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Servant leadership and HPWS for work-life balance and job satisfaction in the Hotel Industry: perspectives from Conservation of Resources Theory

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Servant leadership and HPWS for work-life balance and job satisfaction in the Hotel Industry: perspectives from Conservation of Resources Theory

Abstract

Purpose - Based on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study analyses how servant leadership and high-performance work systems (HPWS) provide employees with valuable resources that help them cope with work demands and preserve or increase personal and job resources, which in turn enhances their work-life balance (WLB) and job satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach - A sample of 253 hotel workers from Gran Canaria were surveyed. The study used Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypotheses.

Findings - Both servant leadership and HPWS positively affect employees' job satisfaction. Additionally, WLB plays a mediating role in explaining how servant leadership and HPWS can increase employees' job satisfaction.

Originality - This study is among the first to investigate the mediating role of WLB between servant leadership, HPWS and job satisfaction in the hospitality sector. By applying COR theory, it offers new insights into the interaction between personal and job-related resources and their impact on employee outcomes.

Practical implications - Our findings offer practical guidance for hotel mangers on implementing strategies that foster employee well-being and enhance performance through a combination of servant leadership and HPWS.

Keywords: Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory; Servant leadership; High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS); Work-Life Balance (WLB); Job satisfaction.

Paper type: Research paper

1

1. Introduction

The tourism industry plays a significant role in the global economy. However, its growth has not coincided with an increase in job quality, due to the challenging working conditions. Employees frequently face excessive workloads, emotional problems and feelings of injustice (Ayachit and Chitta, 2022; García-Cabrera *et al.*, 2018). This is especially evident in the hotel sector, where employees work long hours, including nights and weekends, receive low wages and perform roles involving stressful and demanding tasks (González-De-la-Rosa *et al.*, 2023). As a result, working in a hotel is both psychologically and physically demanding (Qiu *et al.*, 2022), which can undermine job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is defined as a positive emotional state towards one's job (Locke, 1969) and is a valuable intangible asset in service companies such as those found in the tourism sector. It can motivate employees to provide high-quality services, thereby enhancing customer value (Appiah, 2019).

In line with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), job satisfaction can be influenced by the availability of key organizational resources, such as leadership and HPWS, which help employees manage demands and prevent resource depletion. This manuscript investigates the potential influence of these organizational resources on job satisfaction. Servant leaders offer empathy, support, feedback and job resources to employees, creating a climate of empowerment (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2021). High performance work systems (HPWS), on the other hand, provide employees with the capabilities, motivation and opportunities to perform effectively (Boon *et al.*, 2019). The literature acknowledges that both servant leadership and HPWS positively affect organizational performance by improving employees' attitudinal and affective outcomes (e.g., Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2020a). One of those outcome variables is job satisfaction (Bavik, 2020). Consistently with the principles of COR theory, we

propose that providing employees with the resources to cope with work demands may positively influence such outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2019).

Despite some consensus on the positive association between both servant leadership and HPWS with organizational performance, the mechanisms explaining those relationships are not fully understood. Recent systematic and meta-analytic reviews on servant leadership (Bavik, 2020; Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Gui *et al.*, 2021) and HPWS (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2020a; Murphy *et al.*, 2018) acknowledge this gap and urge researchers to focus on these mechanisms. In this study, we propose that WLB - defined as the ability of individuals to harmonize their professional obligations with personal pursuits and aspirations (Clark, 2000; Hughes and Bozionelos, 2007) - plays a mediating role. Following the gain spiral corollary of COR theory (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), organizational resources such as servant leadership and HPWS may contribute towards enhancing hotel employees' job satisfaction by improving WLB.

The hospitality and tourism industry is unique due to its operational features and its high reliance on employees to provide customer services. The importance of WLB as a necessary resource for employees has been highlighted in this sector and authors have called for further research on this issue (Kim *et al.*, 2023; Medina-Garrido *et al.*, 2023). Given the harsh working conditions, where service consumption occurs simultaneously with service provision, context-specific research in hospitality is justified (Yang *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this manuscript addresses the following two research questions:

R1. Do servant leadership and HPWS in hospitality organizations contribute towards enhancing employees' job satisfaction according to the main tenet of COR theory?

R2. Do servant leadership and HPWS influence hospitality employees' job satisfaction through WLB, thus aligning with the gain spiral corollary of COR theory?

To address both research questions, we conducted a quantitative survey with a sample of 253 hotel workers in Gran Canaria. The selection of this context is not arbitrary as the hotel

industry is a dominant sector in Gran Canaria's economy. It is one of the most important tourist destinations in Spain; in 2023, it received 4.34 million international visitors. Tourism contributes 35% to the regional GDP and generates 40.4% of local employment (Exceltur, 2024). Building upon this context, our study contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence that servant leadership and HPWS are positively associated with employees' job satisfaction, directly and indirectly through WLB. Consequently, this manuscript provides theoretical support to the main postulates of COR theory as a relevant conceptual framework upon which to study HPWS and servant leadership in hospitality contexts.

Additionally, we contribute towards enriching the leadership and HPWS literature in line with previous studies that support their positive benefits in hospitality and tourism contexts (e.g., Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2021; Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2020b). Furthermore, we contribute towards unlocking the "black-box" of mediating mechanisms, through which HPWS may affect outcomes, as frequently called for in the literature (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2020a; Murphy *et al.*, 2018). This study highlights the mediating role of employees' WLB in the relationship between HPWS and servant leadership with employees' job satisfaction as WLB has not received sufficient support in hospitality settings and scholars have called for more research on this topic (Al-Azab and Al-Romeedy, 2024; Gui *et al.*, 2021).

Following this introduction, the paper is structured as follows: first we present COR theory and the research hypotheses. The methodology is described in the third section, followed by the results obtained. Lastly, we discuss the study's theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 Conservation of Resources Theory

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which explores stress, coping and well-being in various settings, including workplaces

4

(Hobfoll, 1989). Initially proposed to explain stress, it is also used to examine employee outcomes such as turnover, exhaustion and job satisfaction (Chen and Fellenz, 2020). COR theory posits that people strive to protect and enhance valuable resources, as their loss or any threat to them can negatively impact outcomes (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Resources, defined as valued objects, states or conditions that help achieve objectives (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll, 1989), include organizational practices that facilitate employee outcomes, such as leadership style, peer support and other valued resources (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014).

COR theory posits that stress arises when individuals face the threat of resource loss, either through the actual loss of resources or the inability to obtain crucial additional resources, despite their best efforts, leading to a cycle of resource depletion detrimental to employee outcomes (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). In addition, the theory proposes corollaries related to the concept of spirals (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Employees who lack resources are at risk of further depletion, while gaining resources increases the likelihood of future resource acquisition. Providing job resources enhances employees' self-efficacy, which leads to higher engagement (Llorens *et al.*, 2007). Thus, interventions aimed at enhancing employees' resources positively impact job satisfaction.

Both servant leaders and HPWS provide support, empowerment and growth opportunities, which employees can use to improve job satisfaction (Eva *et al*., 2019; Liden *et al*., 2015). This approach aligns with COR theory, as access to valuable resources helps individuals cope with job demands, reducing burnout and enhancing performance (Halbesleben *et al*., 2014). According to the gain spiral postulate of COR theory (Hobfoll *et al*., 2018), effectively providing employees with organizational resources (e.g., servant leadership and HPWS) can facilitate the acquisition of personal resources (e.g., WLB), which in turn positively influences job satisfaction. Our model suggests that servant leadership and HPWS contribute to job satisfaction directly and indirectly through WLB, consistent with COR theory. In this

context, servant leadership creates and maintains an environment where followers have access to abundant resources, which helps them manage stress and improve job performance. This underscores the importance of fostering a supportive work environment that aligns with the principles of COR theory (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll, 2001).

The choice of COR theory as our guiding framework is due to its unique focus on resource dynamics. It provides a robust basis for examining the influence of servant leadership and HPWS - viewed as resources - on employee outcomes (Miao *et al.*, 2021; Ye *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, its corollaries allow us to analyse the interplay between organizational (i.e., HPWS and servant leadership) and personal (i.e., WLB) resources and their impact on employee outcomes.

2.2. The effects of servant leadership on employees' job satisfaction

Servant leadership, originally conceptualized by Greenleaf (1998, 2002), "is holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual…), such that they are empowered to grow into what they are capable of becoming" (Eva *et al.*, 2019, p. 111). This approach is particularly relevant in hospitality, where challenging working conditions (e.g., long working hours, leading to potential overwork and interpersonal tensions) can reduce job satisfaction (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016). Servant leaders, by focusing on the personal and professional development of their followers, create a supportive environment that helps manage stress and enhances job satisfaction (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Eva *et al.*, 2019; Khan *et al.*, 2021). This comprehensive approach is essential for promoting followers' job satisfaction and growth.

COR theory can be used to understand how servant leadership affects job satisfaction (Eva *et al.*, 2019). By offering employees valuable resources for both personal and professional growth, servant leaders generate positive work outcomes (Ye *et al.*, 2019). Studies show that servant leadership boosts hospitality employees' enthusiasm for their work. Through social

support and care (Rabiul *et al.*, 2023), servant leadership enhances job satisfaction by focusing on meeting followers' needs and fostering their growth through emotional support, development opportunities and a supportive work environment (Van Dierendonck, 2011). By minimising resource depletion and promoting the accumulation of personal resources, which are essential for addressing work challenges and maintaining well-being (Eva *et al.*, 2019), servant leadership may help reduce stress and positively influence job satisfaction.

In the hospitality industry, the role of servant leadership is crucial. Tourism companies provide value through service provision, and customer satisfaction and loyalty depend on the quality of interactions with the employees (Schneider *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, hotel workers must find job satisfaction to effectively provide exceptional service. Employees tend to experience increased job satisfaction when supervisors offer personalized assistance and adequate support (Karatepe and Kilic, 2007). Servant leaders who prioritize the needs and growth of their employees can significantly improve job satisfaction among hotel workers by creating a supportive and empowering work environment (Nisar Khattak *et al.*, 2024). Studies indicate that servant leaders can provide hotel employees with several benefits to increase their job satisfaction, such as flexible work schedules, enhanced compensation and social benefits, family leave options, etc. (*e.g.,* Bavik, 2020; Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Nisar Khattak *et al.*, 2024).

Although these benefits are established by the organization, servant leaders play a crucial role in facilitating and promoting access to these resources; they minimize the depletion of valuable resources and promote the accumulation of personal resources, essential for addressing work challenges and maintaining workplace well-being (Eva *et al.*, 2019). Recent research has shown that servant leadership has a positive impact on several attitudinal and affective outcomes such as engagement, work commitment and job satisfaction (Gui *et al.*, 2021; Ozturk *et al.*, 2021). In the hospitality industry, servant leadership enhances employees'

job satisfaction by reducing stress and improving their ability to provide high-quality service (Chon and Zoltan, 2019). Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: *Servant leadership is positively associated with hotel employees' job satisfaction.*

2.3. The effects of HPWS on employees' job satisfaction

Another type of organizational resource that we examine in this study are HPWS, a set of integrated human resource practices implemented by organizations to enhance employees' capabilities, motivations and opportunities (Sun *et al.*, 2007), which are related to productivity and performance (Huselid, 1995). These practices include rigorous recruitment and selection procedures, extensive training plans, performance assessments, and incentive systems (Boon *et al.*, 2019). Research shows that HPWS have positive effects on business performance (Huselid, 1995; Murphy *et al.*, 2018) because of their influence on employees' behavioural and attitudinal outcomes (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2020a). Miao *et al*. (2021) identified these practices as enhancing employees' attitudinal outcomes, such as satisfaction and commitment. Evidence from hospitality and tourism organizations links HPWS with types of employee performance such as extra-role behaviours, service recovery performance and creative performance (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2021; Yang *et al.*, 2021).

Despite the importance of job satisfaction in service organizations, there is a notable gap in research studies relating HPWS and job satisfaction in tourism settings (Peethambaran and Naim, 2024). Initial empirical evidence suggests a positive association, although results are inconclusive, as negative effects have sometimes emerged (Dorta-Afonso *et al.*, 2023; Page *et al.*, 2018). We hypothesize a positive association between HPWS and job satisfaction based on COR theory since HPWS are seen as valuable resources that help employees cope with daily work demands, positively influencing their behavioural and affective outcomes (Peethambaran

8

and Naim, 2024; Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012; Zhang *et al*., 2019). In line with COR theory, HPWS offer employees numerous opportunities to cultivate, maintain and preserve their resources, ultimately enhancing employee outcomes related to their well-being (Haar and Harris, 2023).

We consider HPWS as a crucial component of contextual resources that employees strive to obtain, protect and maintain. According to Abubakar *et al*. (2019), HPWS create a work environment that is abundant in resources. Specifically, these systems enhance employees' resources by reinforcing their abilities, motivation and opportunities in the workplace. When employees receive additional resources provided by HPWS, it enhances their ability to perform their duties more efficiently and effectively. This improvement in performance leads to increased job satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: *HPWS are positively associated with hotel employees' job satisfaction.*

2.4. The mediating role of employees' work-life balance

The effects of both servant leadership and HPWS on employees' job satisfaction may be mediated through WLB. We posit the mediating role of employees' WLB, between both servant leadership and HPWS, on job satisfaction, supported by the gain spiral corollary and the core tenets of COR theory. Work and personal life are key dimensions for people, and the connection between these spheres is increasingly being investigated (Cuéllar-Molina *et al.*, 2018) as it directly influences job satisfaction. Greenhaus *et al.* (2003, p. 513) described it as "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in—and equally satisfied with—his or her work role and family role". WLB is influenced not only by employees' personal choices, but also by broader organizational factors such as working conditions, job design, organizational culture, and the degree of flexibility provided by HR practices (Medina-Garrido *et al*., 2023).

A healthy WLB can lead to improved job satisfaction, while an imbalance can lead to stress and dissatisfaction. This is particularly relevant in the hospitality industry due to irregular working hours, physical demands, low wages, and limited benefits for less qualified employees (O'Neill and Follmer, 2020). Fostering viable and effective WLB is recognised as a significant future challenge in the industry (Bouzari and Karatepe, 2020; Kaya and Karatepe, 2020). COR theory has previously been used to study WLB (Haar and Brougham, 2022; Haar and Harris, 2023). In their study, Haar and Brougham (2022) assert that job demands are entirely mediated by WLB, influencing job satisfaction. Furthermore, WLB, as an individual resource, influences wellbeing outcomes such as job burnout and insomnia (Haar and Harris, 2023).

In the WLB context, personal resources are influenced by work demands and personal responsibilities. Effective resource management plays a critical role in achieving a successful balance (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). WLB represents a level of self-confidence, control and esteem that can lead to satisfaction in both work and life (Haar and Brougham, 2022). Therefore, research on WLB in the hospitality industry has received increasing attention, demonstrating that when employees experience an imbalance between their personal and work lives, it leads to negative personal and work outcomes (O'Neill and Follmer, 2020).

Building on COR theory (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), individuals employ their existing resources to acquire additional resources, thus engaging in a 'resource gain spiral'. This process may start from contextual resources - such as HPWS - that foster the development of personal resources (Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012). Hence, HPWS play a significant role in enhancing resource accumulation for employees (Haar and Harris, 2023; Zhang *et al*., 2019). In the hospitality industry, a hotel receptionist may face work-related demands such as complaints from customers (Chen and Fellenz, 2020). Prolonged exposure to such situations causes emotional exhaustion leading to demotivation (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Thus, HR practices that contribute to improving employees' WLB, such as more flexible working conditions

(Vargas *et al.*, 2022), are key to promoting work wellness and reducing burnout, thus mitigating work-life imbalance (Carvalho and Chambel, 2016).

According to COR theory, promotion of WLB through HPWS may be a fundamental policy to improve workers' quality of life in the tourism industry. Based on this rationale, we assert that contextual resources in the form of HPWS should promote the development of WLB as an intermediate outcome, in line with the gain spiral corollary of COR. Furthermore, and based on COR theory's basic principle, we can expect HPWS to foster positive workplace outcomes, including increased job satisfaction among employees by enhancing their WLB. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3: *HPWS are positively associated with hotel employees' job satisfaction, partly because they are positively associated with their WLB.*

On the other hand, supervisor support becomes a key element in dealing with WLB conflicts and enhancing employee job satisfaction (Talukder, 2019). Servant leaders who care for followers' growth and provide resources both within and outside of the workplace (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016) are positively correlated with employees' WLB (Rabiul *et al.*, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2012). According to the COR theory framework, the resources obtained by employees can compensate for possible imbalances between work and family life (Talukder, 2019). This can lead to more flexible work schedules, reducing the stress of juggling work and personal lives and providing resources to manage their WLB.

Servant leadership, therefore, can be seen as a key resource capable of enhancing employee WLB. Based on the gain spiral corollary of COR theory, servant leaders could be perceived as providing significant social support and valuable resources that enhance their followers' WLB. Moreover, and consistent with COR theory's main principle, WLB serves as a valuable resource for employees, enabling them to successfully manage the demands of work

and personal life while preserving their personal resources, ultimately enhancing their job satisfaction. In this sense, when supervisors adopt a servant leadership style, their employees' WLB will increase (Tang *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2017), and so will their satisfaction (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016). Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 4: *Servant leadership is positively associated with hotel employees' job satisfaction, partly because it is positively associated with their WLB.*

Figure 1 captures our research model and hypotheses. As can be seen in the figure, we propose that HPWS and servant leadership are directly related with employees' job satisfaction (i.e., H1 and H2 are direct effects) and indirectly through the enhancement of their WLB (i.e., H3 and H4 are mediating effects).

Insert Figure 1

Source: Authors own work

3. Method

3.1 Sample and data collection

Data was collected via a survey administered by research assistants between March and June 2022. The sample comprised 253 workers from three-, four-, and five-star hotels. To control for differences in the way these hotels are organized and their HPWS, we used stratified sampling to ensure representation across different hotel categories. Research assistants unfamiliar with our research objectives in order to avoid bias directly contacted hotel employees at their establishments and personally administered the surveys on paper. Responses were then recorded electronically to ensure accuracy and consistency in data entry.

As shown in Table I, 59.68% of the total sample were women. Of the respondents, 15.81% worked in a three-star establishment, 48.62% in four-star hotels, and 35.57% in five-

12

star hotels. Most respondents (43.78%) had a high school diploma or vocational training. Finally, most of the workers belonged to the reception and food and beverage departments (28.3% and 22.7%, respectively).

Insert Table I

Source: Authors own work

3.2 Measures

The measures used were obtained from previous studies. Workers answered on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree) regarding their agreement with different statements (full scales in the Appendix I). We used measures for HPWS, servant leadership, WLB, and job satisfaction. *HPWS* was measured with 20 items from Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020b), covering seven HR practices (selection, training, safety, performance evaluation, incentives, participation, and job design). *Servant leadership* was measured with seven items from Liden *et al*. (2015), focusing on the supervisor's leadership style. *WLB* was measured with five items elaborated and adapted from previous literature (Duffy *et al*., 2017). *Job satisfaction* was measured with three items from the scale outlined by Suazo (2009). *Control variables* included both the gender of the participants and the category of the hotel (specifically, its number of stars).

3.3 Data analysis

To avoid common method variance (CMV), we followed recommendations by Podsakoff *et al*. (2003). A full collinearity test revealed that all VIF values ranged between 1.008 and 1.904, therefore below the threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015), concluding that CMV was not problematic in our study. We used PLS-SEM for the statistical analyses, as the research model consisted of both reflective (WLB, servant leadership, and job satisfaction) and formative (HPWS) constructs.

13

4. Results

PLS-SEM analyses comprised two steps. The first step evaluated the measurement model and the second analysis the structural model.

4.1. Measurement model

First, we validated the first-order model (see Table II). This involved assessing the measures' reliability at the individual item level (indicator reliability) and at the construct level (internal consistency reliability) and evaluating convergent and discriminant validity. Indicator loadings were greater than 0.708 (except for the first leadership item), demonstrating adequate reliability. Both Cronbach's alpha and rho_A exceeded 0.7 for all constructs, indicating sufficient internal consistency (Hair *et al.*, 2021). Convergent validity was confirmed as the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct exceeded 0.5.

Insert Table II

Source: Authors own work

Table III displays results of discriminant validity. We confirmed that the square root of the AVE (elements on the diagonal in bold) for each construct was not lower than the correlations with the other constructs (elements below the diagonal). Additionally, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio showed that most values were below 0.85, confirming discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). Insert Table III

Source: Authors own work

After validating the first-order model, a two-step approach was used to establish the second-order model (Wright *et al.*, 2012). These dimensions were specified as latent variables, and their scores were used as the items that formed second-order variables to validate the HPWS

14

construct. As can be seen in Table IV, items were kept in case their weight was significant, or their loading was higher than 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Insert Table IV

Source: Authors own work

4.2. *Test of research hypotheses*

The last step of the PLS-SEM analysis - required to test the hypotheses - was the evaluation of the structural model. The VIF values were below 3, indicating no multicollinearity in the model. Next, the direct effects (β), confidence intervals (CI) and significance level of the proposed hypotheses were analysed.

The results illustrated in Table V indicate that servant leadership has a positive and direct effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.222$; $p< 0.001$), so H1 is supported. HPWS also have a positive effect on workers' job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.308$; $p< 0.001$), supporting H2. These results support the idea that these factors are valuable resources for employees according to the main tenet of COR theory. In addition, both servant leadership ($\beta = 0.157$; $p< 0.05$) and HPWS ($\beta = 0.388$; $p< 0.001$) exerted positive effects on WLB. In turn, WLB positively affects workers' job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.292$, $p< 0.001$). Such findings suggest that WLB may be acting as a mediating mechanism. Regarding control variables, our results show significant gender effects on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.212$; $p < 0.05$), with female participants reporting higher levels of satisfaction than males. However, the hotel category did not significantly influence job satisfaction.

Insert Table V

Source: Authors own work

To test whether there is a mediating effect, the indirect relationships of the model were analysed. As shown in Table V, this effect is statistically significant in both cases ($\beta = 0.113$; $p < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.046$; $p < 0.05$), confirming the mediating effect of WLB and supporting both H3 and H4. In our case, WLB acts as a mediating variable between HPWS and job satisfaction and between servant leadership and job satisfaction, meaning that these factors influence job satisfaction both directly and indirectly through WLB.

The last step in the analysis of the structural model consists of the evaluation of its explanatory power, which is expressed by the R^2 values of the construct. The model explains 45.8% of the variance of job satisfaction and 25.3% of the variance of WLB. Furthermore, we examined the out-of-sample predictive power, taking into consideration the PLS predict procedure (Shmueli *et al*., 2019). PLS predict was employed to compute Q^2, assessing the PLS model's ability to predict new out-of-sample observations rather than relying on only in-sample predictions. As shown in Table VI, the model outperformed the naive benchmark, as the Q^2 predicted values were positive for all the indicators. Additionally, the PLS-SEM model was smaller than the linear model. Thus, the results from the PLS predict analysis highlight that the model has strong external (out-of-sample) predictive power (Shmueli *et al*., 2019).

Insert Table VI

Source: Authors own work

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Conclusions

The findings of this study provide a deeper understanding of how servant leadership and HPWS directly influence job satisfaction, with WLB serving as a critical mediating factor. The fact that both servant leadership and HPWS support WLB suggests that these organizational

16

practices provide employees with the personal resources necessary to manage their work environment more effectively, thus enhancing job satisfaction. These findings align with the gain spiral effect of COR theory, which suggests that the provision of organizational resources fosters the accumulation of personal resources (such as WLB), thereby enhancing outcomes like job satisfaction.

The results highlight the importance of organizational resources such as servant leadership and HPWS, particularly in the demanding hospitality sector, where supportive practices are essential for enhancing employees' WLB and job performance. Servant leadership, by providing emotional support, development opportunities and a supportive work environment, helps employees cope with work demands while preserving or increasing their personal and professional resources. Similarly, HPWS provide employees with the necessary resources to perform their work more efficiently and effectively, thus preventing resource depletion and fostering positive workplace outcomes. Therefore, this study represents an additional contribution towards enriching the hospitality sector management, which operates under very specific and demanding conditions. Thus, servant leadership and HPWS are not merely means to improve job satisfaction but directions to achieve competitive advantage in hospitality industry.

5.2. Theoretical implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, although previous studies have recognized the relevance of servant leadership in hospitality (Bavik, 2020; Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Gui *et al.*, 2021), few previous studies have analysed it from the perspective of COR theory. Our work provides empirical evidence on how servant leadership can be considered an organizational resource that promotes the accumulation of personal resources (i.e., WLB), which are pivotal for job satisfaction. While this finding aligns with previous works supporting

the benefits of servant leadership in hospitality and tourism, we further explore the role of WLB as a mediator between servant leadership and employees' job satisfaction. Hence, this study contributes to the literature by positioning COR theory as a suitable framework to explain the relationship between leadership styles and employee outcomes.

Second, our findings advance the understanding of how HPWS influence job satisfaction through the development of personal resources, such as WLB. From the COR perspective, we provide new evidence that HPWS can improve attitudinal outcomes because they encourage employees to obtain personal resources in the form of WLB. Moreover, our work contributes towards unlocking the "black box" of mediating mechanisms through which HPWS influence outcomes. While prior research has mainly focused on job-related mediators such as organizational commitment and work engagement (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2021; Karatepe, 2013; Karatepe and Vatankhah, 2015), our study extends these findings by showing that the gain spiral corollary of COR theory generalizes those findings to personal resources, like WLB.

Consequently, this study reinforces servant leadership's relevance as a critical leadership style in the tourism industry (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022) and align with the mutual gain perspective, which suggests that HPWS can create a 'win-win' situation, enhancing organizational performance while safeguarding employees' well-being (Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2019). Moreover, the application of COR theory advances the theoretical understanding of resource dynamics. Unlike theories limited to specific organizational aspects, COR theory is flexible and universally applicable across diverse sectors (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), allowing a more holistic understanding of employee dynamics. Therefore, we expand the applicability of COR theory for industries characterized by intense job demands such as hospitality.

18

5.3. Practical implications

The results of this study have significant practical implications for managers in the hotel sector, a context marked by persistent job dissatisfaction due to the demanding nature of the work, characterized by long hours, low wages and intense emotional labour, which negatively impacts employees' WLB. Our findings suggest that to address these challenges, hotel companies should actively promote among their managers and supervisors a culture which creates a work environment that enhances employees' WLB and job satisfaction (Chon and Zoltan, 2019). In this sense, the use of servant leadership and the implementation of HPWS, oriented towards addressing employees' needs, empowering them and offering growth opportunities, would be encouraged. Additionally, implementing flexible work schedules and policies that promote WLB can further enhance employee engagement and satisfaction.

To foster this new culture for managing employee relations, effective communication is necessary (Al-Romeedy and Khairy, 2024). This includes raising awareness of existing HPWS initiatives (e.g., performance-based incentives, continuous training programmes and structured performance evaluations) and ensuring that employees understand how these practices benefit them. Moreover, effective internal communication is essential for strengthening trust and engagement, making employees feel valued within the organization. Given the crucial role of supervisors in disseminating HPWS, organizations should also prioritize selecting and promoting managers who demonstrate servant leadership behaviours (Eva *et al.*, 2019). Training programmes aimed at developing core servant leadership qualities such as empathy, active listening and stewardship should be also offered (Huning *et al.*, 2020). Mentorship programmes where experienced servant leaders guide emerging leaders (Williams *et al.*, 2019) could be also considered as an informal form of coaching. Hence, it is necessary to reinforce servant leadership qualities through continuous training programmes, workshops and reward systems that recognize and encourage these leadership behaviors (Nisar Khattak *et al.*, 2024).

This leadership approach fosters greater employee engagement, helping them feel useful and meaningful in their roles, and minimizes potential negative outcomes (Zia *et al.*, 2022).

5.4. Limitations and future research

This research has certain limitations that open important lines of future research. First, the findings are based on data from employees in the hotel sector in Gran Canaria, a region highly dependent on tourism. Thus, the results may not be generalizable. Future research could replicate the study in other national and international contexts with more diversified economies to test the model's robustness across cultures. Second, although this research is one of the few contributions analysing the combined influence of HPWS, servant leadership and WLB on job satisfaction in the tourism industry (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2021; Rabiul *et al.*, 2022), future studies should explore additional outcome variables such as burnout, turnover intention, organizational commitment, and customer satisfaction. Third, given the cross-sectional design, longitudinal studies are needed to better capture mediation effects and reduce potential common method variance (CMV). Additionally, qualitative methods could further contribute to insights into employee perspectives. Fourth, in this study, we have focused on servant leadership, since it is one of the leadership styles that has gained more relevance in the tourism business literature. However, we would like to stress the fact that servant leadership overlaps with other related leadership styles (Lemoine *et al.*, 2019) and future research could address this issue by focusing on the particularities that distinguish servant leaders from others. Finally, regarding HPWS in tourism, it would also be interesting to investigate whether there are certain HR practices or sets of practices that are beneficial to improving employee attitudes and behaviours and organizational results (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2020b).

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Figure 1. Research Model

Table I. Sample profile

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	102	40.32%
Female	151	59.68%
Hotel category		
Three-stars	40	15.81%
Four-stars	123	48.62%
Five-stars	90	35.57%
Education level		
No studies	2	0.8%
Primary-Secondary	43	17.27%
High School-Vocational Training	109	43.78%
University	95	38.15%
Department		
Housekeeping	46	19.7%
Reception	66	28.3%
Kitchen	19	8.2%
Food & Beverage	53	22.7%
Management	18	7.7%
Others	31	13.3%

Table II. Reliability and convergent validity of the first-order model.

Construct	Indicators	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	AVE
Servant leadership (SL)			0.917	0.928	0.669
	SL_1	0.691***			
	SL_2	0.867***			
	SL_3	0.811***			
	SL_4	0.876***			
	SL_5	0.819***			
	SL_6	0.832***			
	SL_7	0.818***			
HPWS	Selection (SEL)		0.857	0.862	0.700
	HPWS_1	0.843***			
	HPWS_2	0.805***			
	HPWS_3	0.839***			
	HPWS_4	0.859***			
	Training (TRA)		0.828	0.834	0.744
	HPWS_5	0.871***			
	HPWS_6	0.871***			
	HPWS_7	0.845***			
	Security (SEC)		0.790	0.813	0.704
	HPWS_8	0.882***			
	HPWS_9	0.788***			
	HPWS_10	0.843***			
	Performance assessment (PER)		0.850	0.856	0.768
	HPWS_11	0.893***			
	HPWS_12	0.863***			
	HPWS_13	0.873***			
	Incentives (INC)		0.820	0.820	0.847
	HPWS_14	0.922***			
	HPWS_15	0.919***			
	Participation (PAR)		0.729	0.754	0.643
	HPWS_16	0.747***			
	HPWS_17	0.834***			
	Job design (DES)		0.851	0.851	0.870
	HPWS_18	0.822***			
	HPWS_19	0.932***			
	HPWS_20	0.933***			
Work-life balance (WLB)			0.848	0.853	0.622
	WLB_1	0.796***			
	WLB_2	0.832***			

	WLB_3	0.777***			
	WLB_4	0.799***			
	WLB_5	0.736***			
Job Satisfaction (SAT)			0.797	0.797	0.712
	SAT_1	0.813***			
	SAT_2	0.856***			
	SAT_3	0.861***			

Table III. Discriminant validity of the first-order model

Discriminant validity

	SL	SEL	TRA	SEC	PER	INC	PAR	DES	WLB	SAT
SL	**0.818**	*0.630*	*0.466*	*0.479*	*0.641*	*0.369*	*0.652*	*0.602*	*0.447*	*0.621*
SEL	0.568	**0.837**	*0.708*	*0.639*	*0.850*	*0.490*	*0.788*	*0.638*	*0.525*	*0.575*
TRA	0.417	0.596	**0.863**	*0.674*	*0.776*	*0.562*	*0.673*	*0.595*	*0.449*	*0.463*
SEC	0.415	0.532	0.540	**0.839**	*0.768*	*0.552*	*0.706*	*0.594*	*0.393*	*0.535*
PER	0.574	0.721	0.647	0.637	**0.877**	*0.585*	*0.918*	*0.685*	*0.455*	*0.635*
INC	0.301	0.407	0.461	0.445	0.489	**0.921**	*0.748*	*0.424*	*0.256*	*0.225*
PAR	0.548	0.615	0.510	0.526	0.714	0.555	**0.802**	*0.830*	*0.373*	*0.607*
DES	0.538	0.543	0.501	0.484	0.583	0.354	0.678	**0.933**	*0.472*	*0.593*
WLB	0.405	0.454	0.384	0.329	0.392	0.218	0.313	0.405	**0.788**	*0.644*
SAT	0.537	0.478	0.379	0.431	0.525	0.183	0.479	0.488	0.532	**0.844**

Note: the elements on the diagonal line (in bold) refer to the square root of the AVE. The elements below the diagonal line correspond to the correlations between constructs. The elements above the diagonal line (in italics) are the HTMT values.

Table IV. Validation of the second-order model

Construct	Dimensions	Loadings	Weights	VIF
HPWS	SEL	0.858	0.003***	2.334
	TRA	0.699	0.461^{ns}	2.015
	SEC	0.706	0.104^{ns}	1.859
	PER	0.852	0.059**	3.349
	INC	0.365	0.074**	1.594
	PAR	0.741	0.835^{ns}	2.963
	DES	0.825	0.001***	2.056

Note: n = 10,000 subsamples; ***$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.08$; ns non-significant

Table V. Hypothesis testing.

Path Coefficients	β	t	95% IC	Hypothesis
Direct effects				
H1: Servant leadership → Job satisfaction	0.222***	3.897	[0.110; 0.330]	H1: Supported
Servant leadership → WLB	0.157**	2.272	[0.017; 0.290]	
H2: HPWS → Job satisfaction	0.308***	3.791	[0.162; 0.478]	H2: Supported
HPWS → WLB	0.388***	5.038	[0.249; 0.522]	
WLB → Job satisfaction	0.292***	4.545	[0.155; 0.406]	
Indirect effects				
H3: HPWS → WLB → Job satisfaction	0.113***	3.552	[0.056; 0.180]	H3: Supported
H4: Servant Leadership → WLB → Job satisfaction	0.046**	2.007	[0.004; 0.094]	H4: Supported

Note: n = 10,000 subsamples; ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.05$

Table VI. Predictive power

Variable	Q^2 predict	PLS-SEM model	LM model	PLS-SEM – LM RMSE
SAT1	0.275	0.680	0.705	-0.025
SAT2	0.213	0.763	0.789	-0.026
SAT3	0.279	0.778	0.791	-0.013

Abbreviations: LM, linear model; RMSE, root mean squared error

APPENDIX

Study variables and items with means, standard deviations skew and kurtosis

Study variables and items	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
HPWS				
1. Great effort is taken to select the right person	3.18	1.04	-0.12	-0.59
2. Long-term employee potential is emphasized	3.20	1.11	-0.22	-0.72
3. Considerable importance is placed on the staffing process	3.22	1.04	-0.15	-0.54
4. Very extensive efforts are made in selection	2.96	1.09	0.01	-0.71
5. Extensive training programs are provided for individual in customer contact or front-line jobs	3.00	1.12	0.13	-0.78
6. Employees in customer contact jobs will normally go through training programs every few years	3.07	1.07	0.02	-0.85
7. Formal training programs are offered to employees to increase their promotability in this organization	2.87	1.10	-0.02	-0.77
8. Employees in this job can expect to stay in the hotel for as long as they wish	3.15	1.13	-0.23	-0.78
9. It is very difficult to dismiss an employee in this job	2.96	1.14	-0.01	-0.77
10. Job security is almost guaranteed to employees in this job	2.88	1.13	0.06	-0.70
11. Performance is more often measured with objective quantifiable results	3.09	1.08	-0.29	-0.68
12. Performance appraisals are based on objective quantifiable results	3.10	1.12	-0.16	-0.81
13. Employee appraisals emphasize long term and group-based achievement	3.09	1.14	-0.10	-0.80
14. Individuals in this job receive bonuses based on the profit of the organization	2.72	1.20	0.10	-0.93
15. Close tie or matching of pay to individual /group performance	2.82	1.14	-0.02	-0.81
16. Employees in this job are allowed to make any decisions	2.91	1.11	-0.14	-0.71
17. Employees in this job are often asked by their supervisor to participate in decisions	2.94	1.15	-0.19	-0.88
18. The duties of this job are clearly defined	3.39	1.09	-0.16	-0.78
19. This job has an up-to-date job description	3.21	1.14	-0.06	-0.87
20. The job description for this job contains all the duties performed by individual employees	3.33	1.13	-0.13	-0.87
Servant leadership				
1. My supervisor usually tells me if something work-related goes wrong	3.24	1.35	-0.24	-1.18
2. My supervisor makes my professional development a priority	2.83	1.27	0.13	-1.05
3. I would seek help from my supervisor if I had a personal problem	2.75	1.34	0.20	-1.12
4. My supervisor emphasizes the importance of contributing to the community	2.75	1.27	0.17	-1.10
5. My supervisor puts my interests ahead of his own	2.51	1.16	0.34	-0.72
6. My supervisor gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations the way I see fit	2.75	1.26	0.17	-0.99
7. My supervisor would NOT compromise ethical principles to achieve success	2.98	1.36	0.03	-1.24

Job satisfaction

1. All in all, I am satisfied with my job	3.25	1.10	-0.24	-0.63
2. In general, I like my job	3.44	1.09	-0.40	-0.43
3. In general, I like working here	3.34	1.16	-0.26	-0.83

Work-life balance

1. Currently, I seem to enjoy every facet of my life equally	3.31	1.02	-0.16	-0.56
2. I am satisfied with my work-life balance	3.22	1.07	-0.20	-0.62
3. I believe I manage the demands of my work and personal life well	3.35	1.04	-0.24	-0.62
4. I have enough time to perform non-work-related activities	3.12	1.08	0.00	-0.73
5. I have time to rest during the week	3.12	1.03	-0.07	-0.71

Source: Authors own work

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