeds the critical value of 1.96 and the p-value is below the 0.05 significance threshold, Servant Leadership has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. Therefore, H1 is supported.

The effect of servant leadership on work engagement produced a path coefficient of 0.512, a T-statistic of 3.721, and a p-value of 0.000. Because the t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. Accordingly, H2 is supported.

The effect of work engagement on job satisfaction resulted in a path coefficient of 0.517, a t-statistic of 2.858, and a p-value of 0.004. These results indicate that work engagement has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. Therefore, H3 is supported.

The indirect effect of Servant Leadership on job satisfaction through work engagement yielded a path coefficient of 0.265, a t-statistic of 2.181, and a p-value of 0.029. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction. This finding indicates that Servant Leadership enhances job satisfaction not only directly but also indirectly through increased work engagement. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Regarding the model's explanatory power, the R^2 value for work engagement is 0.262, indicating that servant leadership explains 26.2% of the variance in work engagement, while the remaining 73.8% is explained by variables outside the research model. Meanwhile, the R^2 value for job satisfaction is 0.634, indicating that servant leadership and work engagement jointly explain 63.4% of the variance in job satisfaction, whereas the remaining 36.6% is attributable to other factors not included in the model.

The Q^2 value for work engagement is 0.213, while the Q^2 value for job satisfaction is 0.508. Since both Q^2 values are greater than zero, the structural model demonstrates satisfactory predictive relevance, indicating that it has good predictive capability for the endogenous variables, particularly job satisfaction.

In addition, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value is 0.038, indicating a good model fit. Because the SRMR value is below the recommended threshold of 0.08, the structural model exhibits an acceptable level of goodness-of-fit. Therefore, the proposed model is considered appropriate for explaining the relationships among servant leadership, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

Overall, the results presented in Table 5.9 demonstrate that servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on both work engagement and job satisfaction, work engagement has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction, and work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction. Accordingly, all research hypotheses are supported.

4.2. Effect of Servant Leadership on Job Satisfaction

The hypothesis testing results indicate that Servant Leadership has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. This finding suggests that the better employees perceive the implementation of Servant Leadership, the higher their level of job satisfaction. Leaders who prioritize service, attend to employees' needs, build trust, and empower subordinates are able to create a supportive work environment that enhances job satisfaction.

This finding reinforces Social Exchange Theory, which explains that the relationship between leaders and employees is based on reciprocal exchanges. When employees receive fairness, care, support, and trust from their leaders, they reciprocate with more positive work attitudes, including greater job satisfaction. Therefore, servant leadership serves as a mechanism for fostering high-quality social relationships between leaders and employees, ultimately promoting job satisfaction.

The findings are consistent with those of Dami et al. (2022), who reported that servant leadership positively influences job satisfaction in this institution. They also support the findings of Al-Asadi (2019), who demonstrated that Servant Leadership enhances both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction; Anselmus et al. (2024), who found that servant leadership strengthens positive leader–subordinate relationships, thereby increasing job satisfaction; and Putri et al. (2023), who reported similar results in the Indonesian banking sector. The consistency of these findings suggests that the positive effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction is robust across various organizational contexts.

Within the context of the Bangli Regency Transportation Office, the findings indicate that leaders who emphasize service, care, empowerment, and trust can enhance employees' job satisfaction. These results provide empirical evidence that Servant Leadership is not only applicable in business and educational settings but is also effective in public sector organizations as a strategy for improving human resource management.

4.3. Effect of Servant Leadership on Work Engagement

The hypothesis testing results show that servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. This finding indicates that the better the implementation of servant leadership within the organization, the higher the employees' level of work engagement. Leaders who prioritize serving others, pay attention to employees' needs, foster trust, and empower subordinates create a work environment that encourages employees to work enthusiastically, remain highly dedicated, and actively engage in their work.

These findings support Social Exchange Theory, which posits that leader–employee relationships are founded on the principle of reciprocity. When employees receive attention, support, trust, and fair treatment from their leaders, they are motivated to reciprocate through positive work attitudes. In this study, such reciprocity is reflected in higher levels of work engagement. Thus, servant leadership functions as an important factor in building high-quality social relationships that enhance employees' energy, dedication, and involvement in their work.

The findings are consistent with Kenek (2024), who found that servant leadership positively influences work engagement in the industrial sector. They also align with Hermanto and Srimulyani (2022), who reported that servant leadership significantly improves teachers' work engagement. These consistent findings across different organizational settings strengthen empirical evidence regarding the importance of service-oriented leadership in fostering employee work engagement.

In the context of the Bangli Regency Transportation Office, the findings suggest that leaders who demonstrate service, care, empowerment, and trust can significantly increase employees' work engagement. Employees who feel supported and valued by their leaders tend to exhibit greater enthusiasm, stronger organizational commitment, and higher levels of focus in delivering public services. Therefore, implementing servant leadership can serve as an effective human resource management strategy to enhance employee work engagement.

4.4. Effect of Work Engagement on Job Satisfaction

The hypothesis testing results indicate that work engagement has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. This finding suggests that employees with higher levels of work engagement also experience higher levels of job satisfaction. Employees who demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and strong involvement in their work are more likely to experience positive work outcomes, leading to greater satisfaction with their jobs.

This finding supports Social Exchange Theory, which explains that the relationship between employees and organizations is based on reciprocal exchanges. Employees with high work engagement tend to perceive their organization as supportive, appreciative, and capable of providing a positive work environment. These positive perceptions foster favorable work attitudes, including increased job satisfaction.

The findings are consistent with Sari et al. (2025), who found that work engagement positively affects job satisfaction among public sector employees in Indonesia. Similar findings were reported by Côté et al. (2020), Ghosh et al. (2020), and Rai and Maheswari (2021), who identified work engagement as a key determinant of job satisfaction. Additional support comes from Mascarenhas et al. (2022), Wei et al. (2023), Wulandari and Hafidz (2023), Ibrahim and Hussein (2024), Gutierrez et al. (2025), Gazi et al. (2025), and Luvthia and Susanti (2026). The consistency of these findings across various organizational contexts highlights work engagement as a critical determinant of employee job satisfaction.

In the Bangli Regency Transportation Office, employees who demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and active involvement in serving the public tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction. These findings suggest that improving job satisfaction depends not only on organizational factors but also on employees' psychological conditions, particularly work engagement. Therefore, initiatives such as employee empowerment, stronger communication, recognition programs, and the creation of a supportive work environment can serve as effective strategies for sustainably improving employee job satisfaction.

4.5. The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

The hypothesis testing results indicate that work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction. This finding suggests that servant leadership enhances job satisfaction not only directly but also indirectly by increasing employees' work engagement. Leaders who emphasize service, care, empowerment, and trust encourage employees to become more engaged in their work, which subsequently enhances job satisfaction.

These findings support Social Exchange Theory, which argues that leader–employee relationships are based on reciprocity. When employees perceive care, support, trust, and fairness from their leaders, they respond with positive work attitudes. In this study, this reciprocal process is reflected in increased work engagement, which subsequently leads to greater job satisfaction. Therefore, work engagement represents the psychological mechanism through which servant leadership enhances employees' job satisfaction.

The findings are consistent with Aboramadan et al. (2020), who found that servant leadership influences organizational outcomes through psychological mechanisms. They also support the findings of Akdol and Arikboga (2017) and Ozturk et al. (2021), who identified work engagement as a mediator between servant leadership and job satisfaction. Likewise, Pranitasari et al. (2022) and Ahdinita and Setyaningrum (2024) reported that work engagement plays a significant mediating role in enhancing job satisfaction. These consistent findings reinforce the empirical evidence that work engagement is an important mechanism explaining how servant leadership influences job satisfaction.

However, these findings differ from those of Putri et al. (2023), who positioned job satisfaction as the mediator between servant leadership and work engagement. This discrepancy suggests that the relationships among servant leadership, work engagement, and job satisfaction may vary depending on organizational context, respondent characteristics, and research design. Consequently, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that, within the Bangli Regency Transportation Office, work engagement serves as the mechanism linking servant leadership to employee job satisfaction.

The results also reveal that work engagement functions as a partial mediator, as servant leadership continues to exert a direct effect on job satisfaction in addition to its indirect effect through work engagement. This finding indicates that employee job satisfaction can be enhanced through two pathways: directly by implementing Servant Leadership and indirectly by strengthening employees' work engagement. Therefore, improving job satisfaction within the Bangli Regency Transportation Office requires not only service-oriented leadership but also policies that reinforce employees' work engagement.

4.6. Theoretical Implications

The findings provide theoretical support for Social Exchange Theory in explaining the relationships among servant leadership, work engagement, and job satisfaction. The theory suggests that leader–employee relationships develop through mutually beneficial social exchanges. When leaders demonstrate care, support, trust, empathy, and empowerment, employees perceive positive organizational treatment. In return, employees reciprocate through positive work attitudes and behaviors, including greater work engagement, stronger dedication, higher enthusiasm, and improved contributions to organizational performance.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that Servant Leadership not only directly enhances job satisfaction but also indirectly improves job satisfaction by increasing employees' work engagement. Thus, work engagement serves as a psychological mechanism explaining how servant leadership influences job satisfaction. These findings extend Social Exchange Theory by highlighting that positive reciprocal relationships between leaders and employees foster stronger work engagement, which ultimately leads to higher job satisfaction.

4.7. Practical Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for the Bangli Regency Transportation Office in developing its human resource management policies.

First, organizational leaders should adopt servant leadership as a leadership development strategy by encouraging managers and supervisors to demonstrate service orientation, empathy, empowerment, trust, and genuine concern for employees' needs. Such leadership practices are expected to create a more supportive work environment and improve organizational performance.

Second, management should implement policies aimed at strengthening work engagement, including involving employees in decision-making, increasing autonomy in job execution, improving communication between leaders and employees, and recognizing employees' contributions and achievements. These initiatives are expected to enhance employees' enthusiasm, dedication, and involvement in delivering public services.

Third, because work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction, efforts to improve employee job satisfaction should extend beyond compensation and workplace facilities to include strengthening the quality of leader–employee relationships. Therefore, the findings can serve as valuable

recommendations for developing sustainable human resource policies focused on enhancing work engagement and job satisfaction.

Research Limitations

Despite providing empirical support for the relationships among servant leadership, work engagement, and job satisfaction, this study has several limitations.

First, the study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design, limiting the ability to examine causal relationships over time. Future studies are therefore encouraged to adopt longitudinal research designs to explore changes in these relationships across different time periods.

Second, this study examined only one leadership style, namely servant leadership. Future research should compare servant leadership with other leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, or ethical leadership, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership factors influencing work engagement and job satisfaction.

Third, work engagement was examined solely as a mediating variable. Future studies could investigate additional mediating or moderating variables, including trust in leader, leader-member exchange, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, or organizational culture, to develop a more comprehensive model explaining the relationships among these variables.

5. Conclusion

The findings indicate that Servant Leadership has a positive and significant effect on both work engagement and employee job satisfaction at the Bangli Regency Transportation Office. In addition, work engagement positively influences job satisfaction and significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction. These findings suggest that implementing a service-oriented leadership approach can effectively enhance employees' work engagement and job satisfaction.

Recommendations

The Bangli Regency Transportation Office is encouraged to strengthen the implementation of servant leadership by actively involving employees in communicating organizational vision, setting organizational goals, and participating in decision-making processes. The organization should also promote work engagement through employee motivation, recognition, and the creation of a supportive work environment. Furthermore, improving workplace comfort, fostering effective communication, and ensuring equitable task allocation are expected to further enhance employees' job satisfaction.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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