

# INFLUENCE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEES' BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES IN CULTURES WITH HIGH POWER DISTANCE ORIENTATION

Muhammad Azeem Qureshi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Kazi Afaq Ahmed<sup>2</sup> and Dr. Syed Irfan Hyder<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

*Inadequacies of leadership character have resulted in failure of many businesses. Servant leadership is one of the character-driven leadership models that emerged to address these inadequacies but this leadership approach is found to be less-effective in cultures with high power distance orientation. Drawing on conservation of resource theory and leader-member exchange theory, this study uses AMOS and PROCESS to perform confirmatory factor analysis and to test proposed hypotheses respectively. Results suggest that servant leadership positively influences innovative work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior. However, this study does not find any support for power distance orientation as a moderator. High religiosity is the possible cause for such finding which gives direction for future research. This study has theoretical and practical implications.*

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Innovative Work Behavior, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Power Distance Orientation.

**JEL Classification:** O150, L200

## Introduction

Failure of well-known companies such as Enron, Tyco, WorldCom and many others in the world is associated with ethical leadership crisis, therefore emergence of value-laden leadership comes as no surprise (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Servant leadership is another addition into the existing leadership literature which addresses inadequacies of leadership character. Greenleaf (1970) originated the term “servant leadership” with the core theme of “going beyond one’s self-interest”. Research on servant leadership has been overlooked after its origination until the last decade.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Management & HR, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi, Pakistan.  
Email: azeem.qureshi@hotmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Management & HRM, IoBM, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: afaq.kazi@iobm.edu.pk

<sup>3</sup> Professor, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi, Pakistan. Email: irfan.hyder@iobm.edu.pk

Scholars have urged to deduce servant leadership theory in different cultural context to legitimize it as a mainstream leadership model (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016).

Servant leadership literature is consistent with respect to its positive outcomes at individual and organizational level (Bobbio, Van Dierendonck, & Manganelli, 2012; Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Donia, Raja, Panaccio, & Wang, 2016; Newman, Schwarz, Cooper, & Sendjaya, 2015; Tang, Kwan, Zhang, & Zhu, 2015). However, Social norms in Pakistan demand predominantly assertive and authoritative leadership style while people-oriented leadership style such as servant leadership seems to be counter-cultural and a substantial challenge (Ertel, 2017; Simkins, Sisum, & Memon, 2003). In addition, employees with higher power distance orientation take little care about how their leaders treat them (Lin et al., 2013). Therefore, whether leaders treat their followers positively (e.g. servant leadership) or negatively, followers are less likely to show sensitivity to such treatment (Donia et al., 2016; Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012). Culture in Pakistan is moderately high in terms of power distance orientation (Hofstede, 2016; Khilji, 2002) but little is known with reference to what influence servant leadership makes on employees' behavioral outcomes in such culture.

Pressure to remain competitive compels organizations to expect their employees to make extra efforts, come up with innovative ideas and make efforts in promoting and implementing these ideas (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013). Therefore, organizations seek their employees to demonstrate organizational citizenship behavior (Newman et al., 2015) and innovative work behavior (Yoshida et al., 2014). Despite different leadership approaches are found to be positively associated with these behaviors but limited literature has addressed the role of servant leadership in this respect. This research also attempts to fill this gap.

#### *Contribution & Originality*

The servant leadership theory is in its early stage and requires a deductive approach to be legitimated as a mainstream leadership theory (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2015). This study makes an attempt to test servant leadership theory in a different cultural and organizational context to endorse servant leadership construct as a mainstream leadership theory as proposed by Chiniara and Bentein (2016). Further, this study also attempts to address the call for future research proposed by Donia et al. (2016) and Newman, Schwarz, Cooper, and Sendjaya (2015) to examine how servant leadership works in different cultural contexts in order to increase generalizability (Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012). Finally, according to Hofstede (2018), it is uncertain how people of Pakistan will respond to cultural dimension of power distance, it is necessary to examine and validate the role of power distance orientation as a moderator which can dilutes the influence of leadership on different employee-related outcomes. This study makes an attempt to contribute in this respect by examining whether power distance orientation moderates the influence of servant leadership such that the

influence of servant leadership is attenuated.

### *Research Objectives*

This research aims to assess the influence of servant leadership practice on followers' behavioral outcomes, namely innovative work behavior and organizational citizenship under the moderating influence of power distance orientation.

## **Literature Review**

### *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership is described as a way of life and not a management technique (Greenleaf, 1977; Greenleaf & Spears, 1998). Servant leaders are those who give value to their subordinates, develop them (Laub, 1999), show concern for their subordinates (Ehrhart, 2004) and with humble attitude (Van Dierendonck, 2011), they are ambitious to serve others (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Servant leaders invest great deal of energy and time to understand career goals, interest and capabilities of their followers (Greenleaf & Spears, 1998). Since serving the followers is the supreme priority of servant leaders, they craft an environment that provides opportunities for enhancing followers' present skills and growing new ones (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). This serving attitude makes servant leaders role model to their followers (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2010). Servant leaders empower their follower to grow to what they are capable to be through engaging them relationally, emotionally, ethically and spiritually (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, Dierendonck, & Liden, 2018).

Servant leadership is not only an ethical theory but also an action-driven leadership approach where service-driven behavior and action-driven behavior of servant leader co-exist and complement each other (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). It is evident that servant leaders, through their serving behavior, gain trust from their subordinates which results in positive employee outcomes (Chan & Mak, 2014). Furthermore, servant leaders foster positive employee and organizational outcome better than any other type of leadership style (Schneider & George, 2011).

### *Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)*

De Jong (2006) defined IWB as a behavior related to creation, promotion and implementation of novel ideas at workplace. There exists a significant relationship between leadership and innovative work behavior (Dzulkfli, 2014). Studies investigated leadership influence on innovative work behavior are consistent with respect to leadership and its positive association with innovative work behavior (Černe, Jaklič, & Škerlavaj, 2013; Dhar, 2016; Imran & Anis-ul-Haque, 2011; Kamaruddin, Adi, Nazir, Arif, & others, 2015). Servant leadership appears to be a better predictor of

innovative work behavior than any other leadership style as servant leaders satisfy the needs of autonomy of their followers. Empowering followers and liberating them to handle difficult situations, learning from mistakes, encouraging followers to be creative, making decisions on their own and providing followers supporting environment to exercise their full potential, are the some of the key function servant leaders perform (Liden et al., 2008).

#### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)*

OCB is defined as an individual's discretionary behavior which an employee shows by going beyond his/her job description and seek task which are not rewarded by formal reward system (Organ, 1988). OCB is often discretionary and not endorsed by the official reward system (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014). A competitive business environment entails ample involvement and discretionary efforts from employee to maintain a competitive edge. Therefore, the role of organizational citizenship behavior has become more important (Detert & Burris, 2007).

Research has suggested that servant leaders inspire their followers through their serving behavior which motivates them to exhibit OCB (Reed, 2015). Followers are more likely to produce various extra-role behaviors when servant leaders put their prime focus on their need fulfillment (Marinova & Park, 2014). A recent study has also identified positive association between servant leadership and OCB (Linuesa-Langreo, Ruiz-Palomino, & Elche-Hortelano, 2018).

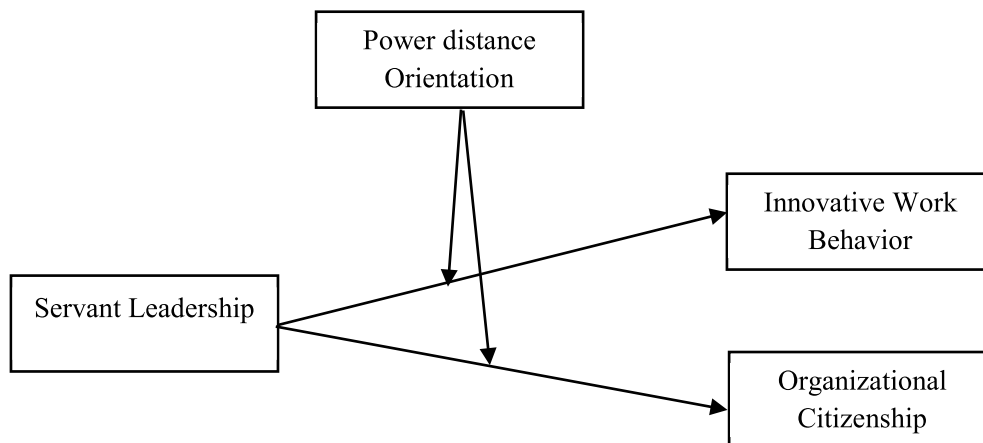
#### *Power Distance Orientation (PDO)*

PDO is a cultural value (Hofstede, 1980; Lin et al., 2013; Lowe, 2006) which refers to degree to which people believe and legitimize the hierarchical difference between those who possess power and those who do not ( Hofstede & Minkov, 1991). The employees with high power distance orientation are less sensitive to social exchange norms (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007). Therefore, irrespective of how leaders treat their followers, followers are less likely to show sensitivity to such treatment in power distance culture (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012). Impact of leadership is inconsistent in power distance cultures (Donia et al., 2016). PDO has been found to be a moderator in several studies. For instance, the mean level of servant leadership was less in Italy than in UK and Netherland (Bobbio et al., 2012) as the power distance orientation in Italy is more than UK and Netherland (House, 2004). Similarly, Morris, Brotheridge, and Urbanski (2005) suggested that virtue-based leadership might be less-effective in male-dominant societies as compared to female-dominant societies. A recent study conducted by Ahmad and Gao (2018) found support to the premise that power distance orientation is more related to leadership practices than any other cultural values in making the impact of leadership less effective when power distance orientation is high.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study draws on *Conservation of Resource Theory* which postulates that individuals try to retain and protect resources necessary to fulfill the needs of their daily lives. These resources include physical, social and psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Servant leaders protect these resources by treating individuals as a valuable organizational resource, growing them, developing them and by taking care of their well-being (Gregory Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). This creates a sense of security and safety (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010) and these acts of servant leaders fulfill the physical, social and psychological needs of subordinates (Aryee et al., 2007). Such perception of needs fulfillment and sense of security and safety results in bringing about abundance mentality (Covey, 2014) and consequently helps employees in exhibiting innovative work behavior by originating, promoting and implementing innovative ideas.

This study further draws on *Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX)* which proposes that followers maintain equitable social-exchange by reciprocating the treatment they received from their leaders (Blau, 1964; Dienesch & Liden, 1986). This theory provides the exchange mechanism through which leadership practices are reciprocated, therefore it is contended that subordinates try to reciprocate serving behavior of their leaders by demonstrating organizational citizenship behavior. The following conceptual frame and statements of hypotheses have been developed on the basis of profuse literature and the proposed theoretical framework.



*Figure 1: Research Model*

#### *Statements of hypotheses*

*H1: Servant leadership positively influences innovative work behavior.*

*H2*: Servant leadership positively influences organizational citizenship behavior.

*H3*: Power distance orientation moderates the influence of servant leadership on innovative work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior such that the influence of servant leadership is attenuated.

### Research Methodology

This study is based on positivist research paradigm which proposes that reality can be attained through observation and experimentation (Henn et al., 2009). Since this study aims to investigate the cause-effect relationship to predict behavioral outcomes in response to leadership behavior, the most appropriate research design for causal research is quantitative research design (Creswell, 2013). The positivist research paradigm also support a researcher uses quantitative method to test hypotheses.

#### *Questionnaire Development*

The questionnaire for this study is based on the instruments adopted from widely used and published measurement scales in the field of organizational research. All the scales have appropriate reliability Cronbach's alpha scores. All the items in questionnaire addressing each variable in the conceptual framework have been measured on a 5-point Likert scale. *Servant Leadership* has been measured through 8-items developed by (Liden et al., 2014) with ( $\alpha$ ) was .84. Innovative work behavior has been measured through 6-items proposed by Hu, Horng, and Sun (2009) with initial reliability ( $\alpha$ ) = .91. *OCB* has been measured through the scale proposed by Lee and Allen (2002) with  $\alpha$  = .83. While Power distance orientation has been measured through eight items proposed by Earley & Erez (1997) with initial reliability of .81.

#### *Sampling*

This study uses purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique to gather data from respondents. There are a large number of unregistered organizations in Pakistan which carry out economic activities outside the official reporting system and are beyond the tax net except for the large corporates (Wajeeh, 2017). Most of the small units producing goods and services both from rural and urban areas of Pakistan are undocumented in government statistics and contribute about 71 percent of GDP (Khan & Khalil, 2017). Therefore, it is almost impossible to draw a sample on the basis of probability. However, the issue of generalizability is associated with all non-probability sampling techniques, purposive sampling is common in academic research which is subject to time and resource constraints (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). Further, this research gathers dyadic data to avoid common method bias.

A sample of minimum 200 respondent has been suggested as appropriate for factor analysis

(Thompson, 2004) while Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) have suggested a sample of more than 200 respondents is adequate for structural equation modeling. Following this approach, this study uses a sample of 474 respondents to increase generalizability of the study.

### Data Analysis Methods

#### Normality, Validity and Reliability

Normality of the data has been ascertained through Skewness and Kurtosis. Normality of data is confirmed if the values of Skewness and Kurtosis range between  $\pm 2.5$  and sig. value  $< .05$  (Hair, 2010). It is necessary to assess measuring instruments' construct validity when instruments have been developed in different cultural context. Since all the constructs which we have used in this research have been developed in the western context, therefore it is necessary to ascertain construct validity of instruments used in this study. Construct validity can be ascertained through discriminant validity and convergent validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study follows method recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson (2010) which assess the discriminant validity and convergent validity through Composite Reliability (*CR*), Average Variance Extracted (*AVE*) and Maximum Shared Squared Variance (*MSV*). This method follows the cut-off criteria recommended by Hu & Bentler (1999) which suggests  $CR > 0.7$ ,  $AVE > 0.5$  and  $CR > AVE$  are necessary to establish convergent validity. While discriminant validity is established when  $AVE > MSV$  and the square root of *AVE* is greater than each pair of correlation for all the constructs. Further, Composite reliability has been measured to confirm internal consistency of data (Peterson & Kim, 2013).

#### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This study performs Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to determine goodness of model fit (Hair, 2010). Fit indices used in this study are Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ), Chi Square/ Degree of Freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/d.f.$ ), Significance ( $p$ ), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) for absolute fit indices. Further, for incremental fit indices, this study uses Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) which is also known as Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI). The summary of the cut-off values of model-fit indices used for this study are given in Table 1.

Table 1  
Classification of Fit Measures

Fit Measure					
Absolute Fit Indices		Relative Fit Indices		Parsimony Fit Indices	
Test	Criteria	Test	Criteria	Test	Criteria
$\chi^2$	$P > .05$	<i>CFI</i>	$\geq .95$	<i>PNFI</i>	$< .5$
$\chi^2/df$	$\leq 3.0$	<i>TLI</i>	$\geq .95$	<i>PCFI</i>	$< .5$
<i>SRMR</i>	$< .05$				
<i>RMSEA</i>	$< .05$				

### *Hypotheses Testing*

This study uses SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) to test hypotheses, measurement of moderating effect and interaction term. Independent variable and moderator were mean-centered before analysis by subtracting means from their values (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991; Hayes, 2013). This research draws separate interaction plots to estimate slopes describing the relationship between SL, IWB and OCB at varying level of power distance orientation. The interaction terms have been calculated by the tool *Interaction 1.7* developed by Soper (2013).

## **Results**

### *Respondents' Profile*

The age of the respondents falls between 20 to 58 years ( $M = 32$ ,  $SD = 8.24$ ) while there were 320 male and 154 female respondents. 378 respondents were married while 96 were unmarried. Tenure of respondents varies from 2 years to 25 years ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 5.6$ ) within the same organization. Among the respondents, 90 (19%) were leaders while 384 (81%) were followers.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Following Table 2 represents descriptive statistics and normality of data through Skewness and Kurtosis.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Servant Leadership	3.54	.93	-.78	-.06
Power Distance Orientation	3.68	.71	-1.54	2.08
Innovative Work Behavior	3.64	.83	-1.21	.59
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	3.52	.84	-.95	.04

Since values of Skewness and Kurtosis of all the constructs fall within the acceptable range of  $\pm 2.5$  (Hair, 2010). It can be concluded that the data set used for this study fulfills the requirement of normality.



*Construct Validity*

Construct validity has been measured through discriminant validity and convergent validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This research follows the cut-off criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). Table 3 below presents the results of construct validity.

Table 3  
*Construct Validity*

	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>MSV</b>	<b>MaxR(H)</b>	<b>SL</b>	<b>IWB</b>	<b>PDO</b>	<b>OCB</b>
<b>SL</b>	0.903	0.571	0.445	0.907	<b>0.755</b>			
<b>IWB</b>	0.872	0.534	0.146	0.879	0.329***	<b>0.731</b>		
<b>PDO</b>	0.900	0.529	0.003	0.901	-0.058	-0.040	<b>0.727</b>	
<b>OCB</b>	0.928	0.501	0.445	0.943	0.667***	0.382***	-0.006	<b>0.697</b>

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

Results of Table 3 above show that Composite Reliability (CR) of all constructs is greater than .7. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all the constructs is greater than .5 CR > AVE, therefore it can be said that all the requirements of convergent validity are fulfilled. Since AVE is greater than MSV and Square Root of all the constructs is greater than the correlation of each pair of their corresponding constructs, discriminant validity is said to be confirmed.

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Before making any attempt to evaluate the structural model, it is necessary to analyze full latent variable models through assessing the validity of the measurement model (Byrne, 2016). Figure 2 below illustrates the parameters of the measurement.

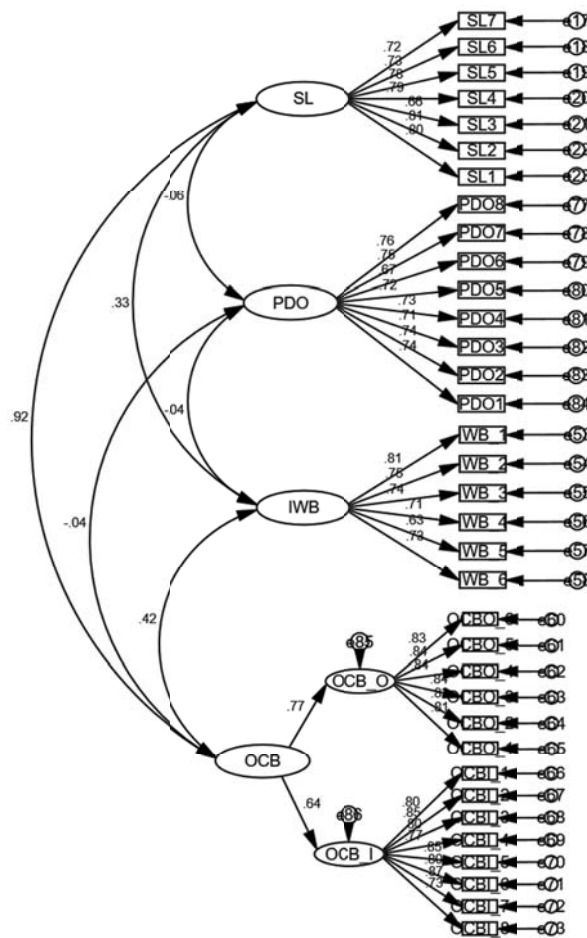


Figure 2: CFA for Second-Order Measurement Model

All the fit indices of the measurement model are within the acceptable range as presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4  
*Goodness of Fit Indices for the Measurement Model*

Absolute Fit Indices				Relative Fit Index			Parsimony Index		
$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	PNFI	PCFI
871.42	552	.000	1.58	.04	.035	.97	.97	.90	.85

Following the CFA of the measurement model, CFA for structural model was performed to ascertain how well the proposed model fits that data. Figure 3 below shows details of structural model's parameters.

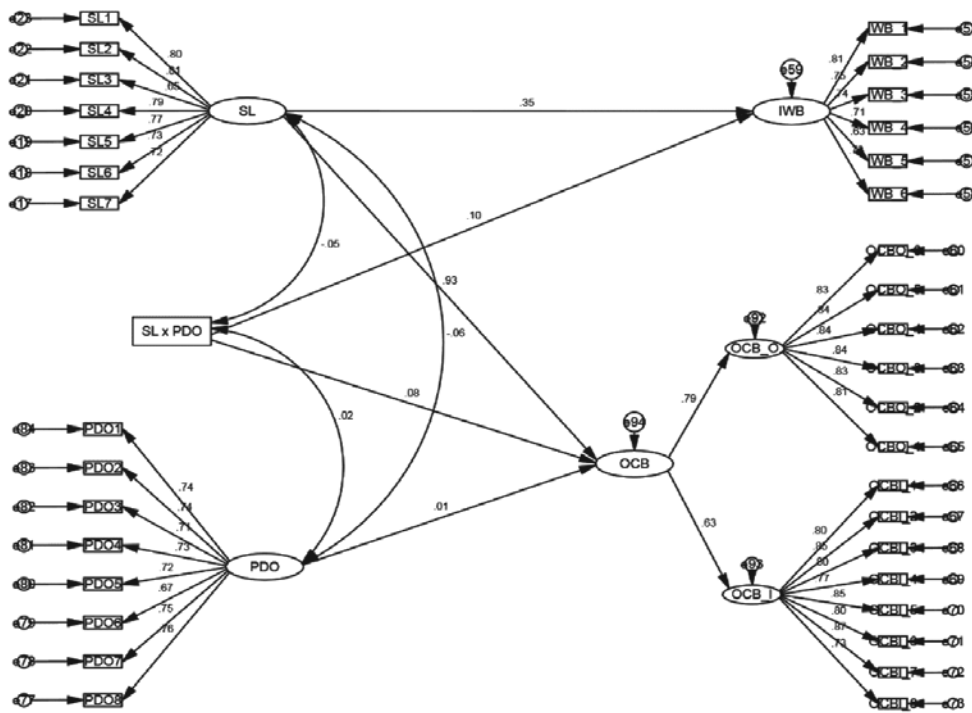


Figure 3: CFA for Structural Model

The Chi-Square statistic  $\chi^2 (586) = 920.18, p < .05$  which is consistent with results of

second-order CFA, indicating an inadequate goodness-of-fit. Since Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) is sensitive to sample size and significant in most of the cases (Iacobucci, 2010) even with a reasonable sample size (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Experts have recommended reporting Normed Chi-Square or Relative Chi-Square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) statistic in order to address Chi Square statistic's deficiency (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). The value of  $\chi^2/df$  is 1.57 which is less than 3.0 and suggesting good-fit (Kline, 2015).

In addition to  $\chi^2$  and  $\chi^2/df$  results, the value of *SRMR*, another absolute fit index, is .04. The value closer to 1 indicates a perfectly fitting model (Hoyle, 2012). Using the 90% confidence interval, the value of *RMSEA* is .03 which is below .05 and closer to .00, therefore indicating well-fitted model (Weston & Gore, 2006).

Moving to the incremental fit indices, the recommended values  $\geq 0.95$  for *CFI* and *TLI* suggest excellent-fit (Hooper et al., 2008). *CFI* and *TLI* are comparatively not affected by sample size (Pituch & Stevens, 2015). The value of both *CFI* and *TLI* are .96 indicating good-fit. While the *PNFI* and *PCFI* demonstrate a comparatively better fit than the second-order CFA with the values of .85 for *PNFI* and .90 for *PCFI*. Since the values closer to 1.0 represent good-fit for *PNFI* and *PCFI* (Lomax & Schumacker, 2012), it can be assumed that the model indicates a reasonable-fit for these indices.

#### *Results of Hypotheses Testing*

In the light of the theoretical framework, it was hypothesized that servant leadership positively affects innovative work behavior and OCB while power distance moderates the effect of servant leadership. Therefore, this research attempts to test this hypothesis by taking (SL) as a predictor, Power distance Orientation (PDO) as moderator and innovative work behavior (IWB) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as outcome variable. Table 4 below presents the summary of results.

Table 5  
Summarized Result of Moderation Analysis

Predictor	DV = IWB	DV = OCB
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
Constant	3.64***	3.53***
Servant leadership (SL)	.26***	.62***
Power distance orientation (PDO)	-.03 <sup>+</sup>	.02 <sup>+</sup>
SL x PDO	.12 <sup>+</sup>	.08 <sup>+</sup>
R <sup>2</sup> Change	0.1 <sup>+</sup>	.00 <sup>+</sup>

*N* = 474, Confidence level = 95% for 10000 bias corrected bootstrap samples, \*\*\**p* < .001, \*\**p* < .01, \**p* < .05, <sup>+</sup>*p* > .05

Table 5 shows that the influence of SL on IWB is positive and significant ( $b = .26, p < .001$ ) while the influence of SL on OCB is also positive and significant ( $b = .62, p < .05$ ). However, the interaction between SL and PDO is insignificant for IWB ( $b = .12, p > .05$ ) and OCB ( $b = .12, p > .05$ ). To better understand the moderating effect of power distance orientation, the plot of interaction at two levels of power distance orientation (1 SD below the mean and 1 SD above the mean) has been described in Figure 4. The interaction pattern presented in Figure 3 shows that there is little or ignorable difference in IWB by servant leadership for individuals with power distance orientation (1 SD above the mean) and individuals with low power distance orientation (1 SD below the mean). Similarly, the interaction pattern between SL and OCB at different levels of PDO is insignificant and ignorable. These results support  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  while there is no support for  $H_2$ .

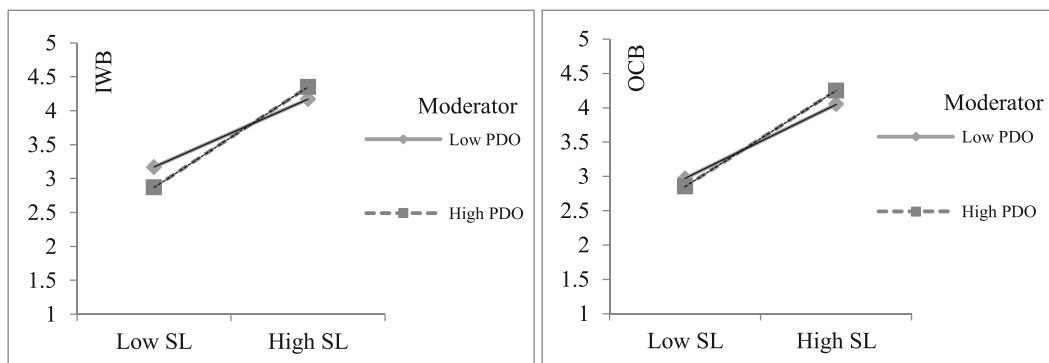


Figure 4: Interactive effect of SL and PDO on IWB and OCB

## Discussion and Conclusion

Findings of this study support Greenleaf's premise that servant leadership impact individuals and organization through its focus on serving others. This study supports the role of conservation of resource theory in predicting innovative work behavior suggesting that servant leaders provide their followers the experience of resourcefulness which ultimately leads employees to demonstrate innovative work behavior. Further, servant leader's tendency to tolerate mistakes and failures of their follower also supports employees to demonstrate innovative work behavior as described by Kamaruddin et al. (2015). This research also supports leader-member exchange theory in transmitting the influence of servant leadership on employees demonstrating organizational citizenship behavior that people maintain the norm of reciprocity even in culture with high power distance orientation. Therefore, this study finds support for H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>. Further, these findings are in support of the global expansion of servant leadership practices irrespective of Western or Eastern context (Ertel, 2017). Contrary to expectations, the power distance orientation did not moderate the proposed relationship (H<sub>3</sub>). Since, high religiosity affects power distance orientation of society (Mathew Sagi, 2019), therefore, the possible reason for servant leadership dominance and ineffective moderation of power distance is apparently the religious orientation of Pakistani society (Hassan, 1987). Since the idea of servant leadership has its roots in religion (Davis & Winn, 2017) and religion is an essential component of social reality and plays an important role in shaping societies, the integration between religion and leadership practices cannot be ignored (Gümüşay, 2019). Therefore, many similarities can be observed between servant leadership practices and religious teachings. However, empirical evidence is required to support this claim. This finding opens endeavors for future research.

### *Theoretical and Practical Implications*

This study implies that servant leadership is an effective leadership approach irrespective of the cultural context and geographic location. Servant leadership functions even under moderate power distance culture where the influence of different leadership practices is attenuated. This study can help the business community in the development of a practical manual to implement servant leadership practices in organizations. This study can also help managers for developing strategies to incorporate servant leadership behavior in their organizations.

### *Limitations & Future Research*

Since the data set used for this research is cross-sectional, no absolute claim can be made with reference to its findings. The longitudinal study in future can help to strengthen the findings of this research. More research on possible moderation of religious orientation in cultures with high or lower power distance orientation can provide great insight with regards to its impact on leadership practices, particularly on character-driven leadership approaches. This can provide empirical support

to this premise that religious orientation can undermine other cultural moderators such as power distance orientation.

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