

The effects of servant leadership and despotic leadership on employees' happiness at work (HAW): the role of job crafting

Servant versus
despotic
leadership and
HAW

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory, this study aims to examine the effects of servant leadership and despotic leadership on employees' happiness at work (HAW) through job crafting.

Design/methodology/approach – To test the hypothesized relationships, the data were collected from 309 Pakistani employees. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data.

Findings – The findings showed that servant leadership is an optimal leadership style for creating employees' HAW. In addition, job crafting was found to mediate the effects of servant leadership on employees' broad-based positive attitudinal outcome (HAW). Moreover, results showed that despotic leadership negatively influences employees' HAW through job crafting.

Originality/value – This study is novel as it investigates how newer forms of positive (servant) and negative (despotic) leadership styles influence employees' multidimensional attitudinal outcome (HAW) via job crafting. By doing so, this research extends the nomological network of servant leadership, despotic leadership, job crafting and HAW.

Keywords Servant leadership, Despotic leadership, Job crafting, Happiness at work, Conservation of resources

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Happiness is an important concept that fascinated philosophers since the dawn of mankind (Fisher, 2010). It is, however, recently the concept has gained attention from psychology and management researchers (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017, 2018). Given the significance of happiness in individuals' lives, this notion has been extended to the workplaces (Mousa and Chaouali, 2022; Salas-Vallina and Alegre, 2021) to capture employees' "happy feelings toward the job itself, job characteristics, and the organisation as a whole", termed as happiness at work (HAW) (Salas-Vallina and Alegre, 2018, p. 633). According to Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2018), there are, however, inconclusive findings pertaining to the conditions that foster employees' happiness. Thus, owing to the importance of the concept, there is a need for more research to identify factors that affect employees' HAW (Dahiya and Raghuvanshi, 2021; Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017, 2020b).

Previous literature indicated the critical role of leadership in influencing employees' emotions and feelings toward the job and the organization as a whole (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020b). In general, leadership is a topic of increased interest because it influences the



well-being of employees and organizations alike (Haque *et al.*, 2021; Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020b). Although the leadership literature largely focused on examining the impact of the positive side of leadership on employees' outcomes (Badar *et al.*, 2023), only recently, studies have started to explore its effects on employees' multidimensional outcomes, i.e. HAW. Such as limited literature showed that positive leadership styles, including altruistic leadership (Salas-Vallina and Alegre, 2018), inspirational leadership (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020b), servant leadership (Salas-Vallina and Guerrero, 2018), and transformational leadership (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017) influences employees' HAW.

On the other hand, there has been insufficient attention devoted to an investigation of how dark leadership affects employees' happiness (Syed *et al.*, 2022). Exploring the effects of dark leadership is important, provided that, in contemporary times, leadership is becoming more unethical (Boak, 2021). More specifically, among the various dark leadership styles (see Albashiti *et al.*, 2021), despotic leadership — which is the most destructive form of leadership — has received scant attention in the management and psychology literature (Badar *et al.*, 2023). Against these backdrops, and unlike previous research, this study in response to scholarly proposals (Song *et al.*, 2022; Karakitapoğlu-Aygün and Gumusluoglu, 2013) investigates the effects of newer forms of contrasting leadership styles, i.e. servant leadership (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2022) and despotic leadership (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021; Song *et al.*, 2022) in a single model. Besides, this study responds to Mehmood *et al.* (2023) call to explore the underlying mechanisms by which leadership influences employees' well-being. Accordingly, in this research, employees' proactive work behaviors (i.e. job crafting) have been proposed to mediate the effects of both positive and negative leadership styles on employees' HAW.

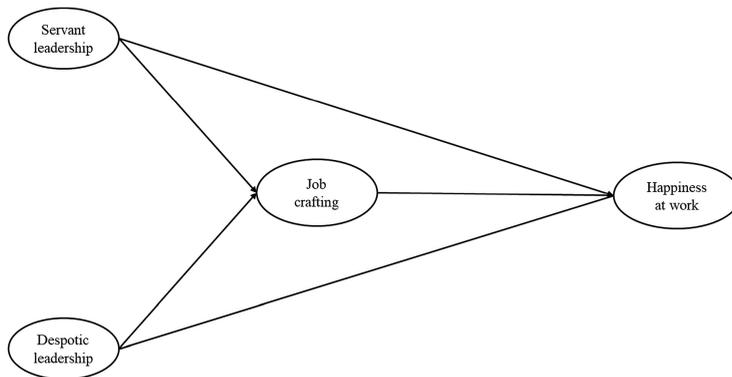
Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate whether and how servant leadership and despotic leadership are related to HAW. By relying on the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), this research explains the relations between leadership styles (servant and despotic) and a multidimensional attitudinal outcome (HAW) that comprises three dimensions: engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. Moreover, this study proposes that the indirect effects of servant leadership and despotic leadership on employees' HAW will be mediated by employees' proactive work behaviors (here: job crafting).

Contributions

By proposing the model as shown in Figure 1, this study hopes to make the following meaningful contributions. First, the empirical evidence pertaining to the effects of leadership on employees' happiness is still in its infancy (Ruiz-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2023; Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020b). Thus, to advance the existing knowledge, this study attempts to examine the effects of servant leadership and despotic leadership on employees' multidimensional attitudinal outcome. By far, only a few empirical studies investigated the effects of servant leadership on employees' HAW. Such as, in their study, Salas-Vallina and Guerrero (2018) found that servant leadership influences machine operators' happiness. Even more so, importantly, the empirical literature lacks evidence of the harmful effects of a leader's despotic tendencies on employees' broad-based positive attitudes, i.e. HAW. Against these backgrounds, this research accepts the proposals by leadership researchers (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün and Gumusluoglu, 2013; Song *et al.*, 2022) and investigates the effects of contrasting leadership styles (Ruiz-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2023), i.e. servant and despotic — to discern their effects on employees' HAW in a single model.

Servant versus despotic leadership and HAW



Source(s): The author's work

Figure 1.
Research model

Second, owing to the limited literature that empirically investigated the effects of leadership behaviors in relation to employees' motivation to craft their jobs (Tuan, 2022). This study responds to the call made by Khalil *et al.* (2023) for the need for more research to explore the effects of servant leadership on enhancing employees' ability to actively craft their jobs. Further, little is known concerning the impact of dark leadership on employees' job crafting behaviors (Masood *et al.*, 2021). Given the absence of this evidence, present research explores whether and how the most destructive form of leadership (i.e. despotic leadership) relates to employees' proactive work behaviors (i.e. job crafting). Thus, by filling in these voids, the present research contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the effects of both servant and despotic leadership behaviors on employees' job crafting activities.

Third, in this research, employees' proactive work behaviors are explored as a process by which leadership exerts its influence on employees' happiness. In doing so, this study contributes to the limited yet growing body of literature on job crafting (Dar *et al.*, 2023; Kundu *et al.*, 2022) by examining its underlying role in the relationships between contrasting leadership styles (i.e. servant and despotic) and employees' happiness. Fourth, this study draws on the COR theory and its resource perspective to explain the extrapolations between servant leadership, despotic leadership, job crafting, and HAW.

Research context

Owing to the predominance of research on the study variables in the western contexts. This research responds to scholarly calls to explore the effects of leadership styles (here: servant and despotic) on employees' outcomes in the non-western context (Gentry *et al.*, 2014; Raja *et al.*, 2020; Tuan, 2022). To achieve this, the data for this study has been collected from employees working in a non-western and highly collectivist country, Pakistan. Although the theoretical arguments are culturally neutral, however, exploring the effects of leadership styles, i.e. servant (Yasir and Jan, 2023) and despotic (De Clercq *et al.*, 2018; Raja *et al.*, 2020) is highly relevant in the context of Pakistan.

Pakistan presents a unique context to examine the effects of positive (servant) and negative (despotic) leadership styles for the following motives. First, in highly collectivist and power-distanced societies, such as Pakistan, the negative leadership styles (i.e. despotic leadership) are more palpable that negatively affect employees' and organizational outcomes alike (Nauman *et al.*, 2021). Despite its relevance, the research on the effects of the most

destructive form of leadership has received considerably less attention when exploring the effects of a leader's despotism in relation to employees' outcomes in Pakistan (Mehmood *et al.*, 2023). Second, realizing the critical role of leadership in shaping various employees' outcomes, researchers are increasingly proposing a moral based and people-oriented leadership approach (i.e. servant leadership) because of its ability to derive various favorable outcomes in the context of Pakistan (see, e.g. Iqbal *et al.*, 2021; Yasir and Jan, 2023; Qamar *et al.*, 2023). Thus, understanding whether and how servant leadership can affect employees' various attitudinal outcomes (HAW) in the context of Pakistan — a high-collectivist and power-distanced society — is useful because such leaders' serving and caring behaviors can be instrumental to stimulate desired behaviors and attitudes that ultimately benefit the organizations.

Hypotheses development

Servant leadership

The term servant leadership was coined by Greenleaf (1970), and based on an extensive review Eva *et al.* (2019, p. 114) proposed its definition as it is “an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community”. Servant leaders put the needs and benefits of others (e.g. followers) before their own, and demonstrate honesty, truthfulness, and humility (Cai *et al.*, 2022).

Despotic leadership

Despotic leadership encompasses the most negative characteristics of dark leadership (Schilling, 2009). In comparison to other dark leadership styles (e.g. leaders from hell, destructive leadership, and abusive leadership), despotic leadership is viewed to be the most self-centered and destructive (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021). This is because, leaders who demonstrate despotic tendencies are highly manipulative, do not tolerate questioning, and focus on gaining supremacy and dominance over others, e.g. followers (Naseer *et al.*, 2016).

Job crafting

Job crafting is defined as “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001, p. 179). Since the concept of job crafting emerged, to date, its two prevailing conceptualizations are proposed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Tims *et al.* (2012) whereby both concepts imply that employees make efforts to change their work environment. Following Tims *et al.* (2012) conception, this study focuses on observable aspects (van Wingerden and Poell, 2017) of job crafting (i.e. task crafting and relational crafting) first introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) in their seminal work.

Task crafting refers to the activities that employees embark on beyond their official job description to accomplish work objectives (Niessen *et al.*, 2016). For example, an employee may communicate and coordinate with a supervisor and co-worker(s) on how assigned tasks can be completed quickly, which may shorten the time to deliver a project. This activity can be viewed as reshaping the boundaries of a job, as an employee chooses to alter the scope of or approach to work. Relational crafting implies that individuals “decide upon who they will interact with more or less intensively while doing the job” (Niessen *et al.*, 2016, p. 1289). In other words, in relational crafting, an employee exercises discretion over the extent to which she or he will interact with the supervisor and/or co-workers at work. This may include, for example, making efforts to interact and perhaps make friends with co-workers who share

similar experiences, skills, and interests. When an employee is carrying out a task, she or he may decide the frequency of interaction with others at work, and therefore, this activity can be viewed as the individual reshaping her or his relational boundaries at work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Happiness at work

HAW is a multidimensional higher-order construct that consists of three components, i.e. engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment (Fisher, 2010). Work engagement is defined “as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). Job satisfaction considers the positive attitudes of employees towards their jobs (Spector, 1997). The concept of job satisfaction has been criticized for being defined as an emotional state but operationalized based on the cognitive aspects (Moorman, 1993; Fisher, 2000, 2010). According to Salas-Vallina *et al.* (2018), job satisfaction incorporates both cognitive and affective elements and it is considered to be a response to employees’ perceptions of the job characteristic. Another view is that job satisfaction should not be measured through survey questionnaires only, essentially because a questionnaire-based survey approach cannot capture and highlight various workplace events and conditions that can be highlighted through qualitative approaches (Bussing *et al.*, 1999). However, given the focus in the present research on a multidimensional construct (i.e. HAW), job satisfaction in this context, has been demonstrated to be an essential element of the higher-order happiness construct (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017) that fundamentally incorporates both affective and cognitive states of individuals (Salas-Vallina and Alegre, 2021).

Affective organizational commitment refers to employees’ feelings of belongingness and affection towards their organization (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Affective commitment is part of a three-component model proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990). The three-component model consists of affective, continuance, and normative commitments to the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990) which have been criticized due to its conceptual and theoretical oversights (Stazyk *et al.*, 2011). One of the strongest critiques is presented by Solinger *et al.* (2008) who stated that in comparison to affective commitment, continuance and normative commitments are “qualitatively different concepts” (p. 11). Continuance commitment refers to employees’ “awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization” (Ko *et al.*, 1997, p. 961). On the other hand, employees with strong normative commitment stay with the organization because of normative pressures. In the words of Meyer *et al.* (1993) “employees with a strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to, those with a strong continuance commitment remain because they need to, and those with a strong normative commitment remain because they feel they ought to do so” (Meyer *et al.*, 1993, p. 539).

The three-component commitment model is criticized because it conflates the attitudes toward the organization with the attitudes about staying or leaving an organization (Solinger *et al.*, 2008). That is, employees who are affectively committed may leave the organization because of the lack of continuance or normative commitments, while those who are (affectively) uncommitted may still continue their membership with the organization because of continuance or normative commitments (Solinger *et al.*, 2008; Stazyk *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, previous research has shown that affective commitment is most likely to be influenced by leadership, and therefore leadership studies are increasingly focusing on the affective element of the three-component commitment model (e.g. Jang and Kandampully, 2018; Cho *et al.*, 2019) which is considered to be an essential component of the higher-order construct (i.e. HAW, Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020b) being examined in this study. The coalition of the concept of HAW has been subsequently tested by Salas-Vallina *et al.* (2018) which incorporates hedonic

Servant leadership, despotic leadership, and happiness at work

In this study, relying on COR theory (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014) it is proposed that servant leadership will positively influence employees' HAW. According to the COR theory, individuals seek to gain, retain, and protect valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees' resources tend to deplete due to actual loss of resources or when they face a threatening situation (Hobfoll, 1989) which negatively affects their well-being. Therefore, individuals seek sources of support through which they can accumulate more resources to protect their well-being (Hobfoll, 2001). Under the umbrella of COR theory, leaders' supportive behaviors can increase the followers' pool of resources, which would ultimately enhance their well-being (Harju *et al.*, 2018). More specifically, the presence of a leader who shows concern, empathy, and support for others (i.e. servant leadership), provides more resources to followers (Khan *et al.*, 2022), which they are likely to invest in positive attitudes beyond the minimum expectations (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014), such as engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment (Ling *et al.*, 2017; van Dierendonck, 2011) that are the fundamental components of a higher-order attitudinal outcome, i.e. HAW. Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that servant leadership is an effective leadership style that can stimulate employees' positive emotions required to make them happy. Hence, it is posited that:

H1. Servant leadership positively relates to happiness at work.

Consistent with the assumptions of COR theory, this research predicts that despotic leadership will negatively affect employees' HAW. Despotic leadership, a highly deceptive, immoral, and self-centered leadership style has been indicated to be a salient workplace stressor that drains employees' valued resources (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021). When followers are exposed to such resource draining situations (i.e. despotic behaviors of a leader) at the workplace, they are less likely to feel happy (Naseer *et al.*, 2016; Raja *et al.*, 2020) towards the work itself (engagement), characteristics of the job (job satisfaction), and organization as a whole (affective commitment), i.e. HAW (Fisher, 2010). Previously, relying on COR theory, researchers showed that leaders' despotic inclinations are detrimental to various employees' work-related attitudinal outcomes, including engagement (Song *et al.*, 2022) and job satisfaction (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021). However, the effects of despotic leadership on employee-level broader attitudinal outcomes (i.e. HAW) have been overlooked in the previous research. Thus, to fill in these voids in the existing scholarship, this research proposes that:

H2. Despotic leadership negatively relates to happiness at work.

Servant leadership, despotic leadership, and job crafting

Although job crafting is perceived to be a bottom-up approach — the extent to which an individual actively crafts her/his job tasks to achieve goals (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). At the workplace, however, an employee does not work in isolation but rather interacts with various people (e.g. leader) on a daily basis which influences her or his proactive behaviors, i.e. job crafting (Xue and Woo, 2022). The literature indicated the importance of leadership in providing valued resources to employees that influence their motivation to indulge in proactive work behaviors (here: job crafting, Zhang and Parker, 2019). For instance, various leadership styles, e.g. transformational leadership (Hetland *et al.*, 2018), empowering leadership (Kim and Beehr, 2018), and servant leadership (Harju *et al.*, 2018) have been shown to significantly influence job crafting. Whereas limited evidence exists on the role of leaders' destructive style in reducing followers' motivation to craft their jobs. Unlike the majority of

previous research that primarily investigated the effects of positive leadership styles (Badar *et al.*, 2023), this study explores the effects of both positive (i.e. servant) and negative (i.e. despotic) leadership styles in a single model to discern their effects on employees' motivation to craft their jobs.

According to the assumptions of COR theory (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014), when individuals are exposed to resource draining situations (leaders' harmful behaviors, such as, abusive, exploitative, narcissistic, manipulative, and unforgiving, Naseer *et al.*, 2016), they strive to protect their resources. It thus follows that employees avoid investing their limited resources to prevent further loss of resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, employees working under resource draining conditions (i.e. despotic leadership) will be psychologically distressed (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021) which contributes to their emotional exhaustion (Huang *et al.*, 2020), and as a result, they will be less likely to put efforts in their work tasks and initiate crafting activities (Wang *et al.*, 2016), i.e. develop avoidance-oriented job crafting behavior (Masood *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, the availability of ample resources facilitates individuals to amass, conserve, and even amplify their resources, as a result, they are more likely to invest excess resources in behaviors that are beyond expectations (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). For example, an extraordinary empathizing and caring manager (i.e., servant leader) by providing autonomy, support and opportunities for personal development to employees (Eva *et al.*, 2019) can fortify their resource base. Hence, employees can draw on supportive resources provided by the servant leadership that can boost their proactive behaviors (i.e. proactively crafting job tasks) to perform the job efficiently (Harju *et al.*, 2018; Tuan, 2022). Based on the above discussion, it is proposed that:

H3. Servant leadership positively relates to job crafting.

H4. Despotic leadership negatively relates to job crafting.

Job crafting and happiness at work

Employees who actively craft their jobs develop a positive state of mind and well-being (Luu, 2020). The existing research indicates that employees' job crafting positively affects work engagement among Finish employees working in various industries (Harju *et al.*, 2016), job satisfaction in the Taiwanese hospitality sector (Cheng and Yi, 2018), job performance among primary school teachers for special education (van Wingerden *et al.*, 2017), and well-being among chemical plant employees in the Netherlands (Tims *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, Moulik and Giri's (2023) study in India investigated the effects of job crafting on employees' work-related happiness. Based on a survey of millennials working in the services sector (banking, telecom, and information technology), their study however, accounts for the effects of job crafting on individual dimensions of HAW, i.e. engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. Considering that HAW represents a broader attitudinal concept that involves both cognitive and emotional factors (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017), the study of Moulik and Giri (2023) however, adopted a narrow view that tends to overlook that employees' attitudes encompass a rather wide range of states of mind (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020a). Thus, following Fisher's proposal in this research the focus lies "on a higher-order construct, [. . .] containing a number of positive attitudes and feelings (Fisher *et al.*, 2020, p. 402), i.e. HAW, that is a broad-based attitudinal concept to measure the employees' well-being (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, in line with COR theory, employees' job crafting activities enable them to acquire and maintain a pool of resources (Luu, 2020), thereby inducing more job meaningfulness, satisfaction, and thriving experiences (Khan *et al.*, 2022) that leads to their enhanced well-being (Ruparel *et al.*, 2022). Thus, this leads to propose the following hypothesis:

The mediating role of job crafting

Based on the preceding discussion, it makes sense that leaders' despotic inclinations will negatively affect employees' proactive work behaviors. On the other hand, a servant leader provides support to followers, empowers them, and focuses on their development, which is why, when employees are exposed to servant leadership, this, in turn, positively influences their proactive behaviors, i.e. job crafting (Khan *et al.*, 2022). Here, drawing on the resource perspective, nested in the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2002), when employees actively craft their jobs, they can gain various resources from their supervisors and co-workers (Khalil *et al.*, 2023; Salas-Vallina and Guerrero, 2018). Owing to the resource gain, individuals may be more likely to invest excess resources in activities (e.g. learning new skills, gaining more knowledge, and building quality relationships) that amplify their resource base (Harju *et al.*, 2016). As a result of a resource gain spiral, individuals' well-being will be enhanced, and they will develop feelings of self-realization (more vigor and energy, i.e. engagement), sense of professional development (job satisfaction), and a sense of attachment to the organization (affective commitment), i.e. HAW (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2017). To conclude, by reviewing the relationships between servant leadership, despotic leadership, job crafting, and HAW, this study proposes the following two hypotheses.

H6. Job crafting mediates the relationship between servant leadership and happiness at work.

H7. Job crafting mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and happiness at work.

Methods*Sampling and procedure*

The survey questionnaire was created and administered online. The participants were recruited through a professional social media platform (LinkedIn) which is being increasingly used by researchers because of its effectiveness (Aslam *et al.*, 2022; Muduli and Trivedi, 2020; Ouerdian *et al.*, 2021). Further, the individuals were also asked to share the survey with their social network, hence, a "virtual snowball sampling" method was deemed appropriate in this study (Baltar and Brunet, 2012). The participants were required to be in (1) full-time employment, (2) currently employed in an organization and not self-employed, and (3) located in Pakistan. In total, 309 Pakistani employees completed the survey. The respondents of this study were working in various industries including, aviation, travel, and tourism (19.7%), information technology (18.4%), manufacturing (14.9%), banking, finance, and insurance (14.2%), consulting, training, and education (9.4%) and others. Of the respondents, 90.6% were male, in terms of age 36.6% were 30 years or younger, and the remaining were 31 years or older, 71.8% had 5 years (or less) organizational tenure, 54.4% held a bachelor's degree, and 44.7% had a master's degree or higher.

Constructs

The survey was designed and conducted in the English language because it is the official language in Pakistan. All the items were assessed via a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Servant leadership: This construct was measured using four items borrowed from Liden *et al.* (2015). A sample item was "My manager makes my career development a priority". Cronbach's reliability coefficient was 0.94.

Despotic leadership: This construct was measured using four items borrowed from De Hoogh and De Hartog (2008). A sample item was “My manager is punitive; has no pity or compassion”. The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was 0.95.

Job crafting: This construct was measured using four items borrowed from Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013). The sample items were “I change the scope or type of tasks that I complete at work” (task crafting), and “I make an effort to get to know people well at work” (relational crafting). The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was 0.93.

Happiness at work: This construct was measured using six items borrowed from Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2021). The scale has three dimensions, i.e. work engagement (sample item “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous”), job satisfaction (sample item “I am satisfied with the nature of work I perform”), and affective organizational commitment (sample item “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”). The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was 0.94.

Analysis strategy

The analyses were conducted using SPSS 25 and AMOS 22. Following a two-step analysis approach (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) the measurement and structural models were assessed in AMOS 22. This process has also been used by various researchers (see, e.g. Khan et al., 2023; Sabbir et al., 2023). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the reliability and validity of the study variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and SEM was used to assess the direct, and indirect effects. The mediating effects were analyzed using a 5,000 bootstrapping method (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) in AMOS 22. The following indices were used to examine the fitness of the measurement model: “ χ^2/df , comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR)”. To establish a good model-fit the values of indices must be “CFI >0.95, TLI >0.95, SRMR <0.08, and RMSEA <0.06” (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Results

The values of mean, standard deviations (SD), and Pearson’s correlations are presented in Table 1. The correlations between the variables were higher than 0.70, hence, a multicollinearity test was conducted. The scores of variance inflation factor (VIF) were less than 10 (Hair et al., 2006), suggesting that multicollinearity is not an issue. Moreover, the data normality was assessed using kurtosis and skewness scores. The findings revealed that

Variables	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SL	2.87	1.39	–							
2. DL	2.89	1.43	–0.86**	–						
3. JC	3.10	1.21	0.83**	–0.82**	–					
4. HAW	2.84	1.21	0.80**	–0.78**	0.78**	–				
5. Gender	1.09	0.29	0.07	–0.06	0.09	0.06	–			
6. Age	1.89	0.82	0.25**	–0.22**	0.22**	0.31**	–0.16**	–		
7. Tenure	1.42	0.77	0.35**	–0.29**	0.26**	0.38**	–0.10	0.61**	–	
8. Education	2.47	0.58	0.21**	–0.23**	0.27**	0.29**	0.10	0.10	0.08	–

Note(s): $N = 309$

** significant at 0.01 level and * significant at 0.05 level

Abbreviations: SD: standard deviation, SL = servant leadership, DL = despotic leadership, JC = job crafting, HAW = happiness at work

Source(s): The author’s work

Table 1.
Correlation matrix with means and standard deviations

the skewness and kurtosis scores were less than ± 2 and ± 3 , suggesting data were normally distributed (Kline, 1998).

Power analysis

A rule of thumb to determine the sample size is that the number of arrows pointing toward the dependent variable shall be multiplied by 10 (Barclay *et al.*, 1995; Hair *et al.*, 2013). In the present study, the number of arrows pointing towards HAW were three, and as per the rule, it resulted in a required sample size of 30. Bagga *et al.* (2023) have also adopted this approach. Besides, as an additional measure, following the recommendation by Cohen (1988) a post hoc power analysis was conducted to assess the adequacy of the sample size and to ensure if findings of this study are influenced by Type-I and Type-II errors. It was assessed using GPower software (significance level: 0.05, number of predictors: 3, squared multiple correlation: 0.78) and the results indicated that the sample size ($N = 309$) provided substantial statistical power (i.e. power = 1.0) to conduct structural modeling.

Common method variance (CMV)

The data for this study were collected from one source and one point in time, therefore, the recommendations by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) were followed. First, all the questionnaire items were borrowed from the already validated scales. Second, the participants were informed about the purpose of the data collection, its confidentiality, and that they can quit the survey at any point in time. Moreover, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire with honesty (Conway and Lance, 2010). Finally, to rule out any potentiality of the CMV, following Malik and Garg (2017) and Malik (2023) the CFA version of Harman's single factor test was conducted where all variables of the study were loaded onto one factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) in AMOS 22. Specifically, the four-factor model was compared with one factor model (see Table 2). The results of the one-factor model showed that the data fit to the model was poor: ($\chi^2 = 688.75$, $df = 130$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.04, and RMSEA = 0.11). The results indicate that CMV is not likely to be a significant issue in this study.

Assessment of the measurement model: CFA, reliability, and validity

To assess the fitness of the data and research variables' distinctiveness, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using AMOS 22. The items and their loadings are shown in Table 3. Moreover, as shown in Table 2, the hypothesized model (comprising servant leadership,

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
Hypothesized four-factor model	218.61**	124	–	–	0.98	0.98	0.02	0.05
<i>Three-factor model:</i> servant leadership and despotic leadership combined	421.03**	127	202.42**	3	0.95	0.94	0.02	0.08
<i>Two-factor model:</i> servant leadership and despotic leadership combined; job crafting and happiness at work combined	566.66**	129	348.05**	5	0.93	0.92	0.03	0.10
One-factor model	688.75**	130	470.14**	6	0.91	0.90	0.04	0.11

Table 2. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Note(s): $N = 309$. Four-factor model was compared to all alternative models. ** $p < 0.01$

Abbreviations: CFI: comparative fit index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; SRMR: standardized root mean square residual

Source(s): The author's work

Servant versus
despotic
leadership and
HAW

Items	Loadings of sub dimension	Loadings of main construct	AVE	ASV	CR
<i>Servant leadership</i>					
My manager makes my career development a priority		0.92	0.82	0.78	0.95
I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem		0.93			
My manager puts my best interests ahead of his/her own		0.90			
My manager gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best		0.85			
<i>Despotic leadership</i>					
My manager is punitive; has no pity or compassion		0.87	0.84	0.76	0.95
My manager is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, give orders		0.92			
My manager expects unquestioning obedience of those who report to him/her		0.94			
My manager is vengeful; seeks revenge when wronged		0.92			
<i>Job crafting</i>					
<i>Task crafting</i>					
I change the scope or type of tasks that I complete at work	0.93	0.99	0.96	0.76	0.98
I introduce new work tasks that I think better suit my skills or interests	0.90				
<i>Relational crafting</i>					
I make an effort to get to know people well at work	0.89	0.96			
I make friends with people at work	0.89				
<i>Happiness at work</i>					
<i>Work engagement</i>					
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	0.95	0.95	0.88	0.72	0.96
I am enthusiastic about my job	0.86				
<i>Job satisfaction</i>					
I am satisfied with the nature of work I perform	0.85	0.96			
I am satisfied with the pay I receive from my job	0.86				
<i>Affective organizational commitment</i>					
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	0.92	0.91			
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization	0.95				
Note(s): $N = 309$					
Abbreviations: AVE: average variance extracted, ASV: average shared variance, CR: composite reliability					
Source(s): The author's work					

Table 3.
Questionnaire items,
loading, average
variance extracted,
average shared
variance and
composite reliability

despotic leadership, job crafting, and HAW) demonstrated a good fit of the data to the model: ($\chi^2 = 218.61$, $df = 124$, $p < 0.01$, $CFI = 0.98$, $TLI = 0.98$, $SRMR = 0.02$, and $RMSEA = 0.05$), and was superior to alternative models, including a three-factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 202.42$, $\Delta df = 3$), two-factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 348.05$, $\Delta df = 5$), and one factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 470.14$, $\Delta df = 6$).

The composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values were estimated. The CR values for study variables were as follows: servant leadership (0.95), despotic leadership (0.95), job crafting (0.98), and HAW (0.96). The AVE values were as

follows: servant leadership (0.82), despotic leadership (0.84), job crafting (0.96), and HAW (0.88). Since the values of CR and AVE for all study variables were higher than 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), these findings suggest that the conditions of reliability and convergent validity are met. The discriminant validity was assessed using average shared variance (ASV). The results showed that the ASV values for each variable were lower than their respective AVE scores (see Table 3), which indicates that the discriminant validity conditions of the constructs are satisfied (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Hypotheses testing

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The results (see Figure 2) indicated that servant leadership was positively and significantly associated with HAW (servant leadership → HAW; $\beta = 0.37, p < 0.05$, hypothesis H1 is supported), whereas the direct effect of despotic leadership on employees' HAW was nonsignificant (despotic leadership → HAW; $\beta = -0.17, p = 0.190$, hypothesis H2 is rejected). Moreover, results show that servant leadership is positively and significantly associated with job crafting (servant leadership → job crafting; $\beta = 0.50, p < 0.001$, hypothesis H3 is supported), and despotic leadership is negatively and significantly associated with job crafting (despotic leadership → job crafting; $\beta = -0.44, p < 0.001$, hypothesis H4 is supported). In addition, the results show that job crafting depicts a positive relationship with HAW (job crafting → HAW; $\beta = 0.38, p < 0.01$, hypothesis H5 is supported). As for the indirect effects, the results showed (see Table 4) that job crafting mediated the positive impact of servant leadership on HAW (servant leadership → job crafting → HAW; $\beta = 0.18, 95\% \text{ CI [Lower limit confidence interval (LLCI): 0.065, Upper limit confidence interval (ULCI): 0.358]}$), and the negative impact of despotic leadership on HAW (despotic leadership → job crafting → HAW; $\beta = -0.16, 95\% \text{ CI [LLCI: -0.319, ULCI: -0.066]}$). These results lend support to hypotheses H6 and H7.

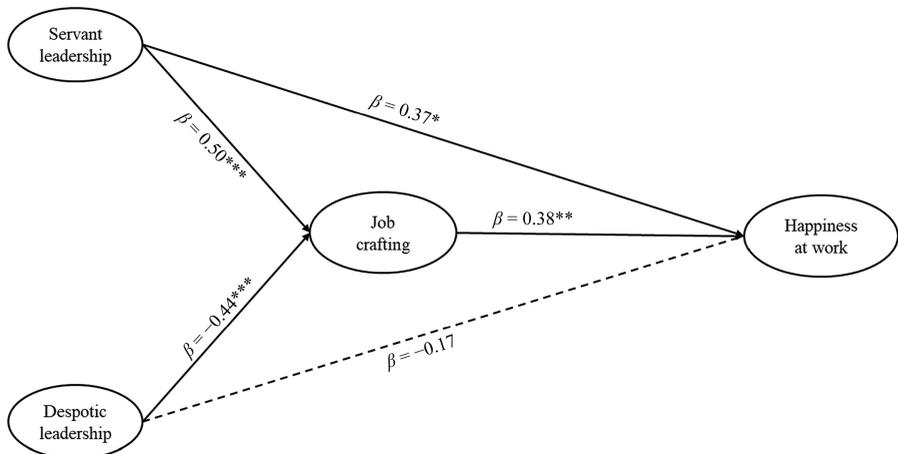


Figure 2. Structural model estimates

Note(s): The results of structural equation modeling with standardized coefficient paths.

Dotted line represents a nonsignificant path. *significant at 0.05 level,

significant at 0.01 level and *significant at 0.001 level

Source(s): The author's work

Regression model	Effect	Bootstrapped 95% confidence interval		Servant versus despotic leadership and HAW
		LLCI	ULCI	
<i>Total effects</i>				
SL → HAW	0.55	0.261	0.809	
DL → HAW	-0.33	-0.625	-0.085	
<i>Indirect effects</i>				
SL → JC → HAW	0.18	0.065	0.358	
DL → JC → HAW	-0.16	-0.319	-0.066	
Note(s): <i>N</i> = 309				
Abbreviations: LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval; SL = servant leadership, DL = despotic leadership, JC = job crafting, HAW = happiness at work				
Source(s): The author's work				

Table 4.
Results of mediation

Discussion

This research examined how servant leadership and despotic leadership influence employees' job crafting and subsequently their HAW. The data provided support for the positive association between servant leadership and HAW, however, the negative association between despotic leadership and HAW (direct link) was found to be insignificant (see Figure 2). Further, results revealed that job crafting significantly predicts employees' HAW. As for the effects of mediation, the findings suggest that job crafting mediated the positive relationship between servant leadership and employees' HAW (partial mediation), and the negative relationship between despotic leadership and employees' HAW (full mediation).

Theoretical implications

First, in response to scholarly calls (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün and Gumusluoglu, 2013; Ruiz-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Song et al., 2022) this study investigated the effects of two contrasting and newer forms of leadership styles (i.e. servant leadership and despotic leadership) on employees' happiness. Given that, this study adds to the leadership literature by illustrating the factors that either enhance or diminish employees' positive attitudes toward their jobs and the organization. More specifically, this study is unique, as it identifies the determinants of a broad-based employees' attitudinal outcome, which measures the employees' life quality at work (Salas-Vallina and Fernandez, 2017). The findings revealed that servant leadership has a proximal effect on employees' HAW. These results suggest that positive behaviors of servant leaders are a precursor to eliciting employees' positive emotions and happy feelings towards the job and organization as a whole (i.e. HAW). On the other hand, contrary to the hypothesized relationship, the negative impact of despotic leadership on employees' HAW was found to be insignificant. This finding suggests that the link between these variables is distal and not straightforward.

Second, this research illuminates the importance of job crafting and identifies the working conditions (i.e. leadership) under which it occurs or perishes. In doing so, this study responded to the calls made by researchers to empirically investigate the effects of constructive (Khalil et al., 2023; Tuan, 2022) and destructive (Masood et al., 2021) leadership styles in relation to employees' job crafting activities. More specifically, this research focused on servant leadership and despotic leadership styles. The results revealed that servant leadership is a significant enabler of employees' ability to craft their jobs. This finding corroborates the findings of a few earlier studies that revealed a positive association between servant leadership and job crafting (Bavik et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2022; Tuan, 2022). Further, results indicate that despotic leadership negatively and significantly influences job crafting. This is

because, when employees are exposed to leaders' intimidating, hostile, and harmful behaviors, this, in turn, diminishes their motivation to craft their jobs (cf. [Luu, 2020](#)).

Third, for a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership impacts employees' positive attitudes, this study investigated the underlying role of job crafting. By doing so, this research also contributed to the limited literature on job crafting ([Dar et al., 2023](#); [Kundi et al., 2022](#)) by expanding its nomological network. The findings illuminate that job crafting is a significant underlying mechanism by which servant leadership positively affects HAW. These findings are in part consistent with the prior research that revealed servant leadership influences employees' HAW via mediating mechanisms ([Salas-Vallina and Guerrero, 2018](#)). Moreover, based on the findings, job crafting was found to fully mediate the negative effects of despotic leadership on employees' HAW. This finding is consistent with the assumptions of COR theory, that is when employees work under resource draining situations (i.e. despotic leadership) they tend to develop avoidance-oriented job crafting behaviors, which subsequently affects their quality of life at work (i.e. HAW).

Moreover, this study provided a rare opportunity to examine the effects of positive (i.e. servant) and negative (i.e. despotic) forms of leadership styles on employees' proactive behaviors and their work-related happiness in the context of Pakistan. Pakistan is a highly collectivist and power-distance society with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance ([Hofstede, 1982, 2001](#)). There is an increasing consensus among researchers that dark leadership styles (i.e. despotic leadership) are more prevalent and nurture in cultural contexts marked by unequal power and uncertainty avoidance that negatively affect employees' outcomes ([Naseer et al., 2016](#); [Islam et al., 2022](#); [Nauman et al., 2018](#)). In general, the findings of the present study echo previous research by illustrating the negative outcomes of despotic leadership ([Son and Pak, 2023](#); [Akhtar et al., 2023](#)).

More specifically, it extends the research on despotic leadership and its outcomes in the context of Pakistan by indicating that when employees are exposed to a leader's hostile and self-aggrandizing behaviors, this significantly and negatively affects the former's ability to actively craft their job and erodes their work-related happiness (i.e. HAW). These findings indicate that self-centered, self-aggrandizing, highly immoral, and unethical leaders are a salient workplace stressor that drains employees' valuable resources ([Albashiti et al., 2021](#)). Being exposed to such resource draining conditions (i.e. despotic leadership) at the workplace, Pakistani employees may likely develop defensive mechanisms, such as, avoidance-oriented job crafting behaviors to protect against further loss of their resources and develop unhappy feelings towards their job and organization as a whole.

Furthermore, the present study empirically established that for employees working in Pakistan, a highly moral and ethical leader who focuses on empowering and developing them with empathy and humility shows concern for their well-being ([van Dierendonck, 2011](#)) can provide ample resources that may facilitate them to accumulate, conserve, and even amplify their resources ([Hobfoll, 2001](#)) that they can invest in positive job-related attitudes and behaviors. In addition, this study also contributes by enhancing the external validity of the western leadership theories in the non-western context. More specifically, based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the organizations in Pakistan can rely on positive leadership theory (i.e. servant leadership), developed in the western context, for better management of employees.

Finally, according to [Salas-Vallina et al. \(2020b\)](#) there is a limited understanding of the theoretical perspectives that can explain the effects of leadership on employees' HAW. In this endeavor, the present research used COR theory as an overarching framework to explain the relationships between servant leadership, despotic leadership, and HAW as mediated by job crafting. The findings of this study contribute to the COR theory by clarifying how critical workplace resources (i.e. servant leadership) and workplace stressors (i.e. despotic leadership) can facilitate and impede job crafting, respectively, which ultimately determine employees' quality of life at work (here: HAW).

Practical implications

In contemporary times, organizations ought to build their competencies to be able to compete in a highly competitive environment, but at the same time are required to remain socially responsible (e.g. creating a healthy and happier work environment). Recently, based on limited yet increasing empirical evidence, a view has emerged that to be able to maintain a competitive edge, organizations should take an employee-centered approach, stimulate their employees' proactive work behaviors (i.e. motivating them to be proactive crafters) and create an environment where workers well-being is protected (Khan *et al.*, 2022; Luu, 2020; Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020a). Based on the findings, this study suggests that servant leadership (leaders encouraging, caring, and supportive behaviors) — an employee-centered approach (Greenleaf, 2002) should be more desirable for organizations in Pakistan. This is because, as the results of this study revealed, servant leadership is notably helpful in provoking employees' proactive work behaviors and enhancing their quality of life at work.

Moreover, given the beneficial outcomes of servant leadership, managers in Pakistan are advised to adopt the philosophy of serving others and to provide sufficient resources (e.g. co-crafting job activities with employees), which would build the employees' confidence to indulge in proactive work behaviors (i.e. job crafting) that are beyond the minimum expectations, as well as, to trigger and enhance their positive attitudes towards the job and organization (i.e. HAW). On the other hand, a toxic and hostile work environment bequeathed by a despotic leader erodes employees' trust in their leader and brings down their confidence required to engage in job crafting, subsequently negatively affecting their well-being (i.e. HAW). Thus, in view of the detrimental outcomes of despotic leadership, it should be the utmost priority of the organizations to curb the leader's despotic behaviors at the workplace. More specifically, in the context of Pakistan, a highly collectivist and power distanced society, where leader's despotism is more prevalent, put even a greater responsibility on the organizations to constantly monitor the behaviors of individuals in authoritative positions.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has some potential limitations. First, the data for this study were collected at one point in time and from the same source, which could potentially inflate the results of the study. Although some methods indicated that the CMV problem is overstated as it could only have minimal effects on the findings of a study (Malhotra *et al.*, 2006; Spector, 2006). Nevertheless, a statistical technique was employed in this research to rule out any potentiality of CMV. The results indicated that CMV is less likely to be a significant issue in this study. Moreover, owing to this study's research design, causal direction for variables of interest could not be established. This opens the avenue for future research to employ longitudinal research design. Second, this study investigated the underlying role of employees' job crafting activities. Future research could investigate other processes (e.g. identification with the leader, leader-member exchange, meaningful work, work-life conflict/enrichment) by which servant and despotic leadership may influence employees' work related outcomes.

Third, in this study, a mediation model of the effects of leadership on employees' positive attitudes was tested. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the potential boundary conditions, such as personality traits, political will, and political skill. For instance, employees with high political skills may be in a better position to navigate the available resources (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019) and be better equipped to deal with challenging and stressful situations (e.g. despotic leadership) at the workplace. Finally, although the data for this study were collected from employees working in various sectors in Pakistan, however, the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. For future research, scholars are encouraged to investigate the effects of servant and despotic leadership styles in other cultural contexts.

Further, in future research, perhaps a comparison of high vs low power-distanced societies could be drawn on the variables of this study.

Conclusion

The present study examined how servant leadership and despotic leadership relate to employees' HAW. Based on the data collected from Pakistani employees, the results suggest that servant leadership positively relates to employees' HAW. On the other hand, the negative and direct relationship between despotic leadership and HAW was found to be insignificant. In addition, job crafting mediated the relationship between servant leadership and HAW (partial mediation) and despotic leadership and HAW (full mediation). These findings denote that, when employees are exposed to servant leadership, they are more likely to demonstrate proactive work behaviors (i.e. job crafting). This, in turn, will lead employees to develop happy feelings toward the job, its characteristics, and the organization as a whole (i.e. HAW). Finally, this study encourages future scholars to further enrich empirical research on servant leadership and despotic leadership by extending their nomological network of outcomes in non-western contexts.

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