



How Does Servant Leadership Affect Extra-Role Customer Service Behavior in the Hotel Business: Role of Sensitivity to Treatment

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received: February 07, 2025 Revised: March 18, 2025 Accepted: March 27, 2025 Available Online: April 02, 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Servant leadership (SL); Work engagement (WE); Sensitivity to others treatment (ST); extra role customer service behavior (ERB); Conservation of resources theory (COR)</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Dr. Shrafat Ali Sair Email: drshrafatali@gmail.com drshrafatali.hcc@pu.edu.pk</p>	<p>Extra-role customer service behavior is presently the root that helps hotels' ability to compete. Grounded on conservation theory this study investigates that servant leadership encourages extra-role customer service behavior among hospitality frontline employees through the intervening of work engagement and moderation of sensitivity to others treatment. We collected the study data in two waves by surveying 305 working for one-to-three-star hotels. Results confirm that servant leadership influences work engagement, ultimately contributing to explaining their extra-role customer service behavior. Results support the contingent impact of sensitivity on the hypothesized relationship. Our study offers guidance to practitioners on how to best implement servant leadership in order to encourage Extra-role customer service behavior.</p>



Introduction

Leadership studies have long recognized the importance of executives in helping their employees attain their full potential (Ghosh et al., 2017). The idea of SL, along with many other leadership theories, offers a framework for researching this issue since SL prioritize fulfilling the desires of followers before meeting their personal. Greenleaf (1977), the forerunner of the notion, highlighted

that SL had robust service inclination that motivates their followers to match SL. Renowned scholars (Huang et al., 2016) recapped that the relationship that SL have with their followers is crucial to comprehending the transformational effect that occurs between them. As an example, a servant leader inspires followers by boosting their self-esteem (Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999). In the same stream other scholars (Bavik, 2020) stated that beyond the "competency inputs" and "performance outputs," SL is said to help create a service culture in the establishment of servant companies, as first proposed by Greenleaf (1977). Followers are inspired to imitate the actions of SL because they respect and admire them. (Zhang et al., 2021). Such a behavioral restructuring of employees in service businesses has considerable relevance for increasing the level of consumer services.

The foundation of hospitality firms is meeting client hopes through the provision of excellent and effective service (Ghosh et al., 2017). Thus, having competent human resources is thought to be essential to such an organization's feat (Khatri et al., 2010). Nonetheless, it has been noted that in service-oriented organizations, the management team still faces a significant obstacle in cultivating a customer-oriented mindset among employees (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; Melchar & Bosco, 2010). Numerous studies demonstrate that hotel employees' mindsets are greatly impacted by their immediate supervisors' SL conduct, which instills in them a sensitivity to customer care (Liden et al., 2014). The emerging viewpoints can elucidate the perceived influence of SL conduct on the client service positioning of the employees in the hospitality business.

The transfer of service aligning from SL to their juniors in hotel firms has not gained enough attention as a momentous area of study, despite the fact that a few prior studies offer evidence in support of the association between SL and service excellence. According to two particular studies (Liden et al., 2014), SL behaviors of restaurant supervisors have a positive impact on a assortment of outcomes such as the creation of a serving culture, employee engagement. Our study's main goal is to determine whether hotel managers' or supervisors' SL behaviors, as seen by their subordinates, contribute to the improvement of particular facets of customer service, such as ERB. It is predicated on the idea that supervisors' SL practices foster a customer service orientation in hotel employees, as measured by the service orientation scale. Thus, this study provides a more targeted explanation of the connection between hotel managers' or supervisors' SL practices and the customer-centric service orientation of their employees. Furthermore, our research shows that SL is a popular managerial style to use in order to achieve customer service excellence in hospitality firms, especially considering the expanding importance of emerging markets. The mechanism route for this effect is unknown because the influence of SL on ERB among hospitality personnel has not been demonstrated.

Drawing upon theory of COR, we anticipate the role of frontline personnel WE in mediating the influence of SL on hospitality employees' ERB and moderation of sensitivity to others treatment. Through the COR perspective, employees who own abundant resources are more probable to actively seek out further resources and allocate resources to activities that go above and beyond the call of duty. Therefore, we assume that working under SL as a spring of resources, followers may adopt a proactive approach, such as proactive WE, to grow resource pool and allocate resources in optional behaviors in service performance such as ERB.

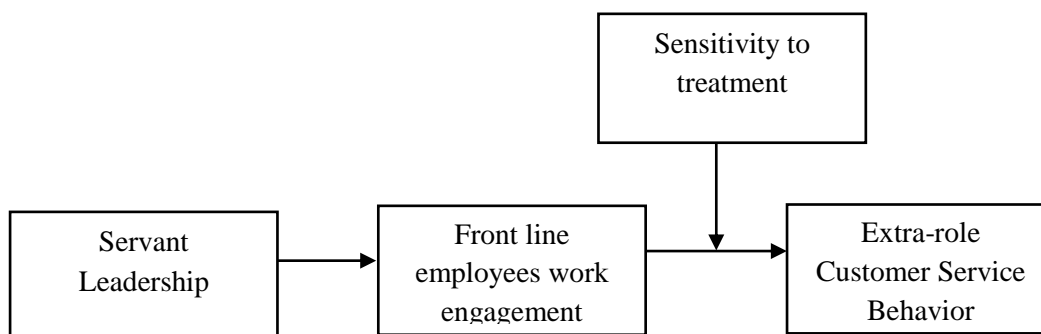
Using this framework as a foundation, this study provides theoretic insights by reporting that SL has an effect on WE as well as ERB. Furthermore, drawing on COR theory, we examine a mechanism by which SL shows its impact on ERB through the mediation of WE. Thirdly, by incorporating sensitivity to others favorable treatment as a moderator, this study throws light on the mechanism by which sensitivity to others favorable treatment impacts ERB. In summary, this

study chose workers' WE as mediator and sensitivity to others favorable treatment as a moderator to build a mediated moderation model, and to further investigate the effect instrument of SL on ERB (Fig. 1).

Literature review

This paper examines the research model presented in Figure 1, which is based on theories and prior studies.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



The direct link between SL and ERB

The theory of COR (Hobfoll, 2001) holds that people are driven to acquire new resources (acquisition) and preserve their current ones (conservation). Resources are described as stuffs, states, situations, and other things that bring worth (Hobfoll, 1988). Resource investment is an expansion of the concept of COR. The process of investing in resources is related to a resource pool and resource buildup. Those that have access to a resource pool are better able to invest in resources and acquire more resources, creating a resource expansion spiral (Halbesleben et al., 2014). When resources are available, people are more likely to use a proactive resource acquisition approach to gather more resources (also known as resource gain spirals) and devote their resources to performance that goes above and beyond the bare requirements (Halbesleben et al., 2014). On the other hand, when people are short on resources, they are more prone to take a defensive stance to protect what little they have. This theory aligns with the idea of SL as a source of resources.

The term SL was first familiarized by Greenleaf in his effort, which stressed that SL is “servant first”; “it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then, conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977). At their core, a SL prioritizes meeting the desires of their followers, organizations, and publics. (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

ERB embody key employee-level outcomes for the success of hospitality firms (Zhu et al., 2019). ERB by hospitality employees offer the best answers to a variety of client needs; they allow for rapid, accurate, and superior service that goes above and beyond requirements for clients (Lim, 2022). Additionally, ERB fosters a collaborative work environment, which raises productivity levels inside firms (Tuan, 2018; Zhang et al., 2023).

We use this theory to contend that abundant resources that workers can shape under SL as source of resources can motivate them to involve in service directed behaviors above and beyond the minimum requirements, including service-inclined behaviors (Tuan et al., 2021).

The front-line employees WE mediates between SL and ERB

Work engagement: In the hospitality business, WE is valued resource that warrants well attention (Dai et al. 2021). Vigor, devotion, and absorption are three essential apparatuses of WE (Bakker et al., 2012). Employees with vigor exhibit energy and resilience at work. The meaning one attaches to and the passion one has toward one's work are both examples of dedication. Absorption involves pleasant engrossment and complete focus at exertion (Schaufeli et al., 2006). WE is the attitude of giving your all for the company, as well as complying with the goals and values of the business (Ringl, 2013). It can be described in terms of fulfillment, a positive attitude, commitment, and love for one's work (Schaufeli 2021).

Previous work has demonstrated that leadership can develop the appreciated resource of WE of hotel employees (Rabiul et al., 2023; Yu et al. 2020). The earlier work has established that leaders can affect the followers WE (Gutermann et al. 2017). Furthermore research found that SL can be better predictor of WE in hospitality industry (Kaya and Karatepe 2020). The recent work shows that WE lowers turnover intentions (Ampofo and Karatepe 2022) and keeps employees in their hotel industry jobs (Teng, Cheng, and Chen 2021). WE and job embeddedness bring better outcomes for the hospitality industry (Karatepe and Ngeche, 2012).

Thus,

H1: WE mediates between SL and ERB

The moderation of ST on the relationship WE and ERB

According to the contingency standpoint (Yukl 2006), leading is a societal construct that cannot be completely comprehended when studied in a vacuum. Follower qualities are one example of a contextual element. In this study, we specifically look at followers' ST. We think that the link between SL and WE is moderated by this sensitivity.

In this context, sensitivity is the degree to which an individual is cognitively and emotionally responsive to interpersonal dealing (Bunk and Magley 2011). People who are very sensitive show a heightened awareness of and reaction to positive or negative treatment (Wu et al., 2013). Only the degree of an worker's cognitive and affective reactivity to positive interactive treatment is taken into account in this study. Since distributive or procedural unfairness does not always involve positive interpersonal treatment, employees' responses to how others treat them can be distinguished from their responses to workplace injustice (Schmitt 1996). Being sensitive to organizational injustice does not always equate to being sensitive to the quality of people's treatment. A person with a high level of sensitivity is aware of their beneficial relationships with other people and responds favorably and passionately to their attention, recognition, and appreciation. Therefore, the favorable interactive treatment characteristic of SL may have a superior role in moderating the WE for people with high ST related with those who score low. According to COR, SL is starting to provide their followers with resources that are friendly and accommodating, and highly sensitive workers observe and appreciate their leaders' positive treatment. They will therefore probably have favorable opinions of and be more eager to work with their SL as a result (Murphy et al. 2003). As each side consistently contributes various resources for trade to the connection, the quality of LMX gradually improves. (H. Wang et al. 2005). The impact of SL is minimal when workers exhibit low levels of sensitivity. Such employees find it difficult to engross in social interactions with their bosses (Murphy et al. 2003) and may find it hard to shape (or be uninterested to) high-quality LMX relations with their bosses, even if the bosses engross in SL. Considering everything, hence:

H2: ST will have moderating effect on the link between WE and ERB such that when ST is high, the association between WE and ERB is stronger

Methodology

Research design

Using snowball practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), we accessed to 24 three-star hotels in Lahore, and 17 of them showed the consent to participate. We designed a questionnaire-based survey for the distribution among frontline employees of these hotels. We adopted with two waves of data gained from frontline personnel. The first round of survey (T1) evaluated SL and demographics. After two weeks elapsed, we executed second round of survey (T2) to quantify WE, ST and ERB.

Adhering to purposive sampling practice (Saunders, 2011), we requested 410 frontline personnel to give the responses to questions contained in the form in T1. We also attached a letter to each form explaining the intent of this investigation. We clarified that study was initiated for academic purposes and that all the data collected certainly would be kept confidential. The response rate in T1 was almost 85% (n= 350). In second round (T2), we accessed those employees who filled the form for the first time. We again invited them to complete this second questionnaire. We collected back 305 usable completed questionnaires (response rate: 87%). In agreement with the rule (10:1) proportion (Randall & Gibson, 2013), the sample size should consist of 310 respondents since the form covers 31 questions. For this study, we had a sample size of 305 respondents enough to circumvent non-responsiveness or other generalizable concerns (Bryman, 2016) and subsequently to reduce sample error.

Measurement

SL. We had the 14-item scale established by Ehrhart (2004) to quantify SL. “My supervisor makes me feel like I work with him or her, not for him or her” and “My supervisor makes my personal development a priority.”. For each item designed to measure the following variables in the study, respondents must point out level of agreement on a scale extending from “1 = Strongly disagree” to “5 = Strongly agree”.

- **WE.** Authors used the 9-items short scale of (Schaufeli et al., 2006). “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”.
- **ST.** A 3-item scale advanced by Bunk and Magley (2011) adapted to gauge frontline employees’ ST. “I would remember when others treat me with respect,” “It is important to me that others trust me,” and “If others appreciate my hard work, it stays on my mind.”.
- **ERB.** We measured this dependent variable using 5 items from a scale established by Bettencourt and Brown (1997). One sample item is “This employee willingly goes out of his/her way to make a customer satisfied”.

We incorporated some demographic variables such as gender, age, and length of experience as control variables.

Descriptive statistics

As Table 1 displays that all four variable scales (SL, WE, ST and ERB) have a good internal consistency, having Cronbach's alphas (.94, .91, .80 and .83) above the acceptable level of 0.7 value. The scale items load into one latent variable, explaining 31.068% of the variance, underneath the 50% threshold value (Mattila & Enz, 2002).

Nearly 76 % of respondents were male (n = 233, 76 %). The mainstream of respondents had a graduate degree (n = 179, 58.7%), and the rest possessed an undergraduate qualification (n = 94, 30.0%), a higher education (n = 32, 10.5 %). Respondents reported 1 to 5 years (n = 93, 30.5 %), 6 to 10 years (n = 136, 44.6 %), 11 to 15 years (n = 71, 23.3%), and 16 years and above (n = 5, 1.6%) of work experience. More than half of the frontline respondents lied in the 20-29 age group (n = 224, 73.4%). Others fall in 30-39 (n = 65, 21.3%) and 40 years and above (n = 16, 5.3 %).

Predictably, SL appears positively related to frontline employees' ERB (r = 0.48, $p \leq 0.01$), ST (r = 0.36, $p \leq 0.01$), WE (r = 0.34, $p \leq 0.01$). Only the educational level shows significant positive relationship the sensitivity to treatment.

Table 1: Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SL (SL)	(.94)							
2. WE (ERB)	.34**	(.91)						
3. Sensitivity to Treatment	.36**	.24**	(.80)					
4. ERB(ERB)	.48**	.28**	.29**	(.83)				
5. Gender	.023	-.056	-.005	.031	NA			
6. Education level	-.051	-.027	-.009	.005	-.005	NA		
7. Experience(years)	.083	.084	.146*	.020	-.002	-.121*	NA	
8. Age	.032	.000	.090	-.001	.021	.010	.363	NA
Mean	3.36	3.38	3.31	3.29	1.24	1.80	1.96	1.32
SD	.86	.82	.90	.90	.42	.61	.78	.59

“** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$. We present Cronbach's alphas (α) in parentheses.”

“Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female // Age: 1= 20-29, 2= 30-39, 3= 40-49, 4= 50-59, 5= 60 or above”

“Work experience (years): 1= 1-5, 2= 5-10, 3= 11-15, 4= 16-20”

“Education level: 1 = Undergraduate, 2 = Graduate, 3 = Master, and 4 = M.Phil./Doctorate”

As revealed in Table 2, the 4-factor model is superior to the other models (1-factor to 3-factor models), as regards goodness-of-fit value criterion. Therefore, we proceeded with 4-factor model, as its goodness-of-fit values (RMSEA = 0.058, $\chi^2 = 863.431$, $df = 428$, $\chi^2/df = 2.017$, CFI=0.913, NNFI = 0.905,) satisfy the recommended scales (RMSEA < 0.08, $\chi^2/df < 3$, CFI > 0.90, NNFI>0.90) (Bagozzi & Youjae Yi, 1988; Browne, M. W. & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 2: CF analysis results

Variables	χ^2	Df	Ratio			
			χ^2 / df	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA
One-factor model ^a	2503.266	434	5.768	0.586	0.557	0.125
Two-factor model ^b	1446.059	433	3.340	0.798	0.783	0.088
Three-factor model ^c	1099.896	431	2.552	0.866	0.856	0.071
Fourth-factor model ^d	863.431	428	2.017	0.913	0.905	0.058

a. SL, WE, ST, and ERB all in one factor

b. SL, ST and ERB in one factor in one factor. ERB as one factor

c. SL and ST in one factor, WE, ERB each as one factor

d. SL, ERB, ST, WE each as one factor

We find from Table 2, EFA, then CFA, also CR, and finally average variance extracted AVE numeric are acceptable. The significant values regarding Bartlett's test: $\chi^2 = 5267.182$, degree of

freedom = 465, $p < 0.001$. Lastly, the four-factor solution appeared, having eigenvalues more than 1.

Table 2: Factor loading (EFA, CFA)

Variables	Items	EFA	CFA (loading)	CR	AVE	\sqrt{AVE}
SL (SL)	SL1	.734	.770	0.939	0.523	0.723
	SL2	.695	.717			
	SL3	.679	.652			
	SL4	.719	.757			
	SL5	.693	.672			
	SL6	.737	.760			
	SL7	.714	.699			
	SL8	.730	.734			
	SL9	.735	.743			
	SL10	.728	.725			
	SL11	.747	.749			
	SL12	.712	.710			
	SL13	.729	.727			
	SL14	.706	.702			
WE (WE)	WE-1	.743	.747	0.907	0.521	0.722
	WE-2	.799	.790			
	WE-3	.722	.682			
	WE-4	.726	.709			
	WE-5	.719	.664			
	WE-6	.728	.721			
	WE-7	.762	.739			
	WE-8	.742	.723			
	WE-9	.724	.715			
ERB(ERB)	ERB-1	.765	.722	0.837	0.507	0.712
	ERB-2	.742	.753			
	ERB-3	.744	.733			
	ERB-4	.750	.715			
	ERB-5	.663	.632			
ST(ST)	ST-1	.815	.782	0.800	0.572	0.756
	ST-2	.796	.754			
	ST-3	.808	.732			

Table 3 supports hypothesis 1. SL influences extra-role behavior through the mediation of front-line employees' WE. In other words, SL increases WE increasing their ERB (hypothesis1).

Table 3: Direct links and sequential mediation links results

Hypotheses	Results	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
H1	SL → ERB	.411	.313	.530	.010
	SL → WE → ERB	.044	.016	.088	.007

“BCa: bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapping confidence intervals. Estimate based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.”

As shown in table 4 outcomes also support hypothesis 2 to: employees' sensitivity to treatment moderates the link between WE and ERB

Table 8: Moderation results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	P
	WE → ERB	.239	4.306	.000
H2	ST → ERB	.259	4.665	.000
	WE*ST → ERB	.116	2.275	.022

Figure 2 illustrates that the higher their sensitivity to treatment, the stronger positive connection between WE and employees' ERB. It appears that employees with high sensitivity to treatment exhibit more extra role customer service behavior, than employees with low sensitivity to treatment.

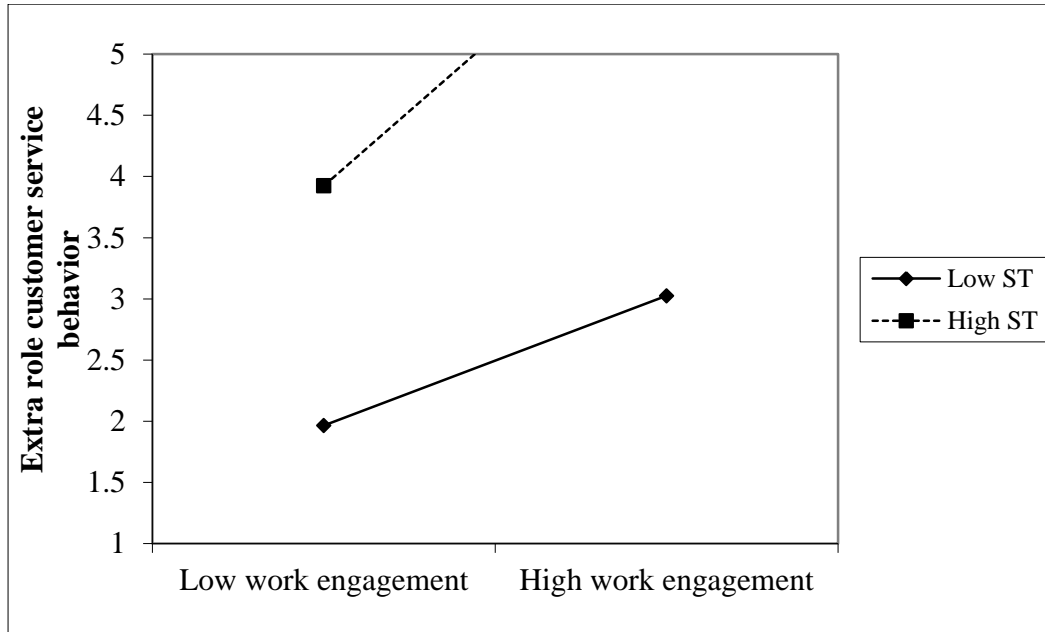


Figure 2. Diagram showing the contingent effect of sensitivity on the relationship between WE and ERB

Discussion

Our findings endorse the importance of SL on ERB in the hospitality business. More precisely, study support Hypothesis 1 and 2. SL appears positively related to frontline employees' ERB. Furthermore, study supports the mediations of WE between SL and ERB. Moreover, study confirms hypothesis 2: the role of ST as moderator on the link between WE and ERB. The higher the sensitivity to others treatment, the higher the strength of the positive connection between WE and ERB. The existing finding strengthens the role of COR theory in the effects of SL on ERB

Theoretical implications

The present study generates many theoretical implications. Initially, this research is one of the first to look at the positive effects of SL on the ERB in the hospitality sector. This study broadens the focus of research on SL and supports the claim that SL is important in the hospitality sector, as put out by Brownell (2010) and others.

Secondly, the study builds the literature on SL such that the association of SL to ERB is mediated by front line employees WE. The results are in line with COR theory and offer support for: (1) SL is helpful in conserving the employee resources working under stressful conditions in hospitality

industry fostering WE extra role behaviors (2) which is then expressed in extra role behavior; (3) SL is “personalized” through COR theory. Hence, COR theory may best portray the relationship between SL and colleagues (van Dierendonck 2011).

Third, our study adds something special to the literature on SL by pointing out a crucial boundary condition under which SL influences followers: the moderating effect of sensitivity. We experienced the moderating effect of followers' ST in order to identify the links between SL, WE, and ERB. This was done using the contingency leadership viewpoint (Yukl 2006).

Practical implications

The most significant practical result of our study is the role that SL has in encouraging many hospitality workers to provide exceptional customer service. In this sense, training programs designed to enhance managers' SL abilities are probably worthwhile investments because some parts of leadership behavior can be learnt and modified. For instance, hospitality companies might train their managers in human relations so that they can better understand the demands and worries of their subordinates (Burke and Day 1986). By selecting new managers who possess the qualities of integrity and a desire to serve, hospitality companies might also think about hiring SL (Wu et al., 2013).

Additionally, firms should support SL by fostering a compassionate perspective by recognizing the importance of caring for others and praising employees for their kindness and decency. Decentralizing decision-making and discouraging formal deference and respect are two more ways that organizations can reduce power distance.

The results of this study also imply that SL does not always increase staff members' willingness to go above and beyond for visitors. Employees that are highly sensitive to positive treatment from others respond best to this leadership style. Managers must discover other motivating strategies for staff members who are less responsive to the favorable treatment of others. This could involve establishing clear guidelines, developing incentive schemes, or teaching the followers the value of providing high-quality service for both the hotel's and the employee's success. Employees are more inclined to act in ways that benefit the firm when their personal objectives coincide with its objectives, such as becoming more customer-focused

Limitations and future research

Despite our efforts to address common method bias, it may still limit our study. However, we are certain that the construct validity tests show that our results were unlikely to be explained by common method bias.

Second, our model that suggests SL encourages employees to take on additional customer service responsibilities, we cannot completely rule out the likelihood that the relationship works the other way around, meaning that servant employees may encourage their leaders to engage in more SL behaviors. Another possibility is that when we assessed SL, customer-focused service behavior was already evident.

Third, we didn't look at the potential outcomes of different leadership philosophies, such as transformational leadership. Other leadership forms may impact or moderate the effects of SL on WE, and ERB would be the similar if other types were involved.

Fourth, it is plausible that we are witnessing the impact of supervisor traits like likability and leniency, rather than SL, on employees' extra-role customer service actions since we failed to record these traits. Therefore, while investigating the connection between SL and employees'

extra-role customer service actions, we urge future studies to account for supervisor likability and leniency.

Lastly, this study might be a Chinese or south Asian cultural artifact. C. Wang, Ling, and Zhang (2009), contended that what is viewed as SL in the West may not essentially be regarded as such in China or south Asia. Furthermore, hotel workers in asia can have a different humanitarian perspective and power distance than those in other nations. van Dierendonck (2011) stated that the nations with low power distance and a high humane orientation may have a higher likelihood of having SL. Additionally, followers who have a low power distance and a high humanitarian orientation might respond better to SL. Future research should evaluate the extent of the equivalence of SL in Western and Asian populations, and adjust for the effects of cultural variables on the incidence and the consequences of SL.

Future studies should also examine other outcomes at the individual and team levels in addition to extra role customer service behavior. Work attitudes, and other work-related behaviors are examples of possible individual-level results, whereas team cohesiveness, knowledge sharing, and performance are examples of possible team-level outcomes. Testing the degree to which SL affects firm-level outcomes like sales growth, ROE, ROA, and social responsibility may also be worthwhile. Therefore, we support more research in this field.

Second, even though the COR theory was found to be a helpful theoretical framework for comprehending the relationship between SL and ERB in the hospitality industry, other theoretical frameworks might be able to explain the influence of SL. For example, the self-esteem theory suggests that messages from important people in the social setting—in this case, managers—are one of the main sources of information by which people form their beliefs about their own self-worth in that social setting (Korman 1966; Pierce and Gardner 2004). While negative messages typically lead to low levels of self-esteem, positive messages promote high levels of self-esteem. By using this reasoning in the study of SL, we might contend that the positive messages that SL is known for could boost workers' self-esteem, which would then result in positive attitudes and actions at work. As a result, future studies could investigate whether the effect of SL on employee outcomes is mediated by organizational self-esteem. Finally, future studies should examine other boundary conditions in which SL is more or less effective, in addition to followers' sensitivity to positive treatment by others.

Conclusion

The current research uses the working sample of front-line employees of hospitality industry from Pakistan to conduct an innovative empirical test on the effect of SL on extra-role customer service behaviour based on COR theory. We find that WE mediates the influence of SL on ERB. Moreover, the contingent effect of employees' ST to how people deal them helps us to recognize a critical boundary condition for the above-mentioned relations. We are confident that our study will excite future research to develop our understanding of the impact of SL in the hospitality business.

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