



Nurturing Work Engagement: Unravelling the Impact of Servant Leadership, Employee Emotional Intelligence, and Work-Family Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of servant leadership (SL), emotional intelligence (EI), and work interfere with family (WIF) on work engagement (WE) among the service sector workforce in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A quantitative approach via survey was administered to 150 employees from the food and beverage, retail and wholesale trade, and accommodation sectors. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis revealed that SL and EI positively affect WE, while WIF negatively impacts WE among service sector employees. The practical implications emphasise the importance of fostering EI, implementing SL practices, and addressing WIF to enhance employee WE. This study also offers theoretical contributions to further enhance the understanding of these factors within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework.

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INTRODUCTION

The services sector plays a key role in driving Malaysia's economic growth, contributing over half of the nation's GDP and employing 51.8% of the workforce (DOSM, 2022). The sector's competitive nature necessitates that employees work extended hours and maintain high levels of commitment (Sharma and Singh, 2021; Zainal, 2019). In addition, employees must navigate emotional labour and are often required to maintain positive behaviours when managing frequent customer interactions, even when it is challenging (Gulsen and Ozmen, 2020; Robbin and Judges, 2019). Given these demands, the work engagement (WE) of employees in this sector are vital for sustained performance.

Employees are widely regarded as the most valuable assets of an organization, forming the backbone that supports its operations (Hobson, 2021). Among these, highly engaged employees are especially critical to organizational success. Work-engaged employees typically exhibit greater energy, dedication, and focus, which contribute to improved job performance, innovation, and organizational commitment (Al Badi et al., 2023; El Junusi et al., 2023; Schaufeli et al., 2002), while also reducing turnover intentions (Arokiasamy et al., 2022). Such employees are more likely to deliver exceptional service, actively connect with customers, and display positive customer-oriented behaviors (Han et al., 2022; Jin, Cheng et al., 2021). These actions create positive customer experiences, which in turn boost customer satisfaction and loyalty (Soelton et al., 2020), enhancing the organization's reputation and strengthening its competitive advantage (Malik and Garg, 2020). However, despite the recognized importance of work engagement, many industries continue to struggle with maintaining consistently high levels of employee engagement.

According to Kincentric (2022), a human resources and talent advisory firm, the global work engagement score increased steadily from 63% in 2016 to 69% in 2020. However, this positive trend reversed in 2021, with a 1% drop, followed by a further 6% decline in 2022, bringing the score to 62%—the lowest recorded since 2016. In Malaysia, Kincentric reported a similar decline, with the work engagement rate falling from 70% in 2019 to 67% by the first quarter of 2022 (Business Today, 2023). This drop reflects decreasing employee motivation, commitment, and involvement, compounded by the challenges of the pandemic on workplace well-being and productivity. A report by Qualtrics (2024) further highlights Malaysia's struggle. While the global engagement score stood at 68% in 2024, just 1% higher than Malaysia's score of 67%, comparisons with other Asian countries reveal a stark contrast. India led the region with an impressive 89%, while neighboring countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam achieved scores between 73% and 86%, significantly outperforming Malaysia. These trends suggest the urgency to improve WE in Malaysia's workforce.

Notwithstanding the extensive research on WE, there is still a limited understanding of its factor. First, researchers have extensively studied transformational leadership styles in relation to WE (Chua and Ayoko, 2021; Sarwar et al., 2020), but they have not fully explored the influence of servant leadership (SL), which emphasises serving and developing employees (Khan et al., 2021). Second, emotional intelligence (EI) has received limited consideration as one of the personal resources that influence WE, with existing research mainly focuses on optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience (Bakker et al., 2023). Past evidence suggests that EI can be a critical resource that helps employees in managing workplace challenges and improving their engagement (George et al., 2022). Third, limited understanding exists on the nexus between work interfere with family (WIF) and WE. The majority of studies mainly focused on burnout rather than WE (Yang et al., 2021; Breugh, 2021) while disregarding the fact that service sector employees are subject to emotional demands and risk of WIF (Sadiq, 2020). This gap leaves an incomplete picture of how WIF impacts WE.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the influence of SL, EI, and WIF on WE. The investigation is grounded on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory as the theoretical foundation. Examining the contributing factors towards WE is crucial following the importance of the services sector to Malaysia's economy and the challenges faced by its workforce.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Job Demands-Resources Theory

According to the JD-R theory, job design can be divided into two primary categories, namely job demands and job resources (Bakker et al., 2023). Job demands consist of aspects requiring ongoing physical or psychological effort that often leads to negative physiological or psychological outcomes like burnout and reduced job satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2023). On the other hand, job resources involve aspects that can help towards achieving work goals, reducing job demands, and fostering personal growth (Bakker et al., 2023). Furthermore, job demands can trigger the health impairment process whereby sustained high demands will eventually result in burnout and disengagement due to continuous energy depletion without adequate recovery (Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). This is in contrast with job resources that enhance WE by fulfilling individual needs and boosting motivation (Demerouti and Bakker, 2023).

Personal resources are defined as individuals' positive self-evaluations of their ability to manage and effectively influence their environment (Bakker et al., 2023). According to the JD-R theory, personal resources are similar to job resources in their dual role: they not only directly enhance WE but also act as a buffer against the negative effects of excessive job demands on WE (Demerouti and Bakker, 2017). Scholars emphasize that personal resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience are key drivers of WE, as they enable employees to approach tasks with confidence, sustain a positive perspective, and adapt effectively to challenges (Bakker et al., 2023). Supporting this view, a meta-analysis by Mazzetti et al. (2023) found that personal resources—including resilience, self-efficacy, optimism, and proactivity—exerted a stronger influence on WE than social or job-related resources. These findings highlight the critical importance of personal resources in fostering WE and enhancing employees' ability to thrive in demanding work environments.

The present study conceptualises SL and EI as job and personal resources, respectively. This is aligned with the JD-R theory whereby the two resources are expected to activate the motivational process that fosters WE. Meanwhile, WIF is conceptualised as a job demand that activates the health-impairment process, potentially hampering WE. The subsequent section provides a brief overview of WE prior to exploring SL, EI, and WIF.

Work Engagement

Work engagement (WE) describes one's energy, dedication, and full absorption towards their job in creating a positive and satisfying work-related mindset (Schaufeli, 2021; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Numerous studies advocate the positive effects of WE, including improved in-role and extra-role performance (Al Badi et al., 2023), employee innovativeness (Koroglu and Ozmen, 2022), organisational commitment (Boonsiritomachai and Sud-On, 2022), alongside its inverse relationship to counterproductive work behaviour (Bilal et al., 2019). Given these outcomes, previous studies looked into the factors of WE.

Past studies have identified several predicting factors of WE at the organisational and individual levels. At the organisational level, greater employer attractiveness (Luan and Ha, 2023) and perceived organisational support (Chooi et al., 2018) are associated with better WE. Job characteristics such as autonomy, feedback, social support, and growth opportunities also predict WE (Bakker et al., 2023). Transformational leadership has garnered significant attention, as various leadership styles have demonstrated a positive influence on WE (Tummers and Bakker, 2021). Additionally, factors like optimism, resilience, proactive personality, and self-efficacy have been reported as the main personal resources influencing WE at the individual level (Bakker et al., 2023).

Aside from the availability of extensive research on the positive factors influencing WE, there is also a growing interest in the negative factors impacting WE. Typically, negative factors are mainly studied in relation to burnout within the JD-R theory, which posits that job demands (negative factors) are expected to activate the health-impairment process through which burnout occurs. While the JD-R theory does not explicitly state that job demands reduce WE, Maslach (1996) argued that engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout. Although job demands are assumed to be positively linked to burnout, they are also expected to be negatively linked to WE. A study by Oliveira and Najnudel (2022) found that abusive leadership negatively affected the WE of 172 Brazilian workers from various economic sectors. Similarly, work-leisure conflict was found to negatively impact WE among 521 front-line employees in service and manufacturing companies in

China. Zhang et al. (2021) tested the influence of perceived job stress and workload and found that these factors negatively impacted the WE of 1,040 nurses in Wuhan, China.

Despite prioritising followers' needs and growth (Greenleaf, 1977), SL has received limited attention regarding its impact on WE. Similarly, although EI involves the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions effectively, it has received less attention in the context of WE. Furthermore, while researchers have studied many negative factors for their impact on WE, but work-family conflict, particularly WIF, has received relatively less attention. Therefore, this study aims to examine SL, EI, and WIF as factors influencing WE, with the following subsections providing a brief review of these factors.

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf introduced servant leadership (SL) in 1970, conceptualizing it as a people-centered leadership style that stands in contrast to traditional, hierarchical approaches. In SL, leaders prioritize the needs, growth, and well-being of their team members over their own interests, fostering a supportive environment where individuals can thrive (Liden et al., 2008). This leadership style emphasizes the ethical treatment of team members along with their personal and professional development (Eva et al., 2019). By placing service to others at its core, SL seeks to create a positive organizational culture that benefits employees while enhancing overall performance and community impact (Canavesi and Minelli, 2022; Eva et al., 2019). Scholars such as Liden et al. (2008) have identified eight dimensions of servant leadership: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering others, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, and forming strong relationships.

Past research has examined the influence of SL actions towards followers' behaviours, attitudes, and performance over time. Among the behavioural outcomes, a significant attention has been placed on the nexus between SL and organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) (Elche et al., 2020; Qiu and Dooley, 2022). SL is also positively linked to volunteer motivation (e.g., Erdurmazlı, 2019), proactive behaviour (Mostafa and El-Motalib, 2019), and innovation (Karatepe et al., 2020), while negatively associated with employee deviance (Paesen et al., 2019). In terms of attitudes, SL's focus on followers leads to positive associations with job satisfaction (Al-Asadi et al., 2019) and is inversely related to emotional exhaustion (Obi et al., 2020), turnover intention (Omanwar and Agrawal, 2022), and burnout (Ma et al., 2021). A positive link also exists between SL with better job performance (Tripathi et al., 2020) and customer service (Cai et al., 2022). Nevertheless, studies on the impact of SL on WE remain limited (Khan et al., 2021), despite the availability of several exceptions (Ozturk et al., 2021; Yagil and Oren, 2021). This prompts the current study to examine the impact of SL on WE.

Puspo Wiriko (2021) argued that SL fosters WE by empowering employees with trust, emotional support, and autonomy, allowing them to use their competencies effectively while prioritizing their growth and well-being over traditional top-down management approaches. Consistent with the concept of job resources, SL mainly concentrates on addressing followers' needs and supporting their growth (Eva et al., 2019). This helps employees to meet work goals, manage job demands, and foster personal development, ultimately boosting WE (Bakker et al., 2023). Research such as Khan et al. (2021) showed that SL improves performance and engagement by implementing practices like participative decision-making and support. Zhou et al. (2022) discovered that SL increases WE among university employees in Pakistan, while Ozturk et al. (2021) demonstrated that SL enhances engagement and retention in hotel staff in Russia. Thus, this study hypothesise that:

H1: SL positively influences WE among services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) describes the capability of perceiving and assessing emotions in oneself and others alongside managing and using emotions effectively (Mayer et al., 2024). Many scholars have increasingly focused on EI and its role in social interactions, making it a key area of behavioural study (Nasir et al., 2023). Emotionally intelligent employees tend to show stronger organisational commitment and better stress regulation, leading to improved work outcomes (Gara Bach Ouerdian et al., 2021). EI is also associated with organisational commitment (Sahoo and Sia, 2015), job satisfaction (Sökmen and Sarikaya, 2022), and job performance (Nasir et al., 2023). Despite its impact on employee outcomes, EI has rarely been studied as a

personal resource from the JD-R perspective. This study examines EI's influence on WE in accordance with Bakker and De Vries (2020) and Mérida-López and Extremera (2020), who consider EI a personal resource.

The JD-R theory posits on the similar impact of personal and job resources towards employee well-being (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). High EI enables individuals to manage emotions, handle stress, and sustain a positive outlook, ultimately enhancing WE (Bakker et al., 2023). George et al. (2022) argued that EI enhances WE by enabling individuals to effectively manage their own and others' emotions, generating the emotional energy needed to sustain work activities and achieve tasks. The positive relationship between EI and WE is also exemplary among Italian teachers (D'Amico et al., 2020) and employees in the United Kingdom (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: EI positively influences WE among services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict (WFC) is an inter-role conflict that occurs from one's competing demands between their work and family roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Perry et al., 2023). A number of experts believe that WFC is both bidirectional and multidimensional. According to Netemeyer et al. (1996), WFC is bidirectional and can manifest as either work interfering with family (WIF) or family interfering with work (FIW). It is also perceived as multidimensional and encompasses three dimensions: time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflict (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

Previous studies on WFC have largely focused on its negative effects like burnout (Galletta et al., 2019; Rajendran et al., 2020; Simões et al., 2021; Terry and Woo, 2021; Wu et al., 2019) and its link to turnover intention (Ribeiro et al., 2023; Yucel et al., 2023) and decreased job satisfaction (Talukder, 2019; Vickovic and Morrow, 2020). The effect of WFC on WE has received relatively less attention, even though there has been substantial research on these negative outcomes. Yang et al. (2021) and Breaugh (2021) highlighted this gap, observing that the focus on burnout often overshadows the potential impact of WFC on WE.

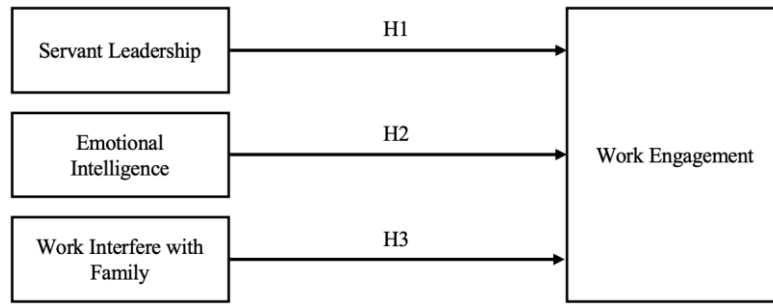
Although WFC is recognized as bidirectional, comprising both WIF and FIW, Yucel et al. (2023) highlighted that empirical evidence consistently demonstrates WIF as more prevalent than FIW. Studies focusing on WIF have linked its prevalence to factors such as excessive work overload, extended working hours, and elevated work-related stress, which create significant challenges for employees in balancing their professional and personal lives (Zheng et al., 2021). These findings underscore that WIF is not only more widespread but also associated with more severe consequences for employees, including reduced well-being, lower productivity, and strained interpersonal relationships. Given the pervasive nature and critical implications of WIF, this study aims to delve deeper into its impact on WE, shedding light on how work-related pressures can diminish employees' motivation and connection to their work.

According to the JD-R theory, excessive job demands can lead to exhaustion and reduced WE (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Accordingly, WIF, including time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflicts, depletes resources and negatively affects WE (Galletta et al., 2019). Yucel et al. (2023) conducted a study among 350 public hospital employees in Erzincan province, Turkey and found that employees with WIF were less focused and less devoted to their jobs, hence showing lower WE. The results led to a conclusion that WIF negatively impacts WE. Based on these findings, it was hypothesised that:

H3: WIF negatively affects WE among services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded on the JD-R theory, which suggests that job resources promote WE while job demands result in burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Maslach et al., 2001). Hypothesis 1 (H1) proposes that SL positively influences WE, while Hypothesis 2 (H2) suggests that EI also positively affects WE. Additionally, Hypothesis 3 (H3) expects WIF to negatively influence WE. Figure 1 depicts the relationships between SL, EI, WIF, and WE.



Source: Authors (2024)

Figure 1 Proposed conceptual framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants and Data Collection

This study examines the influence of SL, EI and WIF on WE. A quantitative research design was selected because it is suitable for identifying factors affecting outcomes, evaluating interventions, and understanding predictors (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). Following the postpositivist paradigm, the study builds on established theories, specifically the JD-R theory, and tests their relationships using survey data to either confirm or challenge these theoretical assumptions (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). Therefore, the quantitative approach aligns with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants due to the absence of a comprehensive list (sampling frame) of the target population. In such cases, non-probability sampling methods like purposive sampling are recommended (Saunders et al., 2023). Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2023).

The participants in this study were employees from the wholesale and retail, food and beverage, and accommodation sectors in the Klang Valley, with at least six months of work experience. Klang Valley was chosen for its significant contribution to the services sector GDP, dense population, and high concentration of service-oriented companies (Cai et al., 2021; DOSM, 2022). The focus on these subsectors is justified by their economic importance, as they account for 76% of the sector's revenue and employ over 66% of its workforce (DOSM, 2023b). The six-month work tenure criterion aligns with typical probation periods, allowing employees sufficient time to adjust to their roles and organizational culture, providing a reasonable basis for assessing SL and WE (Donovan and Ho, 2015; Marshall, 2018). The list of participating companies was sourced from the Malaysia Retailers Association (MRA), Malaysia Retail Chain Association (MRCA), and the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC).

Survey invitations were sent via email, allowing participants to choose between a paper-based or online questionnaire. The sample size was determined using G*Power software version 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007), which required a minimum of 119 responses for three predictors. To account for an expected response rate of 35% in business and management research (Saunders et al., 2019), 340 questionnaires were distributed. Of the 186 responses received, 150 were deemed valid for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 44.1%, which exceeded the minimum requirement. The demographic profile of the respondents shows that a majority were male (64%) and aged between 31 and 40 years (42%). Most participants were Malay (75.3%) and married (80.7%). They primarily worked in the retail and wholesale sector (54%), with 25.3% in food and beverage and 20.7% in accommodation. Many had 1 to 5 years of work experience (36.3%) and held non-executive positions (44.7%). In terms of education, a significant proportion of respondents had a diploma (46.7%) or a bachelor's degree (26.7%). Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the respondents' demographics.

Table 1 Respondents' Demographic Profiles

| Characteristics | Information | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|---|---------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 94 | 64.0 |
| | Female | 56 | 36.0 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Age | 21 – 30 | 40 | 26.7 |
| | 31 – 40 | 63 | 42.0 |
| | 41 – 50 | 35 | 23.3 |
| | More than 50 | 12 | 8.0 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Race | Malay | 113 | 75.3 |
| | Chinese | 23 | 15.3 |
| | Indian | 10 | 6.7 |
| | Others | 4 | 2.7 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Marital Status | Single | 21 | 14.0 |
| | Married | 121 | 80.70 |
| | Divorced / Separated | 6 | 4.0 |
| | Widowed | 2 | 1.3 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Services Subsector | Retail and Wholesale | 81 | 54.0 |
| | Food and Beverage | 38 | 25.3 |
| | Accommodation | 31 | 20.7 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Number of children | 0 | 30 | 20.0 |
| | 1 | 44 | 29.3 |
| | 2 | 35 | 23.3 |
| | 3 | 26 | 17.3 |
| | 4 | 12 | 8.0 |
| | 5 or more | 3 | 2.0 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Length of services | More than 6 months but less than 1 year | 12 | 8. |
| | 1 – 5 years | 54 | 36.3 |
| | 6 – 10 years | 66 | 44.0 |
| | > 10 years | 18 | 12.0 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Position | Non-executive | 67 | 44.7 |
| | Executive | 44 | 29.3 |
| | First-line manager | 32 | 21.3 |
| | Middle-line manager | 7 | 4.7 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Academic Qualification | Master's degree | 3 | 2.0 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 40 | 26.7 |
| | Diploma | 70 | 46.7 |
| | STPM or equivalent | 22 | 14.7 |
| | SPM or equivalent | 10 | 6.7 |
| | PMR or equivalent | 0 | 0 |
| | Certificate | 5 | 3.3 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>150</i> | <i>100</i> |

Source: Author (2024)

Questionnaire and Measurements

The survey was prepared in English and Bahasa Malaysia translation was provided. WE was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli et al. (2002), comprising 17 items across three dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Past studies (e.g., Tomietto et al., 2019) reported a high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90 for UWES. Meanwhile, SL was assessed using the Servant Leadership Scale (SLS) by Liden et al. (2008). It comprises 28 items representing seven dimensions. Qiu and Dooley (2019) reported high reliability scores exceeding 0.90. The employees' EI was evaluated using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) by Wong and Law (2002). Previous studies (e.g., Gao et al., 2013) reported reliability scores ranging from 0.88 to 0.91. Finally, WIF was measured using the WIF dimension of Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams's (2000) WFC scale. This scale has a total of nine items. Studies such as Brenning et al. (2020) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. Meanwhile, two academics and two practitioners, who are experts in human resource management, pre-tested the questionnaire for content validity and raised no major concerns. Next, a pilot test with thirty individuals similar to the study population confirmed its reliability, showing a Cronbach's alpha above 0.70, deeming the questionnaire reliable for the study.

RESULTS

Common Method Variance Assessment

Common method variance (CMV) occurs when the data collection method influences responses more than the actual constructs being measured, potentially causing biased results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman's single-factor test denoted that a single factor explained 33.27% of the variance that is below the 50% threshold, indicating that CMV is not a serious concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, the full collinearity variance inflation factor values were 1.262 for EI, 1.071 for SL, 1.321 for WE, and 1.074 for WIF. These values are below the threshold of 3.33, denoting the absence of serious CMV (Kock, 2015). With CMV ruled out, the researcher proceeded with PLS-SEM using a sample of 150 participants.

Measurement Model Assessment

The reflective measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021). Indicator reliability was evaluated using indicator loadings, with a threshold of 0.708, indicating that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Although several items had loadings below this threshold, they were retained as their values exceeded the mandatory deletion threshold of 0.4, and the average variance extracted (AVE) scores were all above the minimum required value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2021). Internal consistency was assessed using composite reliability (CR), which demonstrated strong consistency with scores ranging from 0.817 to 0.942. This was further supported by Cronbach's alpha values, which ranged from 0.775 to 0.939. Convergent validity, measured via AVE, showed satisfactory results, with all AVE scores exceeding the 0.5 threshold. The results for indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity are presented in Table 2. Discriminant validity was established using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which confirmed the uniqueness of constructs as all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), as shown in Table 3.

Table 2 Item loading, composite reliability, and average variance extracted

| Latent Variable | Item | Outer Loading | Cronbach's Alpha | CR | AVE |
|---------------------------------------|------|---------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| Absorption | A1 | 0.795 | 0.829 | 0.841 | 0.541 |
| | A2 | 0.789 | | | |
| | A3 | 0.788 | | | |
| | A4 | 0.657 | | | |
| | A5 | 0.721 | | | |
| | A6 | 0.646 | | | |
| Creating value for the community | COM1 | 0.890 | 0.891 | 0.892 | 0.754 |
| | COM2 | 0.861 | | | |
| | COM3 | 0.894 | | | |
| | COM4 | 0.825 | | | |
| Conceptual skills | CON1 | 0.809 | 0.883 | 0.886 | 0.742 |
| | CON2 | 0.893 | | | |
| | CON3 | 0.840 | | | |
| | CON4 | 0.899 | | | |
| Dedication | D1 | 0.797 | 0.842 | 0.863 | 0.619 |
| | D2 | 0.790 | | | |
| | D3 | 0.851 | | | |
| | D4 | 0.867 | | | |
| | D5 | 0.598 | | | |
| Emotional healing | EMO1 | 0.791 | 0.840 | 0.844 | 0.676 |
| | EMO2 | 0.839 | | | |
| | EMO3 | 0.818 | | | |
| | EMO4 | 0.840 | | | |
| Empowering | EMP1 | 0.852 | 0.775 | 0.817 | 0.604 |
| | EMP2 | 0.841 | | | |
| | EMP3 | 0.809 | | | |
| | EMP4 | 0.574 | | | |
| Ethical behavior | ETH1 | 0.837 | 0.879 | 0.883 | 0.734 |
| | ETH2 | 0.855 | | | |
| | ETH3 | 0.860 | | | |
| | ETH4 | 0.874 | | | |
| Helping subordinates grow and succeed | GRW1 | 0.779 | 0.833 | 0.840 | 0.666 |
| | GRW2 | 0.844 | | | |
| | GRW3 | 0.827 | | | |
| | GRW4 | 0.812 | | | |

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Table 2 Cont.

| Latent Variable | Item | Outer Loading | Cronbach's Alpha | CR | AVE |
|-----------------------------|------|---------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| Others' emotional appraisal | OEA1 | 0.881 | 0.918 | 0.918 | 0.802 |
| | OEA2 | 0.899 | | | |
| | OEA3 | 0.902 | | | |
| | OEA4 | 0.900 | | | |
| Regulation of emotion | ROE1 | 0.888 | 0.918 | 0.920 | 0.802 |
| | ROE2 | 0.891 | | | |
| | ROE3 | 0.900 | | | |
| | ROE4 | 0.903 | | | |
| Self-emotional appraisal | SEA1 | 0.855 | 0.895 | 0.898 | 0.762 |
| | SEA2 | 0.901 | | | |
| | SEA3 | 0.902 | | | |
| | SEA4 | 0.830 | | | |
| Putting subordinates first | SUB1 | 0.769 | 0.836 | 0.913 | 0.660 |
| | SUB2 | 0.822 | | | |
| | SUB3 | 0.795 | | | |
| | SUB4 | 0.862 | | | |
| Use of emotion | UOE1 | 0.908 | 0.927 | 0.933 | 0.820 |
| | UOE2 | 0.901 | | | |
| | UOE3 | 0.896 | | | |
| | UOE4 | 0.915 | | | |
| Vigor | V1 | 0.805 | 0.879 | 0.883 | 0.622 |
| | V2 | 0.820 | | | |
| | V3 | 0.811 | | | |
| | V4 | 0.763 | | | |
| | V5 | 0.755 | | | |
| | V6 | 0.777 | | | |
| Work interfere with Family | WIF1 | 0.788 | 0.939 | 0.942 | 0.673 |
| | WIF2 | 0.838 | | | |
| | WIF3 | 0.808 | | | |
| | WIF4 | 0.822 | | | |
| | WIF5 | 0.877 | | | |
| | WIF6 | 0.846 | | | |
| | WIF7 | 0.780 | | | |
| | WIF8 | 0.830 | | | |
| | WIF9 | 0.789 | | | |

Notes: The values of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE)

Table 3 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Criterion

| | AB | COM | CON | DE | EMO | EMP | ETH |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| AB | | | | | | | |
| COM | 0.544 | | | | | | |
| CON | 0.668 | 0.712 | | | | | |
| DE | 0.791 | 0.564 | 0.568 | | | | |
| EMO | 0.544 | 0.749 | 0.758 | 0.584 | | | |
| EMP | 0.592 | 0.698 | 0.843 | 0.575 | 0.810 | | |
| ETH | 0.598 | 0.785 | 0.754 | 0.611 | 0.729 | 0.671 | |
| GRW | 0.634 | 0.783 | 0.838 | 0.534 | 0.801 | 0.845 | 0.779 |
| OEA | 0.523 | 0.328 | 0.372 | 0.446 | 0.395 | 0.442 | 0.299 |
| ROE | 0.541 | 0.435 | 0.436 | 0.518 | 0.429 | 0.471 | 0.386 |
| SEA | 0.529 | 0.418 | 0.417 | 0.498 | 0.395 | 0.450 | 0.395 |
| SUB | 0.514 | 0.806 | 0.651 | 0.430 | 0.817 | 0.766 | 0.716 |
| UOE | 0.515 | 0.363 | 0.388 | 0.553 | 0.364 | 0.414 | 0.400 |
| VI | 0.839 | 0.532 | 0.652 | 0.688 | 0.463 | 0.662 | 0.553 |
| WIF | 0.603 | 0.237 | 0.411 | 0.446 | 0.256 | 0.332 | 0.385 |

Note: VI (Vigor); DE (Dedication); AB (Absorption); SEA (Self emotion appraisal); OEA (Others' emotion appraisal); UOE (Use of emotion); ROE (Regulation of emotion); CON (Conceptual skills); Emp (Empowering); GRW (Helping subordinates grow and succeed); SUB (Putting subordinates first); ETH (Ethical behaviour); EMO (Emotional healing); COM (Creating value for the community). HTMT criterion < 0.850.

Table 3 Cont.

| | GRW | OEA | ROE | SEA | SUB | UOE | VI | WIF |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| AB | | | | | | | | |
| COM | | | | | | | | |
| CON | | | | | | | | |
| DE | | | | | | | | |
| EMO | | | | | | | | |
| EMP | | | | | | | | |
| ETH | | | | | | | | |
| GRW | | | | | | | | |
| OEA | 0.435 | | | | | | | |
| ROE | 0.415 | 0.623 | | | | | | |
| SEA | 0.426 | 0.631 | 0.807 | | | | | |
| SUB | 0.804 | 0.306 | 0.368 | 0.373 | | | | |
| UOE | 0.333 | 0.499 | 0.686 | 0.647 | 0.260 | | | |
| VI | 0.617 | 0.450 | 0.525 | 0.490 | 0.544 | 0.579 | | |
| WIF | 0.325 | 0.084 | 0.067 | 0.08 | 0.248 | 0.210 | 0.553 | |

Note: VI (Vigor); DE (Dedication); AB (Absorption); SEA (Self emotion appraisal); OEA (Others' emotion appraisal); UOE (Use of emotion); ROE (Regulation of emotion); CON (Conceptual skills); Emp (Empowering); GRW (Helping subordinates grow and succeed); SUB (Putting subordinates first); ETH (Ethical behaviour); EMO (Emotional healing); COM (Creating value for the community). HTMT criterion < 0.850.

The focus of this study was not how the different facets of SL and EI inform different facets of WE, but rather the overall effect of this EI, SL on overall WE. Therefore, three variables (SL, EI, and WE) were each treated as single multidimensional constructs. We adapted our analytical approach by treating these multidimensional variables as higher-order constructs (HOCs). This approach allows for greater parsimony and reduces model complexity (Hair et al., 2021). Following studies such as Sheikh et al. (2021), Ullah et al. (2023), and Ho et al. (2021), the current study specifies SL, EI, and WE as reflective-formative constructs. The HOCs were assessed using the two-stage approach (Sarstedt et al., 2019). In the first stage, all the lower-order constructs (LOCs) were assessed using the standard reflective measurement model, as presented earlier. In the second stage, HOCs were evaluated using the formative measurement model, focusing on convergent validity, collinearity, indicator outer weights, and significance. As suggested by Cheah et al. (2018), the convergent validity of the HOCs was determined using a single global item. These global items were developed to capture SL, EI, and WE. Through redundancy analysis, the path coefficients for SL, EI, and WE were 0.803, 0.816, and 0.807, respectively as shown in Table 4. Those value exceeding the threshold value of 0.700 (Hair et al., 2021), indicating the presence of convergent validity. Collinearity was also assessed, and results showed that it was not a serious issue in this study, as the VIF values ranged from 1.794 to 3.026, which is below the threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2021). Finally, indicator weights and significance were tested via bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples (Cheah et al., 2018). Results, shown in Table 4, indicate that five out of seven dimensions of SL were statistically insignificant in affecting SL ($\rho > 0.050$), and two out of four dimensions of EI were also statistically insignificant in affecting EI ($\rho > 0.050$). Meanwhile, all dimensions of WE were statistically significant in affecting WE ($\rho < 0.050$). Nevertheless, all insignificant sub-dimensions were retained to fully capture the domains of SL and EI.

Table 4 Assessment of Higher Order Construct

| HOC | LOC | CV | Outer VIF | Outer Weight | Std. Error | t-value | p-value |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|-----------|--------------|------------|---------|---------|
| Servant Leadership | Creating value for the community | 0.803 | 2.731 | 0.085 | 0.157 | 0.539 | 0.590 |
| | Conceptual skills | | 2.889 | 0.391 | 0.162 | 2.419 | 0.016 |
| | Emotional healing | | 2.537 | -0.066 | 0.159 | 0.418 | 0.676 |
| | Empowering | | 2.55 | 0.259 | 0.175 | 1.482 | 0.138 |
| | Ethical behavior | | 2.493 | 0.278 | 0.133 | 2.081 | 0.037 |
| | Helping subordinates grow and succeed | | 3.060 | 0.136 | 0.150 | 0.908 | 0.364 |
| | Putting subordinates first | | 2.774 | 0.075 | 0.145 | 0.517 | 0.605 |
| Emotional Intelligence | Others' emotional appraisal | 0.816 | 1.623 | 0.301 | 0.117 | 2.576 | 0.010 |
| | Regulation of emotion | | 2.619 | 0.244 | 0.165 | 1.474 | 0.140 |
| | Self-emotional appraisal | | 2.421 | 0.153 | 0.158 | 0.968 | 0.333 |
| | Use of emotion | | 1.794 | 0.501 | 0.112 | 4.472 | 0.000 |
| Work engagement | Absorption | 0.807 | 2.573 | 0.402 | 0.091 | 4.424 | 0.000 |
| | Dedication | | 1.944 | 0.256 | 0.093 | 2.745 | 0.006 |
| | Vigor | | 2.219 | 0.467 | 0.086 | 5.455 | 0.000 |

Notes: HOC (Higher order construct); LOC (Lower order construct); CV (Convergent validity).

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was subsequently assessed for collinearity, predictive accuracy, and relationships between constructs (Hair et al., 2021). Collinearity was verified using the variance inflation factor (VIF) and the results indicated no serious collinearity issues as the values ranged between 1.176 and 1.504, which was below the 5.0 threshold (Hair et al., 2021). The model's predictive capacity was measured via the coefficient of determination (R^2) and values of 0.250 indicating weak, 0.500 moderate, and 0.750 substantial predictive power (Hair et al., 2021). This study yielded a moderate predictive capacity (0.694). Effect size (f^2) values of 0.350, 0.150, and 0.020 imply substantial, medium, and trivial effect sizes, respectively (Cohen, 1988). This study showed that EI and WIF had a substantial effect on WE, with values of 0.417 and 0.380, respectively, while SL had a medium effect (0.273). The model's predictive relevance for that particular construct is established when the Q^2 value is above zero (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2021). This study's Q^2 value for WE was 0.513, demonstrating predictive relevance. For hypothesis testing, bootstrapping (5000 resamples) revealed a significant positive relationship between SL and WE ($\beta = 0.351, t = 4.565, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. EI also positively influenced WE ($\beta = 0.405, t = 5.872, p < 0.001$), supporting H2. WIF had a negative, significant impact on WE ($\beta = -0.366, t = 7.412, p < 0.001$), confirming H3. Figure 2 and Table 5 present the results.

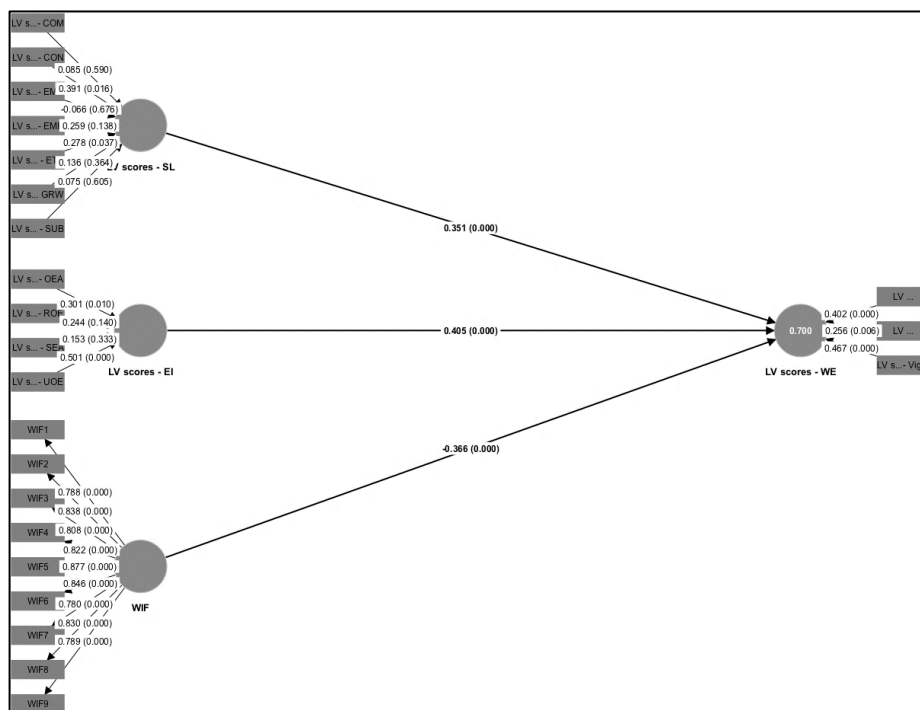


Figure 2 Path Analysis

Table 5 Results of Structural Path Model

| Path Relationship | Std. Beta | Std. Error | Confidence Interval | t-value | p-value | VIF | f^2 | R^2 | Q^2 |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|---------------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| H1) SL -> WE | 0.351 | 0.077 | (0.227, 0.522) | 4.565 | 0.000 | 1.504 | 0.273 | 0.694 | 0.513 |
| H2) EI -> WE | 0.405 | 0.069 | (0.254, 0.523) | 5.872 | 0.000 | 1.311 | 0.417 | | |
| H3) WIF -> WE | -0.366 | 0.049 | (-0.446, -0.251) | 7.412 | 0.000 | 1.176 | 0.380 | | |

Notes: EI = emotional intelligence; SL = servant leadership; WE = work engagement; WFC-WIF = work-family conflict—work interfere with family.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examines how SL, EI, and WIF affect WE in the Malaysian services sector. The results showed that EI has the most significant positive effect on WE; individuals who are more engaged manage emotions well and have a higher EI. SL also has a positive impact on WE; employees who perceive their leaders as supportive and empowering report higher levels of engagement. Conversely, WIF negatively affects WE, with difficulties balancing work and family reducing engagement. Hypothesis 1 (SL positively influences WE) was confirmed, supporting previous studies (e.g., Ozturk et al., 2021; Yagil and Oren, 2021). Hypothesis 2 (EI

positively affects WE) was upheld, which aligns with George et al. (2022). Hypothesis 3, indicating that WIF negatively affects WE, was validated and is consistent with the study by Ribeiro et al. (2023).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study expands the scope of the JD-R theory by integrating SL, EI, and WIF, areas that are underexplored in studies related to WE. By positioning SL as a job resource, the study adds empirical evidence of its positive impact on WE. This framework often studies transformational leadership, but SL's focus on employee growth and well-being uniquely fosters dedication and commitment, distinguishing it from performance-driven leadership styles. Additionally, the study broadens the JD-R theory by incorporating EI as a personal resource. Traditionally, JD-R theory focuses on personal resources like self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, which emphasise an individual's control over their environment. However, the present findings highlight the importance of emotional competencies in promoting WE. Finally, WIF is introduced as a job demand that negatively affects WE, expanding the JD-R theory's scope beyond its typical focus on burnout. This demonstrates that the strain from balancing work and family responsibilities directly reduces engagement.

Wang et al. (2022) found that training managers in SL within service sector organisations can be highly beneficial, as it fosters a positive culture and is advantageous for both individuals and organisations. It is essential for Malaysian leaders to prioritise SL by conducting empathy-based training, promoting employee needs, and recognising SL behaviours. However, resistance may arise due to Malaysia's high power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010). Organisations should gradually build a supportive culture by emphasising SL benefits and demonstrating positive outcomes through pilot programs. Integrating EI training can enhance WE. Employees with high EI are often capable of managing their emotions more effectively, leading to better engagement and productivity. Persich et al. (2021) found EI training reduces stress and improves resilience, suggesting its value. Organisations should invest in cost-effective EI training to develop these competencies over an extended period of time. Finally, the energy depletion caused by WIF can reduce engagement. This can be addressed by organisations through flexible work arrangements and work-life balance, which will improve both engagement and productivity.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that are worth highlighting. The sample is confined to specific service sectors, potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings. Future research should aim for more diversity in the representation of service subsectors, and use larger sample sizes to improve statistical robustness. Finally, further exploration on the moderating effects of SL and EI on WIF within the JD-R framework can offer insights into how job and personal resources influence WE.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study confirms that SL and EI positively influence WE, while WIF has a negative impact. By expanding the JD-R framework to include SL, EI, and WIF, the study offers valuable insights for improving WE in the Malaysian services sector. Practical recommendations include prioritizing SL, investing in EI training, and promoting flexible work arrangements to address the challenges of work-life balance.

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