

## **The Impact of Servant Leadership on Innovation in Hurghada Deluxe Resorts: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to determine how servant leadership influences innovative workplace behavior. This research seeks to present a research model in which employee work engagement (WENG) mediates the impacts of servant leadership (SEL) on innovative work behavior (IWB). A questionnaire, created as a self-reported survey was used to gather information from a sample of 312 hotel employees working in 17 deluxe resorts in Hurghada City. The findings demonstrate that WENG and IWB were positively impacted by servant leadership. Moreover, the results proved that work engagement served as a mediator in the SEL-IWB relationship. These empirical findings carry valuable insights for hotel managers, highlighting the effectiveness of adopting servant leadership techniques in fostering innovative workplace behavior.

**Keywords:** Servant leadership, Work engagement, Innovative work behavior, Red Sea resorts, Hotel industry.

### **1. Introduction**

Existing research has consistently emphasized the significance of fostering IWBs within the hotel industry due to their direct contributions to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and gaining a competitive edge in tourism markets. Tajeddini et al. (2020) underscored the significance of these behaviors in achieving desired business outcomes. According to Dalgic and Birdir (2020), hotels place great importance on fostering a culture of continuous innovation to improve their services. In exploring factors that promote IWB, Li and Hsu (2017) identified emotional engagement and knowledge sharing among restaurant employees as critical drivers. They recognized the role of fostering a supportive environment where emotions are harnessed to fuel innovative thinking and where knowledge exchange becomes a catalyst for generating innovative ideas.

Besides, Tajeddini et al. (2020) emphasized the significance of organizational climate in nurturing IWB among hotel employees. By demonstrating effective leadership and fostering a workplace climate that encourages risk-taking and idea sharing, organizations can cultivate a culture conducive to innovation. Furthermore, there is a positive association between

management commitments to innovation and effective leadership behaviors. These findings reinforce the importance of strategic alignment towards innovation and the focal effect of leaders in motivating employees to actively participate in IWBs.

Overall, prior literature consistently highlighted the significance of promoting IWBs in the hotel industry, with a focus on emotional engagement, knowledge sharing, leadership behaviors, organizational climate, and management commitment to innovation. By embracing these factors, resorts can foster an innovative culture that drives competitive advantage and enhances customer delight.

Since there is a dearth of research on how SEL can enhance IWB in the hotel industry, further examination of this mechanism is required (Eva et al., 2019; Langhof and Guldenberg, 2020). Additionally, Liden et al. (2014) and Karatepe et al. (2019) suggested the need for additional investigation of how servant leaders can influence the work behaviors. The current study contributes to the understanding of the mediation role of work engagement (WENG), where little is known about the linking mechanism between SEL and IWB (Ling et al., 2016; Eva et al., 2019), with the need for new business strategies to spread the concept of (IWB) (Shanker et al., 2017; Anser et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022). Furthermore, few empirical investigations have looked at the underlying process linking SEL to IWB (Krog and Govender, 2015; Rasheed et al., 2016; Cai et al., 2018; Faraz et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2022). However, there is still a gap that deserves investigating the causal relationship between SEL and IWB and there is still no agreement on how SEL affects IWB (Newman et al., 2017). By proposing a research model in which WENG mediates the effect of SEL on IWB and by offering empirical evidence on the impact of SEL on IWB, this study fills in the research gaps and makes a valuable contribution to the literature. It also suggests that SEL behaviors are essential to increase IWB in the context of Egyptian hotels.

## **2. Theoretical foundation**

By integrating insights from self-determination theory (SDT), this paper highlights how fulfilling employees' basic needs for autonomy impacts their level of engagement at work (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Furthermore, humility and prioritizing the interests of the workforce are crucial aspects of SEL (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leaders address the need for autonomy by granting authority, involving followers in decision-making, and assigning meaningful tasks (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). They prioritize stewardship by providing guidance, acceptance, and authenticity.

Delegating authority as servant leaders contributes to followers' development. According to the norm of reciprocity, employees who feel empowered and perceive fairness in the organization are more likely to reciprocate by engaging in behaviors aligned with reciprocity and exchanging actions and resources with their leaders. In this case, SEL enhances employees' trust and empowerment, leading to high levels of WENG as a reciprocal response.

### *2.1. Servant leadership (SEL)*

SEL has gained recognition as an effective approach, emphasizing the service-oriented role of hotel leaders (Qiu et al., 2019). Extensive research consistently highlights the positive effect of SEL on fostering IWB (see Cai et al., 2018). Servant leaders promote job autonomy, enhancing employee creativity (Minh-Duc & Huu-Lam, 2019). Ruiz-Palomino et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of hotel employees participation as the crucial linkage between SEL and IWB. Employee perceptions of trust in servant leaders enhance discretionary actions and WENG. Cai et al. (2018) provided evidence of the effectiveness of SEL in improving productivity and driving innovation, particularly in service-oriented contexts.

SEL encompasses several dimensions, including emotional healing, community building, conceptual skills, empowerment, follower development, prioritizing subordinates, and ethical behavior. Servant leaders demonstrate care for employees' well-being, encourage community involvement, possess problem-solving abilities, delegate responsibilities, prioritize employee growth, prioritize subordinates' needs, and exhibit ethical traits. Servant leaders prioritize equality and their well-being (Van Dierendonck, 2011). They create a positive climate through persuasion and empowerment techniques (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Servant leaders foster an environment that promotes learning, acceptance, and innovation. Their focus is on serving the interests of their employees and meeting their needs (Hoch et al., 2018).

SEL empowers followers in various aspects, facilitating their overall development (Qiu et al., 2019). Servant leaders influence employees to become wiser, healthier, more empowered individuals, and potentially, servant leaders themselves (Northouse, 2021). By building relationships, promoting growth, acting ethically, and utilizing conceptual abilities, servant leaders create a positive work environment. Through granting job autonomy, servant leaders encourage employees to take independent, proactive, and creative actions.

### *2.2. Servant leadership outcomes*

The SEL implementation cultivates a positive service climate and improves job performance in the hotel industry (Cai et al., 2018). As such, servant leaders provide emotional support to resort employees. Empowering leadership stimulates WENG, while aggressive behavior negatively affects employee motivation. Amor et al. (2020) argued that SEL significantly predicted WENG. Engaging leadership techniques aim to enhance employee commitment to their tasks (Rahmadani & Schaufeli, 2022).

Likewise, SEL positively affected WENG in the Pakistani service sector (Khan et al., 2021). Social interaction helps moderate the effects of SEL on the sense of community among hotel employees. IWBs involve generating and implementing new ideas within an organization, like work processes, to achieve organizational goals (Devloo et al., 2015). WENG played a focal role in fostering IWBs (Rao, 2016). Motivated employees are more likely to come up with creative approaches to fulfill their responsibilities.

The SEL philosophy emphasizes trust-building through leaders' acceptance, empathy, and development of their subordinates (Karatepe et al., 2019). Effective leadership practices enhance employees' motivation and encourage them to adopt creative work practices (Bogilovi et al., 2020). Employees engage in their IWBs as a way to express gratitude for the support provided by their leaders. The crucial effect of SEL on IWBs may be indirect, and a learning-oriented work environment characterized by acceptance and humility (Khan et al., 2022), along with reflective role modeling, consultation, delegation, and employee recognition by servant leaders, inspires IWBs (Cai et al., 2018).

SEL is characterized by leaders actively involving employees in decision-making processes and recognizing their creative contributions. As such, Jang and Kandampully (2018) established a link between SEL and organizational commitment among restaurant employees. In South Africa, Krog and Govender (2015) revealed that empowerment mediated the linkage of SEL to IWB. Moreover, Williams et al. (2017) empirically explored the association between SEL and followers' creativity. Overall, SEL promotes a supportive environment for innovation and contributes to IWB's development among resort followers.

### 2.3. Hypothesis development

Our conceptual framework in Figure 1 presents a practical model where WENG acts as a potential mediator between SEL and IWBs in the resort context. This framework incorporates empirical evidence, theoretical perspectives, and the hypotheses proposed in this paper. Based on the above arguments, this paper assumes that the effective implementation of SEL behaviors can positively impact WENG and IWB. The SDT theory suggests that when leaders create a supportive work environment, followers feel empowered to engage in IWB (Harju et al., 2018). Moreover, this paper explores the indirect effect of SEL on IWB via WENG among resort employees. Hence, this paper assumes that:

- H1:** SEL positively affects WENG.
- H2:** WENG positively affects IWB.
- H3:** SEL positively affects IWB.
- H4:** WENG mediates in the association between SEL and IWB.

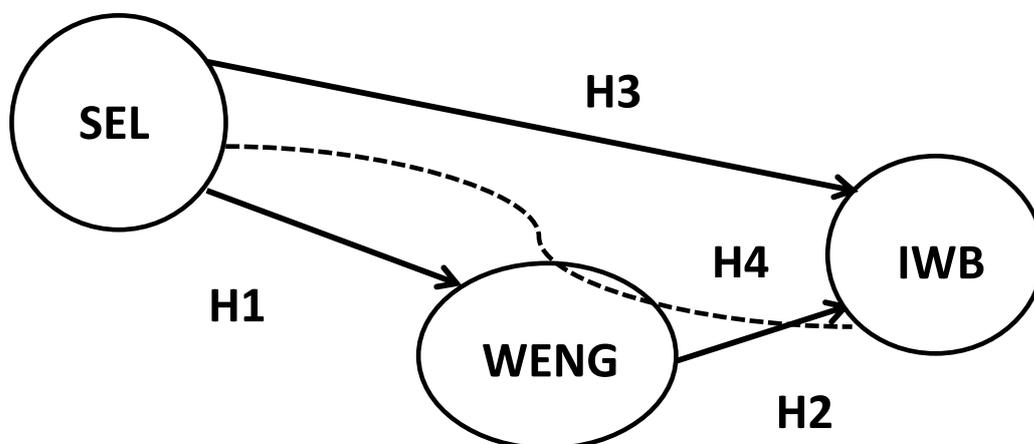


Figure 1. Proposed model

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Data gathering and instruments*

A purposive convenience sample of 17 resorts was chosen, including ten prestigious five-star resorts and seven reputable four-star resorts, primarily affiliated with large international chains. Participants consisted of front-line employees and supervisors from various departments at these resorts. A total of 550 employees were invited to participate, and 312 valid cases were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 56.7%. Data were gathered throughout a two-month period during the fall season of 2022. The survey employed consisted of two parts. The first part collected demographic data, while the second part gauged employees' perceptions of SEL, WENG, and IWB. Established measurement scales were employed. Seven items were employed to gauge SEL derived from Liden et al. (2015). WENG was assessed using nine items modified from Schaufeli et al. (2006). Lastly, IWB was measured using a six-item scale cited from Hu et al. (2009). Respondents rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale for each item.

#### *3.2. Data analysis and sample profile*

Advanced statistical software packages (i.e., SPSS 24 and AMOS 22) were run to analyze the final dataset. Descriptive statistics were calculated to check the item's properties, while confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the outer model. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha were estimated to assess scales' reliability. Most participants (84.3%) held entry-level positions, and 90.1% were predominantly male. In terms of age distribution, 72.3% were under 25 years old. Regarding educational attainment, 43.1% have a high school diploma or equivalent vocational education certificate. In terms of tenure at their current resorts, 61.8% had been employed for 1 to 5 years. The largest percentage of participants worked in the food and beverage service (55.3%), followed by housekeeping (21.1%), and then the kitchen (12.8%). Additionally, 64% were employed at five-star resorts.

### **4. Results**

#### *4.1. Reliability and validity*

As presented in Table 1, findings indicate satisfactory reliability, confirming the internal consistency of all intended constructs. The mean values ranged from 4.02 to 4.91, indicating a favorable level of agreement among participants. Critical ratio values exceeded the threshold for statistical significance, indicating the significance of item-construct relationships. Our findings were confirmed by item loadings being more than twice their standard errors (see Table 1). According to Table 2, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded minimal thresholds, indicating strong internal reliability.

Furthermore, AVE values surpassed 0.50, confirming robust convergent validity. Harman's single-factor test indicated that common method bias was not a significant concern, as a single factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance. Next, discriminant validity was confirmed by the AVEs' square roots exceeding the correlation estimates. Our fit indices, including CMIN/df, CFI, GFI, TLI, and RMSEA, had high values of 3.124, .984, .968, 0.974, and 0.051, respectively (see Figure 2). These fit indices are consistent with established benchmarks, validating the proposed theoretical model.

**Table 1.** Construct validity.

Item description	Mean	Sd.	SFL
<i>Servant leadership behaviors</i>			
My leader is committed to upholding ethical principles and would not sacrifice them for the sake of achieving success.	4.35	1.63	.811
I am free to make decisions based on my personal experiences under challenging circumstances thanks to my leader.	4.82	1.71	.874
My leader puts my interests and prioritizes my welfare.	4.26	1.68	.842
My leader highlights the significance of contributing to the community.	4.91	1.76	.867
If I were facing a personal problem, I would feel comfortable seeking assistance from my leader.	4.43	1.67	.871
My leader prioritizes my career development.	4.37	1.82	.836
My leader possesses the ability to recognize when something is amiss in work-related matters.	4.71	1.79	.885
<i>Work engagement</i>			
In my workplace, I experience a high level of energy and vitality.	4.21	1.82	.845
I experience a sense of vitality and resilience in my work.	4.17	1.69	.856
I have a strong enthusiasm for my work.	4.31	1.61	.881
My work serves as a source of inspiration for me.	4.25	1.74	.869
I am motivated and excited to start working when my day first starts.	4.69	1.71	.832
I experience happiness when I am fully engaged in my work.	4.28	1.65	.816
I take pride in the work that I do.	4.14	1.66	.872
I am fully engaged and invested in my work.	4.22	1.70	.879
I become completely absorbed when I am working.	4.67	1.54	.861
<i>Innovative work behaviors</i>			
In the workplace, I generate innovative and imaginative ideas.	4.02	1.81	.881
In my work, I actively strive to present my own creative ideas and persuade others.	4.15	1.64	.864
I actively explore new service techniques, methods, or approaches in my work.	4.26	1.73	.873
I contribute by formulating appropriate strategies for developing new ideas in my work.	4.17	1.65	.834
I make an effort to secure the necessary cash and materials to implement cutting-edge ideas in my job.	4.43	1.84	.851
In general, I view myself as a creative and innovative contributor to my team.	4.21	1.84	.823

**Table 2.** Results of internal consistency.

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Work engagement</i>	.961	.735	.870
<i>Innovative work behavior</i>	.942	.730	.842
<i>Servant leadership</i>	.950	.732	.853

**Table 3.** Inter-construct correlations.

Variables	1	2	3
1.SEL Practices	.856**		
2.Work Engagement	.781**	.857**	
3. IWB	.713**	.764**	.854**

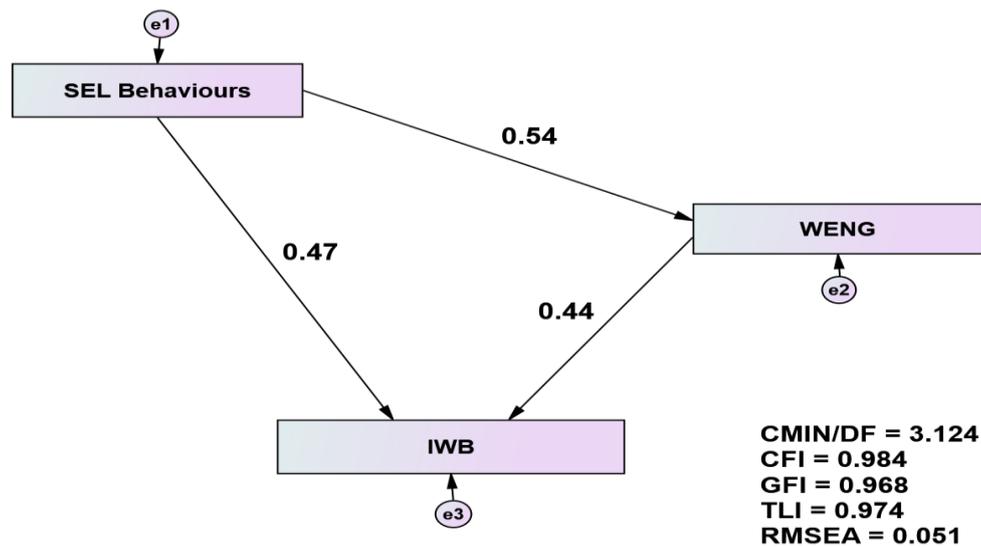


Figure 2. Structural model results.

#### 4.2. Hypotheses testing

Path coefficients related to SEL, WENG, and IWB were found to be highly significant, supporting H1-H3 (see Table 4). These findings align with prior research on the positive influence of SEL on WENG (Cai et al., 2018). The results focused on the importance of SEL in fostering WENG and IWB. Our findings provided evidence supporting the partial mediation of WENG in the SEL-IWB linkage. Sobel's test confirmed the significant indirect effect of WENG, indicating mediation. Moreover, WENG accounted for a substantial proportion of the association between SEL and IWB, explaining 33.6% of the variance. The results contribute valuable insights into the mediating mechanisms through which SEL impacts employee outcomes.

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing.

H.	Paths	p-value	S.E.	t-value	Remark
H1	SEL → WENG	0.537***	0.023	61.041	Supported
H2	WENG → IWB	0.441***	0.045	18.109	Supported
H3	SEL → IWB	0.468***	0.081	11.182	Supported

#### *Proportion of mediation of work engagement on servant leadership-innovative work behavior relationship*

The results of the study indicate a partial mediation, and the researchers performed Sobel test to examine the significance of the indirect effects (Sobel, 1982) and proportion of mediation test (Iacobucci et al., 2007), which confirmed that the mediating effect of WENG. Sobel's (1982) test results showed that the indirect effect is also significant in the relationship between servant leadership and IWB ( $Z = 9.036, p < .001$ ). Further, to reaffirm the partial mediation, we also calculated the variance accounted for (VAF), which is 0.426 and within the range of 0.20–0.80. We conclude that H4 is proven, given that WENG partially mediates the relationship between SEL leadership and innovative work behavior.

As shown in Table 5, the coefficient associated with the indirect path of SEL practices via WENG to IWB was significantly different from zero, and the ratio of indirect to total effect equaled 0.336 (Sobel test = 9.036,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that 33.6 percent of the IWB variance explained by both SEL practices and WENG was accounted for by the indirect path via WENG, whereas the rest of the IWB variance explained by both SEL practices and WENG was accounted for by the direct path. This confirms that WENG has a mediation effect on the relationship between SEL practices and employee innovation behaviors. There was partial mediation, but the direct path predominated, thus, hypotheses 4 was supported. (see Table 5)

**Table 5.** Results of testing proportion of mediation of WENG on SEL-IWB.

<i>H.</i>	<i>1</i> <i>Indirect</i> <i>Effects</i>	<i>2</i> <i>SEL -</i> <i>WENG</i> <i>(a)</i>	<i>3</i> <i>WENG-</i> <i>IWB</i> <i>(b)</i>	<i>4</i> <i>SEL-</i> <i>IWB</i> <i>(c')</i>	<i>5</i> <i>Ratio of</i> <i>Indirect-to-</i> <i>Total Effects<sup>a</sup></i>
<b>H4</b>	SEL-- WENG -- IWB	0.537***	0.441***	0.468***	0.336

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , -- <sup>a</sup>Ratio of direct-to-total effects = 1 - column 5

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

This paper examined the underlying association between SEL and IWB through WENG. Our results supported significant positive associations between SEL with WENG and IWB (Cai et al., 2018; Krog & Govender, 2015). This suggests that WENG and IWB can be promoted when leaders prioritize employee needs and create a supportive work environment. Furthermore, this paper confirmed the mediating effect of WENG (Sobel test = 9.036,  $p < .001$ ). These findings underscore the importance of empowering employees and supporting their career development to foster their engagement in IWB. Empowerment plays a focal role in enhancing intrinsic motivation and enabling them to utilize their skills and make improvements in their work (Li et al., 2020). These findings suggest that when employees perceive their employers fulfilling their promises and investing in their development, they are more likely to reciprocate with positive behaviors. Hoch et al. (2018) supported our results by emphasizing the significant effect of SEL on WENG and the positive relationships between WENG and task performance thorough organizational citizenship.

### 5.2. Contributions and practical implications

Our findings contribute to the leadership literature by confirming the positive influence of leadership behaviors on fostering IWBs. This paper extends prior research by highlighting the mediating role of WENG in the association between leadership behaviors and IWB. These findings enhance our understanding of the impact of these behaviors on employee outcomes, particularly WENG. From a practical standpoint, our paper suggests that promoting SEL in Egyptian resorts can enhance IWB.

In a competitive market environment where responsiveness and innovation are crucial, hotel organizations can benefit from cultivating SEL practices. Managers should provide employees with autonomy, opportunities for development, and a diverse range of skills to foster a proactive and learning-oriented workforce, leading to reciprocity and innovation. To enhance WENG, organizations should meet employees' needs by adopting SEL practices that prioritize personal development, autonomy, and influence. Hotel executives should be educated on SEL principles and practices, and organizations should prioritize the cultivation and expansion of SEL behaviors to promote IWB.

Lastly, it is recommended for hotel executives to combine SEL techniques with WENG strategies. This can be achieved by prioritizing the cultivation of WENG and providing targeted training programs to enhance department heads' SEL skills. Regular evaluation of the effectiveness of SEL practices is essential to creating a positive WENG. By implementing these strategies collectively, hotel organizations can enhance employees' WENG, ultimately leading to improved IWB.

### *5.3. Limitations and future suggestions*

Our findings should be interpreted with caution due to our small sample size and the inclusion of Egyptian resorts. The use of self-reported questionnaires introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Future studies could address these limitations by adopting a multilevel approach and incorporating manager and employee perspectives. Longitudinal research designs would also be valuable in establishing causal relationships and understanding temporal dynamics. Expanding the range of leadership theories considered and exploring other potential mediating variables could further enhance our understanding of the association between SEL and IWB, like organizational pride and knowledge donating.

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### الملخص العربي

#### تأثير القيادة الخادمة على الابتكار في منتجعات الغردقة الفاخرة:

#### الدور الوسيط لمشاركة الموظفين

حسن سيد عبد الله  
دكتورة إدارة الفنادق - جامعة حلوان

جابر جبري أحمد خليل  
المعهد العالي للسياحة والفنادق - الغردقة

### الملخص

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد كيفية تأثير القيادة الخادمة على السلوك المبتكر في مكان العمل. يسعى هذا البحث إلى تقديم نموذج بحث تتوسط فيه مشاركة عمل الموظف تأثيرات القيادة الخادمة على سلوك العمل المبتكر. تم استخدام استبيان لجمع المعلومات من عينة من ٣١٢ موظفًا فندقي يعملون في ١٧ منتجع فاخر في مدينة الغردقة. توضح النتائج أن مشاركة الموظفين وسلوك العمل المبتكر قد تأثرتا بشكل إيجابي بالقيادة الخادمة. علاوة على ذلك، أثبتت النتائج أن مشاركة الموظفين في العمل كانت بمثابة وسيط في علاقة سلوكيات القيادة الخادمة بالسلوك المبتكر للموظفين في العمل. تقدم نتائج هذه الدراسة رؤى قيمة لمديري الفنادق، وتسلط الضوء على فعالية تبني تقنيات القيادة الخادمة في تعزيز السلوك المبتكر في مكان العمل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القيادة الخادمة، مشاركة الموظفين في العمل، سلوك العمل المبتكر، منتجعات البحر الأحمر، صناعة الفنادق.