ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE'S JOB SATISFACTION MEDIATED BY LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE STYLE AMONG EMPLOYEES IN THE PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN KUWAIT

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Highlight
The servant leadership can lead to higher employee job satisfaction and leader-member exchange may mediate the relationship between servant leadership style and employee job satisfaction.

Abstract
A growing body of literature explores the underlying mechanisms and processes that enable servant leadership to impact organizational performance, engagement, and outcomes positively. This research assesses the mediation role of leader-member exchange between servant leadership and job satisfaction among employees in Kuwait's universities. The study utilized a closed-ended survey that was distributed to 240 workers, with 205 valid responses received from employees working in two private higher education sectors in Kuwait. using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. The outcomes of the study demonstrated strong backing for the beneficial influence of servant leadership on leader-member exchange and job satisfaction. Furthermore, a positive correlation was established between leader-member exchange and job satisfaction among employees employed in Kuwait's private higher education sector. Moreover, the results partially validated the mediating effect of leader-member exchange in the relationship between servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. These results underscore the significance of integrating servant leadership principles into leadership approaches within this sector to improve employee satisfaction and overall organizational achievement.

Introduction
Robert K. Greenleaf [1] coined the term "Servant Leadership" (SL) in 1970, defining it as putting serving before leading. According to Greenleaf, servant leaders aim to help followers grow healthier, wiser, more autonomous, and more likely to become servants themselves. Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the topic of leadership. Scholars have noted that servant leaders operate at a higher level, with their focus being on serving others [2–4]. Due to changes in globalization, demographics, work practices, and technology, the concept of leadership has evolved. Studies have explored how leadership can impact organizational culture, employee performance, effectiveness, motivation, retention, and Job Satisfaction (JS) within organizations [4]. The most significant aspect of SL is its focus on serving first, and then aspiring to lead. The two dimensions of serving and leading in SL are crucial to the success and growth of an organization [2].

The achievement of an organization's objectives is intricately tied to the effectiveness of every facet of the company, particularly the performance of each hierarchical level, spanning from upper management to lower-tier employees. It is imperative to underscore that reaching high-performance levels necessitates the

cultivation of a strong sense of JS among employees [5]. Performance is fundamentally connected to the extent of dedication everyone dedicates to their respective tasks. Evaluating performance is vital as it provides a clear gauge of the extent to which personnel can successfully fulfil their assigned responsibilities [2]. As SL is connected to JS, it is possible to examine JS at the levels of the team, individual, and organization. Task performance is a common measure of individual performance (in-role behaviour) that can be used [6]. The authors in [7] found that SL indirectly affects task performance, with servant leaders promoting self-sufficiency and autonomy, resulting in higher levels of subordinates' performance. The pursuit of a "greater form and practice of leading" has been ongoing over the years. In recent studies, two non-leader-cantered styles have emerged: transformational leadership and SL. SL, in essence, is "leading by serving." This style of leadership focuses on the emotional needs, growth, and physical well-being of team members and the organization.

By embodying attributes such as stewardship, healing, conceptualization, foresight, commitment to others' growth, empathy, persuasion, listening, building a community, and awareness, this style of leadership becomes a tool for establishing sustained relationships, emotional healing and support, and organizational constitution [8]. Employee JS can be influenced by a multitude of factors. According to the definition of JS mentioned earlier, it becomes apparent that satisfaction is inherently linked to the individual characteristics and subjectivity of each employee. However, there are identifiable commonalities that impact JS across board [9]. Conversely, some factors exert a significant influence on overall JS. For instance, opportunities for career advancement hold a substantial sway over JS. In this context, the chance to acquire experience and hone one's skills while on the job plays a pivotal role [10]. This study's importance is underscored by the scarcity of research focused on SL in the Middle East, particularly in Kuwait. No previous studies have explored the mediation impact of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on JS and SL in private higher education institutions in Kuwait, making this study an important contribution to the field. This study contributes to the body of academia as follows.

- It explores how adopting the SL style and its attributes can improve work engagement, create a strong academic community, and empower private higher education institutions in Kuwait. It investigates the relationship between SL and employee JS in the private sector of Kuwait and examines the mediating effect of LMX on this relationship.
- It provides practical insights for leaders and managers in the private higher education sector, offering guidance on how adopting an SL approach can potentially enhance LMX and subsequently lead to increased employee JS.
- This study affirms the mediating role of LMX in the connection between SL and JS. This underscores the significance of giving attention to LMX to enhance outcomes in the workplace.
- By focusing on the private higher education sector, the study addresses a specific context that may have unique dynamics and challenges. This sector-specific insight is valuable for practitioners and policymakers in the field.
- The findings and methodology of this study can serve as a basis for further research in leadership, LMX, and employee satisfaction in diverse sectors and industries.

To tackle the shortage mentioned above, a survey was conducted among 240 employees in the private higher education sector in Kuwait. Out of the total surveys distributed, 205 were received and analysed from personnel who regularly report to their managers/leaders. The survey results unveiled noteworthy correlations between SL and JS, SL and LMX, as well as LMX and JS. Additionally, the findings offered partial validation for the notion that LMX acts as a mediator in the relationship between SL and JS. The paper's structure for the subsequent sections is as follows. The following subsections provide context, a review of related literature, and delve into the research model and the formulation of hypotheses. The research method is discussed in Section 2. The study findings and discussion are presented in Section 3. The impact of the study findings is discussed in Section 4 and Section 5 offers concluding remarks for the study.

Servant leadership

Greenleaf [1] introduced the concept of SL which prioritizes human capital and focuses on the leader as a servant. His own experiences working for giant organizations and his study of Journey to the East by Herman Hesse served as the foundation for Greenleaf's concept of SL. Initially, Greenleaf's work was based on his observations rather than research. While other leadership styles emphasize achieving organizational goals and standards, SL prioritizes the needs of followers, with the organization's goals being met as a result. Moreover, SL is considered a philosophy of leadership that addresses ethical concerns and emphasizes morality, ethics, and virtues [6]. SL has gained research interest in the field of organizational studies, with a focus on leaders serving others first to achieve positive organizational outcomes. This shift towards serving others has changed the focus of leadership

research from solely leading to balancing the paradox of leading and serving simultaneously [11]. While transformational and charismatic leaders can achieve remarkable outcomes, without ethical and moral considerations, their results could lead to disastrous consequences.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the impacts of SL within the higher education sector across different geographical regions. For example, Abbas et al. [12] explored SL effects in the higher education sector in Pakistan, while Al-Asfour et al. [13] examined the SL style's consequences in the context of higher education in the USA. Regarding the Middle East, Dahleez et al. [10] examined the effects of SL in the setting of Palestine's higher education industry and recommended that Palestinian colleges and universities embrace the SL style and provide management training to help them hone their SL abilities. Regarding SL in Gulf countries, a study conducted by Shafai et al. [14] investigated the correlation between SL and the role of administrators in higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to produce successful leaders who prioritize meeting people's basic needs without abusing their power. However, there is currently a lack of research that adequately captures the practical application of SL approaches in higher education by Saudi leaders. As power and leadership are closely linked, it is essential to investigate how leaders use their authority in daily operations to gain a better understanding of their leadership styles [14].

Leader-member exchange

According to Graen's LMX theory [15], leaders should forge various kinds of relationships or exchanges with each member rather than employing a single leadership style with all members [16]. The fundamental premise of LMX theory revolves around the idea that leadership is inherently varied within each leader-follower relationship. Consequently, employing a blanket or average leadership style to encapsulate the conduct of any leader does not hold much theoretical or practical validity. This is primarily because a leader's behaviour is inclined to vary based on the specific follower, they are interacting with [15]. Consequently, LMX theory transcends the mere characterization of leader-member relationships and instead provides recommendations for achieving an optimal state of affairs within a group [17].

SL, LMX, and JS are all essential components when setting an organization's goals and objectives and achieving success. High levels of collaboration, transparency, trust, and both informal and formal rewards indicate a positive relationship within a group. Leaders who prioritize the interests of their subordinates have an advantage in building such relationships. In contrast, strong task focus, and distrust are characteristics of a negative or inadequate relationship [17]. Instead of focusing on the more complex interaction between the leader and the followers, the LMX Theory studies the relationship between two variables (e.g., SL and JS). This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of SL in promoting employee JS and the mediating role of LMX in the relationship between JS and SL. SL, LMX, and JS are all crucial factors in establishing an organization's goals, objectives, and achievements.

Job satisfaction

JS is a complex and multifaceted term that can have different meanings for different individuals. While JS is often associated with motivation, the underlying reasons for this link are not well understood. Put differently, JS essentially measures the contentment of team members with their jobs and their employers. Both corporate leaders and personnel in staff development teams commonly employ this term to gain insights into how satisfied and content employees are in their roles. For an organization to continue evolving and adjusting effectively, it is imperative to recognize the factors that influence employee JS and take the necessary steps to achieve it [18].

Several studies have explored the factors that influence an individual's perception of JS. For example, Hasanuddin et al. [19] concluded that motivating elements had an impact on an employee's JS level. Conversely, Conant [20] found that JS and a desire to leave a job are associated with a lack of work responsibilities. Additionally, Kalifa et al. [18] found that employees who have been with a company for an extended period are less likely to quit. Employees who are content in their current roles are more likely to stay with the organization and not actively seek alternative employment. Therefore, managers in the casualty insurance industry should understand the impact of JS on employee retention to prevent employees from seeking alternative job opportunities. Lawler's theory [21] is prominent in studying the relationship between employee JS and leadership style. Lawler categorizes JS into four main theories: fulfilment, discrepancy, equity, and two-factor [21]. The discrepancy theory, one of the four theories, is focused on the gap between what employees expect and what they receive. The theory emphasizes that employees' expectations, evaluations, and hopes for their work are more important than what they have. To understand the gap between expectations and reality, Lawler suggests three questions

and reality, Lawler suggests three questions that should be considered: What are the employees' wishes? What do they have in mind? What are the possibilities for them?

Discrepancy Theory suggests that JS is the result of a discrepancy between two judgments regarding valued characteristics of work [22]. This assessment is affected by a person's needs, desires, goals, beliefs, values, and aspirations, which are related to different JS theories. Here, the level of congruence between an individual's expectations of each component of their work and the experience of those components determines their level of satisfaction. Locke [22] defines JS as "a positive or pleasant emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences."

Related literature

The involvement of LMX in the connection between SL and JS has received little attention in the literature. However, some earlier investigations looked at the link between JS and SL. For instance, in the study conducted by Sahin [23], an examination was made into the relationship between McGregor's Theory X and Y management styles and their impact on LMX. The results showed a positive correlation between Theory Y and LMX. Additionally, the study revealed that LMX acted as a mediator in the connection between affective commitment and Theory Y management [23]. In addition, Akdol et al. [17] conducted a study using quantitative data to investigate the influence of SL on JS and to explore the mediating effects of LMX on this relationship. According to the results, LMX somewhat mediated the association between JS and SL. In a study conducted by Aggarwal et al. [9], the authors reported that SL has a significant positive impact on LMX, and it also enhances employees' organizational commitment, except for continuous commitment. Additionally, they reported that LMX positively affects employees' commitment levels and SL mediates the relationship between employees' commitment and LMX [9]. Previous studies have indicated that factors beyond LMX may impact the relationship between JS and SL. For instance, van Dierendonc et al. [24] proposed trust and justice in the psychological climate as important elements in this relationship. Additionally, Mayer et al. (2008) demonstrated that organizational justice partially mediates the link between SL and JS. Furthermore, Aboramadan et al. [25] reported that JS serves as a complete mediator in the relationship between educational performance and SL.

Relationship between SL and JS

Several studies have identified a noteworthy relationship between SL and JS [26–28]. Researchers have also compared SL practices with other organizational dynamics in various industries, such as academic institutions, daycares, community foundations, media, public works, health care, government, and high-tech. The results of these studies revealed that SL techniques and JS have a statistically significant positive association. Employee JS can be influenced by employee participation and trust, as well as the opportunity to participate in decision-making and charting the organization's direction. These factors align with Patterson's SL model's components of trust and empowerment, making SL an ideal choice for enhancing employee JS [29]. Previous studies have found measurable effects of SL in different areas, including its influence on JS. Hebert et al. [27] reported a significant correlation between JS and SL. In their study, they assessed both intrinsic and extrinsic JS scale scores. Hebert et al. [27] found a strong positive correlation between JS and Laub's SL dimensions of developing people, valuing people, promoting community, offering leadership, demonstrating authenticity, and sharing leadership, as measured by the OLA and the MCMJSS. Herbert et al. [27] focused on the followers' perspective and found a strong association between their perception of SL and subjective and extrinsic JS, as evaluated by the MCMJSS.

Previous research, such as the study conducted by Aboramadan et al. [25], found a significant relationship between SL and JS in educational institutions, indicating that SL positively impacts JS and ultimately leads to improved educational performance. Similarly, some researchers [30–33] have also found a strong association between SL and JS in several types of businesses and organizations. Accordingly, we propose.
- H1: SL positively affects the JS in private institutions in Kuwait.

Relationship between servant leadership and leader member exchange

SL is known to develop a high level of LMX by empathizing with followers, focusing on their personal development needs, and building interpersonal trust with them [4]. This approach helps establish durable connections between servant leaders and their followers based on mutual trust and benefit. Earlier studies have demonstrated that SL is positively correlated with LMX for several causes, including the servant leaders' empathy, morality, and acceptance, which foster followers' trust [34]. By empowering their subordinates and offering them a respectable degree of responsibility based on their requirements and capabilities, servant

leaders can build strong relationships with their followers. This may lead followers to adopt the servant leader's principles and strive to earn their approval [17]. According to Zeng et al. [35], a harmonious relationship between followers and leaders is essential for the success of SL. SL's underlying belief in the intrinsic value of every individual is reflected in the genuine, humble, and accepting nature of servant leaders, who foster a safe work environment. The success of LMX may thus impact how followers perceive themselves because of SL. Based on these findings, we propose.

- H2: SL positively affects the LMX in private institutions in Kuwait.

Relationship between leader-member exchange and job satisfaction

SL, LMX, and JS are important aspects of achieving an organization's goals and objectives. Various tools are available to measure LMX, with different dimensions and elements. Liden and Maslyn [16] proposed a conceptualized model consisting of four dimensions, which include affection, loyalty, contribution, and respect. The study by Janssen et al. [36] revealed that relationships between mastery orientation and leader-rated in-role work performance, and between JS and leader-rated inventive job performance are mediated by the LMX. Volmer et al. [37] that a strong LMX not only enhances JS but also promotes positive supervisor-employee relationships. Their research highlights the importance of considering the reciprocal relationships between LMX and JS when analysing workplace outcomes. In addition, Heriyadi et al. [38] conducted a study with 169 nursing staff in an Indonesian hospital to investigate the effect of LMX, JS, and work-life balance on organizational citizenship behaviour. The study found that LMX and work-life balance have a significant positive impact on JS and organizational citizenship behaviour, leading to improved performance in health services. Therefore, it is suggested that organizations should focus on developing strong LMX and promoting work-life balance to enhance JS and organizational citizenship behaviour, ultimately resulting in better performance. Based on these findings, we propose

- H3: LMX positively affects the JS in private institutions in Kuwait.

Mediating effect of leader-member exchange between servant leadership and job satisfaction

Although the relationship between SL and JS has been extensively studied by researchers such as [24,25,27] studies exploring LMX's mediation role in the SL-JS interaction are few. According to Graen's LMX theory [15], leaders should cultivate distinct and individualized relationships with each follower, rather than employing a one-size-fits-all approach with their team members. By demonstrating empathy, emphasizing staff growth, and facilitating social trust, SL produces high-quality LMX. This leads to strong supportive relationships with each follower and reciprocally favourable relationships with subordinates and high levels of employee JS. LMX is often used as a mediator between SL and JS, and statistical research shows that being a part of the in-group with a high-quality LMX connection led to greater rewards and JS, as leaders tend to entrust more choices to them. This information is derived from several studies, including those by [16,24,39,40]. Wu et al. (2013) anticipated a positive correlation between SL and LMX, attributing it to the ethical and accepting nature of servant leaders who empathize with their followers, thereby creating a sense of trust and empowerment. This, in turn, allows followers to exercise more autonomy and control over their work, leading to increased JS and a greater likelihood of meeting job requirements. Akdol et al. [17] conducted a study using quantitative data to examine the impact of SL on JS and they found that LMX mediation was significant yet partial, between JS and SL. Based on these findings, we propose.

- H4: LMX mediates the relationship between SL and JS in private institutions in Kuwait.

Methods
Research process
The article utilized a quantitative approach to test the relationships among SL, JS, and LMX. A survey questionnaire was designed to assess these connections, following the recommendation of Tsang et al. [41] to use the survey methodology for analysing and validating interactions among various structures or variables within a large population. The survey approach was chosen as it offers more detailed data than other methods, such as observation, and can help generalize the findings to the entire sample community [41]. The study utilized a structured questionnaire with two main sections, demographic information, and JS, to survey faculty representatives in private teaching institutions in Kuwait. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale of five points (i.e., ranging from strongly disagree as 5 to strongly agree as 1). The inclusion of the neutral option on the scale helped minimize bias by not forcing participants to select a positive or negative response [42].

To ensure that the questionnaire used in the study was accurate and dependable, we tested its face and content validity. Four management professors were surveyed to determine the questionnaire's content validity, and

three Ph.D. candidates were surveyed to determine the questionnaire's face validity. The purpose of the tests was to ensure that the questionnaire was understandable, readable, and in the right format and that its items were accurate. Based on the feedback received, we adjusted the questionnaire [43]. Additionally, we used snowball sampling to validate and refine the questionnaire, which involved sending it to seven people working as academic teachers in private universities in Kuwait and making changes to the questionnaire based on their feedback [42].

Participants

In this research, a convenience sampling method was employed to choose participants from two private universities in Kuwait. These universities were the exclusive ones that consented to take part in the survey. Convenience sampling was deemed appropriate in this context, as it was the most feasible sampling method available for this study [44]. The survey was sent to a total of 240 educators. This study included full-time employees who work for 32 hours per week and focused on the Human Resources, Marketing, Finance, Operations, Sales, and Information Technology departments.

Out of the 240 surveys that were distributed, a high survey response rate of 87.5% was achieved with the return of 210 questionnaires. To prepare the data for analysis, a cleaning process was undertaken to eliminate incomplete data using a multi-screening method, in line with the recommendations of Hair et al [44]. As a result of this preparation process, five surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses in over 10% of the cases. Ultimately, there were 205 usable responses for analysis.

Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)

PLS-SEM was employed in this study to analyse the data. A form of statistical multivariate analysis known as PLS-SEM combines a structural model with a measurement model [45]. In contrast to the structural model, which concurrently evaluates the level of correlation among dependent and independent variables, the measurement model is utilized to investigate the connection between survey outcomes and the fundamental latent variables. The authors opted to use PLS-SEM because of the small sample size, the exploratory nature of the work, and the absence of constraints on the normality of the data [44].

Measures

The study utilized three survey instruments to gather data on JS, SL, and LMX. The SL instrument was adopted from Liden et al. [46], the JS instrument (MCMJSS) was adopted from Mohrman et al. [47], and the LMX instrument was adopted from [15]. The complete list of indicators is provided in Table 1. According to the most recent PLS-SEM recommendations [44], all items with outer loadings below 0.7 were eliminated throughout the route analysis such that their removal did not affect the content validity. For SL, after running the initial loading test, SL2, SL6, SL8, SL17, SL18, SL19, and SL20 all scored above 0.7.

However, due to collinearity between SL18 and SL19, we removed 18, which scored less than SL19. Similarly, for JS, all JS1, JS2, JS3, JS4, JS6, and JS8 all scored above 0.7. However, due to the collinearity between JS2 and JS3, we removed JS2, which scored less than JS3. For LMX, all items scored more than 0.7, except for LMX5, which was removed from further analysis.

Table 1. Questionnaire (1-totally disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-total agree). *Source: [15,46,47].*

I	Servant leadership					
1	I would seek help from my immediate supervisor if I had a personal problem	1	2	3	4	5
2	My immediate supervisor cares about my personal well-being	1	2	3	4	5
3	My manager takes time to talk to me on a personal level	1	2	3	4	5
4	My immediate supervisor can recognize when I'm down without asking me	1	2	3	4	5
5	My immediate supervisor emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community	1	2	3	4	5
6	My immediate supervisor is always interested in helping people in our community	1	2	3	4	5
7	My immediate supervisor is involved in community activities	1	2	3	4	5
8	I am encouraged by my immediate supervisor to volunteer in the community	1	2	3	4	5
9	My immediate supervisor can tell if something is going wrong	1	2	3	4	5
10	My immediate supervisor is able to effectively think through hard problems	1	2	3	4	5
11	My immediate supervisor has a very good understanding of our organization and its goals	1	2	3	4	5
12	My immediate supervisor can solve work problems with new or creative ideas	1	2	3	4	5
13	My immediate supervisor gives me the responsibility to make important decisions about my job	1	2	3	4	5
14	My immediate supervisor encourages me to handle important work decisions on my own	1	2	3	4	5
15	My immediate supervisor gives me the freedom to handle hard situations in the way that I feel is best	1	2	3	4	5
16	When I have to make an important decision at work, I do not have to consult my immediate supervisor first	1	2	3	4	5
17	My career development (my improving and progressing in my career) is very important to my immediate supervisor	1	2	3	4	5
18	My immediate supervisor is interested in making sure that I achieve (reach) my career goals	1	2	3	4	5
19	My immediate supervisor provides me with work experiences that enable me to develop new skills	1	2	3	4	5
20	My immediate supervisor wants to know about my career goals	1	2	3	4	5
21	My immediate supervisor seems to care more about my success than his/her own	1	2	3	4	5
22	My immediate supervisor puts my best interests ahead of his/her own	1	2	3	4	5
23	My immediate supervisor sacrifices his/her own interests to meet my needs	1	2	3	4	5
24	My immediate supervisor does what she/he can do to make my job easier.	1	2	3	4	5
25	My immediate supervisor holds high ethical (moral) standards	1	2	3	4	5
26	My immediate supervisor is always honest	1	2	3	4	5
27	My immediate supervisor would not compromise ethical (moral) principles (standards/values) (give in to wrong values or behaviour) in order to achieve (reach) success	1	2	3	4	5
28	My immediate supervisor values honesty (telling the truth) more than profits (money)	1	2	3	4	5
II	Leader member exchange					
1.	I know where I stand with my leader (follower) . . . [and] I usually know how satisfied my leader (follower) is with what I do?	1	2	3	4	5
2	My leader (follower) understands well my job problems and needs	1	2	3	4	5
3	My leader (follower) recognizes well my potential	1	2	3	4	5
4	Regardless of how much formal authority my leader (follower) has built into his or her position, I have high chances that my leader (follower) would use his or her power to help me solve problems in my work	1	2	3	4	5
5	Regardless of the amount of formal authority my leader (follower) has, I have high chances that my leader would "bail me out" at his or her expense	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have enough confidence in my leader (follower) that I would defend and justify his or her decision if he or she were not present to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I would characterize my working relationship with my leader (follower) as extremely effective	1	2	3	4	5
III	Job satisfaction					
1	The feeling of self-esteem or self-respect you get from being in your job.	1	2	3	4	5
2	The opportunity for personal growth development in your job	1	2	3	4	5
3	The feeling of worthwhile accomplishment in your job	1	2	3	4	5
4	Your present job when you consider the expectations you had when you took the job	1	2	3	4	5
5	The amount of respect and fair treatment you receive from your supervisors	1	2	3	4	5
6	The feeling of being informed in your job	1	2	3	4	5
7	The amount of supervision you receive	1	2	3	4	5
8	The opportunity for participation in the determination of methods, procedures, and goals	1	2	3	4	5

Results and discussion

Demographic profile of respondents

The respondents' demographic profile is shown in Table 2. Considerations include gender, age, employment history, and qualifications. 51.2% of respondents were female, compared to 48.8% of respondents who were males. 64% of the participants were aged between 29 and 35, making 70% of respondents. More than 74 had experience between one to five years. The majority of the respondents (80%) held a bachelor's degree.

Table 2. Respondent demographics. *Source: Authors.*

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	105	51.2%
	Male	100	48.8%
Age	Equal to or below 28	45	21.9%
	29-35	131	63.9%
	36-45	20	9.8%
	Equal to or above 46	9	4.4%
Work experience	1-5 years	152	74.1%
	6-10	28	13.7%
	11- 20	22	10.7%
	More than 20	3	1.5%
Qualification	Bachelor	164	80%
	12th class	9	4.4%
	10th class	1	0.5%
	post-graduation	31	15.1%

To ensure that nonresponse bias does not affect the data analysis, the sample was split into two groups; an early group and a late group and compared their responses using demographic variables [42]. The lack of substantial variations among the two groups in the data suggests that nonresponse bias is not considered a serious issue. Additionally, the researchers used Harman's one-factor test to check for process bias, and the results showed that no one factor could account for a sizable portion of the variation, as recommended by MacKenzie et al. [48]. Thus, this problem did not affect the validity of the calculations. Finally, to reduce common method biases, the researchers scattered items that refer to the same construct throughout the questionnaire, rather than clustering them together [49].

Measurement validation

The measures of SL, LMX, and JS were considered reflective indicators that are influenced by their respective latent constructs, according to the modelling approach used in this study [45]. To confirm the validity of the model, we employed the SmartPLS 4.0 software [50] and conducted tests for construct validity and reliability for all indicators. Our findings showed that all items had satisfactory levels of validity and reliability. A number of parameters, such as reliability and outer loadings of indicators, discriminant validity, construct reliability, and convergent validity, were explored to evaluate the measurement model. The ideal threshold for outer loadings is 0.7, and in Table 3, all the items included had outer loadings larger than 0.7 [45]. However, some items with lower loadings were excluded from further analysis to ensure that the indicator's reliability was supported. In total, the final analysis used six items for SL, six items for LMX, and five items for JS, having minimal impact on the model's overall fit. In this study, the researchers assessed the construct reliability using two measures, namely Cronbach Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). An ideal threshold value of 0.7 was used for both measures to evaluate the construct reliability [45]. According to Table 4, the CR and α values for the constructs were above 0.7, indicating satisfactory construct reliability. The convergent validity was tested using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Each construct has a larger AVE value than 0.7, as shown in Table 4, suggesting sufficient convergent validity.

To ensure discriminant validity, the study conducted two tests: cross-loadings, the Fornell and Larcker criterion, and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio [45]. No indicator had a stronger load on competing constructs than any other, according to the cross-loading test. The Fornell and Larcker criterion showed that each construct has a square root of AVE that exceeds the maximum degree of similarity to other constructs. The bold diagonal cells, shown in Table 4, correspond to the AVE values. As depicted in Table 5, the findings demonstrated that each group of constructs' HTMT ratio fell well short of the conservative threshold of 80. All these tests indicated that

the discriminant validity criteria for all constructs were met.

Table 3. Construct indicator; VIF and loading; *P < .10 (T >1.65), **P < .05 (T > 1.96), ***P < .01 (T >2.58). *Source: Authors.*

	SL	LMX	JS
SL 2	0.719 ***	0.542	0.594
SL 6	0.748 ***	0.561	0.597
SL 8	0.721 ***	0.543	0.478
SL 17	0.740 ***	0.544	0.572
SL 19	0.776 ***	0.503	0.460
SL 20	0.772 ***	0.532	0.513
LMX 1	0.557	0.781 ***	0.549
LMX 2	0.594	0.848 ***	0.542
LMX 3	0.587	0.831 ***	0.595
LMX 4	0.585	0.789 ***	0.550
LMX 6	0.574	0.817 ***	0.577
LMX 7	0.638	0.841 ***	0.610
JS 1	0.556	0.561	0.742 ***
JS 3	0.616	0.573	0.859 ***
JS 4	0.517	0.463	0.779 ***
JS 6	0.524	0.570	0.752 ***
JS 8	0.608	0.563	0.787 ***

Table 4. AVE, α, and CR results. *Source: Authors.*

Latent construct	A	CR	AVE	JS	LMX	SL
JS	0.843 ***	0.846 ***	0.616 ***	**0.785**		
LMX	0.901 ***	0.902 ***	0.669 ***	0.698	**0.818**	
SL	0.841 ***	0.843 ***	0.557 ***	0.722	0.721	**0.746**

Table 5. Direct and indirect effects, HTMT, and effect size (f^2). *Source: Authors.*

Relationship	HTMT ratio	VIF	f^2 value	Direct effect	Lower Interval (2.5%)	Upper Interval (97.5%)	Indirect effect	Lower Interval (2.5%)	Upper Interval (97.5%)
SL → JS	0.849	2.082	0.240	0.455 ***	0.320	0.592	0.267 ***	0.149	0.390
SL → LMX	0.826	1.000	0.450	0.721 ***	0.646	0.790			
LMX → JS	0.798	2.082	0.160	0.371 ***	0.211	0.522			

Test of the Structural Model

To evaluate the structural model the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping (The bootstrapping was run with the following settings: Subsamples: 5000, Complete Bootstrapping, Confidence: Two tailed, Sig. Level: 0.05, and 206 cases) procedures were utilized and several steps were conducted, including assessing the model fit, the structural relationships for multicollinearity, regression, testing hypotheses, the R², and the f^2 statistic [45]. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) test was utilized to evaluate the model fit (i.e., the degree to which the empirical data matches the conceptual model under examination and quantifies the disparity between observed and predicted correlations). A smaller SRMR indicates a better fit between the model's structures and the real-world phenomenon, and an SRMR value less than 0.10 (or 0.08 for a more conservative view) is generally considered indicative of a good fit [50]. Our PLS analysis revealed an SRMR value of 0.069, which is less than 0.08, indicating a good fit for the test model.

To assess multicollinearity, we used the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which should be below 3 [45], as depicted in Table 5. Another important structural model test is the consistency and significance of the path coefficients to evaluate the strength of the relationships between variables. As noted by Hair et al. [45], significant path coefficients are important to confirm that a relationship between two constructs exists. The path coefficients and significance for each path are displayed in Figure 1 and summarized as direct effects in Table 5. Our findings

indicated that all hypotheses were supported. Specifically, SL had a significant impact on JS (H1) (B=0.445, p<0.01), SL had a significant impact on LMX (H2) (B=0.721, p<0.01), and LMX had a significant impact on JS (H3) (B=0.371, p<0.01).

R^2 is a metric used to evaluate how well the model can predict the dependent variable based on the independent variables. An R^2 value of 0.25, 0.50, or 0.75 indicates weak, moderate, or substantial accuracy prediction, respectively [45]. In this study, the R^2 values for SL predicting LMX and JS are 52% and 58.7%, respectively, indicating moderate predictive accuracy. Another test that evaluates the strength between two variables is the f^2 effect size, with values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicating small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively [45]. The study found that SL and LMX have a moderate or medium effect size on JS (f^2 = 0.24 and 0.16, respectively), while SL has a large effect size on LMX (f^2 = 0.45).
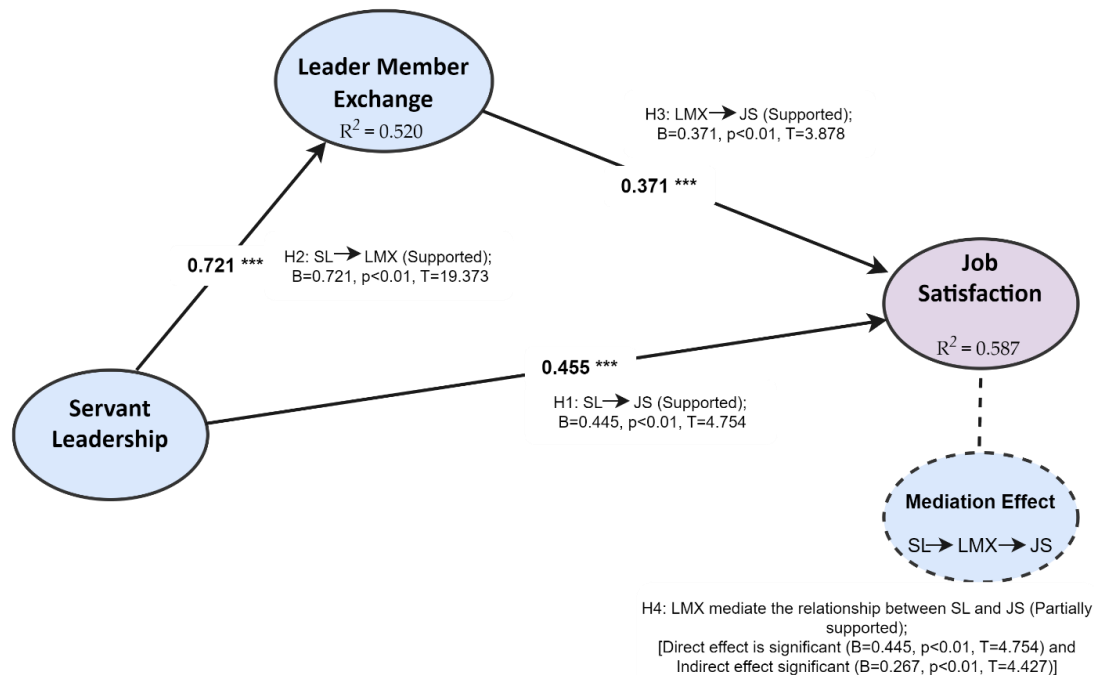

Figure 1. Partial least square SEM results. *Source: Authors.*

Test of the Mediation of LMX on the Relationship between LS and JS
To evaluate the mediating effect of LMX, we followed the approach recommended by Zhao et al. (2010), in which the indirect effects (i.e., SL * LMX) indicate whether LMX mediates the impact of SL on JS. If the indirect effect is significant, we then proceed to examine the direct effect [51]. If the direct effect is significant, it suggests complementary (partial) mediation, while an insignificant direct effect suggests indirect (full) mediation. Our findings reveal a significant indirect effect (B=0.267, p<0.01, T=4.427) and a significant direct effect of SL on JS (B=0.445, p<0.01, T=4.754). These findings imply that the association between JS and SL is either complementary or partially mediated by LMX.

Gender-based Analysis
To determine whether there were any gender differences in the hypotheses, we compared the male and female groups. Given that there were 100 male cases and 105 female cases, we analysed the first 100 cases of the female group and performed PLS analysis on both groups. The results are displayed in Table 6 and reveal a minor distinction between the two groups. Specifically, the male group exhibited greater significance for H1 and H2, while the female group exhibited more significance for H3 and H4. Notably, our findings suggest that the mediation role of LMX is more apparent for females, in the relationship between JS and SL, as indicated by H4.

Table 6. Group analysis results. *Source: Authors.*

Gender	H1	H2	H3	H4	R^2
Male	0.537***	0.744***	0.294***	0.222**	JS=0.611, LMX=0.553
Female	0.395***	0.702***	0.472***	0.331***	JS=0.640, LMX=0.492

Discussion

This study investigated the mediation effect of LMX in the relationship between JS and SL in private universities in Kuwait. The study investigated several hypotheses, namely SL and JS (H1), SL and LMX (H2), LMX and JS (H3), and the mediation effect of LMX (H4). We analysed the data collected (205 surveys) from two universities using PLS-SEM. The results showed that in the SL style, there is a strong emphasis on supporting followers rather than trying to align their interests with those of the organization. SL plays a vital role in influencing LMX and LMX partially mediates the relationship between JS and SL. Additionally, LMX may play a crucial role in influencing follower happiness and contentment. In the following sections, the implications and research limitations are discussed. JS and SL are connected because when leaders put their followers' needs first, it can increase their sense of fulfilment at work. When leaders demonstrate SL traits like empathy, listening, and autonomy, they foster a productive workplace that can raise employee JS. Also, servant leaders may provide their followers the chance to explore their passions and grow their talents, which may enhance their overall JS. However, the robustness of the connection between commitment and SL might fluctuate contingent upon numerous factors, such as organizational culture, individual disparities among employees, and the distinct conduct of the servant leader. As no study is completely inclusive of all possible aspects, some limitations throughout the study were to be noted. As such, the study included two private higher education institutions situated in a specific geographical area with a sample size of 205, and thus the findings and results obtained from this research may not apply to other regions. Data and results from different geographical sites could vary and differ from those of this study. In addition, the sample size of the studied population, which is 205 may not be large, however, PLS-SEM has the capability and robustness to analyse as small as 30 samples [52]. Another limitation of this study lies within the chosen sample as not all academic institutions and their faculties/departments were surveyed, as well as the cohort of the higher education institutions' members and employees as this study focused mainly on the non-faculty (i.e., administration individuals such as employees from executive roles, manager group, and personnel group (team leaders, supervisors, employees)). This may decrease efficiency and representativeness.

Impact

Advocates of SL argue that there are numerous benefits to this leadership style. Empowered staff tend to work more creatively and innovatively, resulting in greater engagement, purpose-driven attitudes, and lower turnover costs for the organization. The findings confirmed that implementing the SL style in private higher education institutions in Kuwait has a positive impact on employees' level of JS, leading to better employee outcomes and productivity, which supports the first hypothesis (H1). These findings provide insights into the potential benefits of applying SL and the importance of balancing learning, service, and leadership [25]. This result is consistent with other research that showed the positive effects of SL on JS [53,54]. Nevertheless, research by Liu et al. [55] on Chinese public sector employees showed that they were unable to properly recognize all the aspects of SL, highlighting the need to consider its dimensionality in many situations. The findings also suggest that the SL approach can be a useful tool for team leaders, supervisors, and managers in the higher education sector to improve employee outcomes, such as JS, productivity, and retention, and enhance the long-term vitality of their organizations [11]. The results also offer proof that embracing the SL approach results in an elevated standard of LMX and a more robust bond between the leader and their followers, as indicated by Hypothesis 2 (H2). This finding is consistent with other earlier research that looked at the connection between SL and LMX and demonstrated a positive effect of SL on LMX (e.g., [33,56]). Leaders who defer credit to others, maintain a low profile, and refrain from seeking praise or rewards for their achievements on behalf of others can decrease employee satisfaction levels [12]. As servant leaders place a great value on their followers' individual consideration and relationship-building, SL may help create LMX partnerships of the highest calibre. Servant leaders may foster good interactions that strengthen trust and loyalty with their followers by actively listening to their followers' needs and responding with encouragement and empowerment [57]. Strong LMX connections can support the JS level (H3). This finding aligns with prior research endeavours that have explored the connection between JS and LMX (e.g., 36-37). Strong ties between leaders and followers may make them feel more at ease talking openly and working together to achieve common objectives, which can promote an SL

Employees' goal orientations, the quality of leader-member exchange, and the outcomes of job performance and job satisfaction culture inside the company and result in more JS. Building trust, affection, and mutual respect at the LMX stage of personalized relationships leads to the formation of stronger links between leaders and followers. Well-trained and trusted employees can continue to grow as future leaders, ensuring the organization's long-term vitality.

The findings, however, partially supported (H4). This result is in line with Akdol et al. [17] findings. This partial mediation may mean that the mediation role of LMX might be effective and positive under certain circumstances on the relationship between JS and SL. This may also suggest that other factors may also play a role in determining employee satisfaction. The findings of this research may help leaders in the importance of prioritizing employee needs, providing them with encouragement and praise, and establishing personalized relationships based on trust, respect, and mutual affection. Moreover, team leaders, supervisors, and managers can foster a culture of empowerment by delegating responsibilities, providing opportunities for skill development and growth, and recognizing employees' contributions and achievements. To sum up, leaders have the authority, influence, and ability to grow and expand employees' JS levels when they demonstrate leadership behaviours, acquire definite leadership styles, and define their position as leaders. This means that these team leaders and managers must expand and enhance their leadership services and talents, as well as adapt their leadership style to the circumstances, settings, and goals they intend to attain. Furthermore, administrative leadership recruiting, for example, which is based on a psychometric exam on SL leader style and readiness, may need to provide leadership style training and growth to all managers and leaders in the institution.

Conclusions

This research endeavours to investigate the influence of SL on JS and to scrutinize the connections between LMX and JS, and LMX and SL, specifically within the private universities in Kuwait. Furthermore, the study aims to assess the mediating role played by LMX in the connection between JS and SL in this sector. Furthermore, the study sought to examine gender differences in the data analysis. The research employed PLS-SEM to test several hypotheses on the connections between SL, JS, and LMX. According to the findings, there were positive and significant relationships observed between SL and JS (H1), SL and LMX (H2), and LMX and JS (H3). However, the mediation impact of LMX (H4) was only partially supported. It was also found that there were no significant differences between males and females in all hypotheses. In conclusion, SL, LMX, and JS are connected conceptions that may have an impact on one another. Positive LMX connections may be facilitated and increased levels of JS among followers through SL activities like empathy and empowerment. Like this, strong LMX connections might encourage an SL culture where leaders put their followers' development and well-being first. High levels of JS among workers may increase their propensity to form wholesome LMX connections and regard their managers as servant leaders. Generally, these ideas are linked and may cooperate to produce productive workplaces and outcomes for people and organizations. To further validate the findings, future research could be conducted in other countries within the Middle East region and with a larger sample size that includes more institutions.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

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