






“Effect of servant leadership on happiness at work of university teachers: The mediating role of emotional salary”

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| ARTICLE INFO | Viancy Gonzales-Macedo, Maria Flores-Lozano, Flor Diaz-Saurin and Jose Joel Cruz-Tarrillo (2023). Effect of servant leadership on happiness at work of university teachers: The mediating role of emotional salary. <i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i> , 21(2), 449-458. doi: 10.21511/ppm.21(2).2023.42 |
| DOI | http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.21(2).2023.42 |
| RELEASED ON | Wednesday, 31 May 2023 |
| RECEIVED ON | Sunday, 26 February 2023 |
| ACCEPTED ON | Thursday, 06 April 2023 |
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| JOURNAL | "Problems and Perspectives in Management" |
| ISSN PRINT | 1727-7051 |
| ISSN ONLINE | 1810-5467 |
| PUBLISHER | LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives” |
| FOUNDER | LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives” |



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

54



NUMBER OF FIGURES

2



NUMBER OF TABLES

4

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine
www.businessperspectives.org

Received on: 26th of February, 2023

Accepted on: 6th of April, 2023

Published on: 31st of May, 2023

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Conflict of interest statement:

Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

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EFFECT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON HAPPINESS AT WORK OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SALARY

Abstract

Undeniably, this new normality brought about by COVID-19 represents an extraordinary challenge for universities, from strengthening infrastructure, technology, and quality of services, to achieving happiness in their collaborators. In response, this study aims to examine the effect of servant leadership on happiness at work, with emotional salary as a moderating variable. The paper adopted a quantitative methodological perspective with a non-experimental design whose study sample consisted of 269 collaborators among teachers and support staff of the Peruvian Union University, Peru. An exploratory factor analysis was performed to determine the latent structure of the constructs, presenting an adequate internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.7$). On the other hand, the confirmatory factor analysis presented an adequate fit. The results showed a significant effect ($\beta = 0.306$; $p < 0.001$) of servant leadership on emotional salary, as well as a significant effect of emotional salary on happiness at work ($\beta = 0.724$; $p < 0.001$). This study provides a valuable perspective for universities seeking to improve the happiness of their employees in the context of the new normal. It emphasizes the importance of servant leadership and emotional salary to achieve this goal. By implementing these strategies, universities can increase employee satisfaction and improve the quality of their services and the student experience.

Keywords

emotional pay, employee satisfaction, job performance, higher education, post-pandemic university

JEL Classification

C38, M12, M54

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated an unprecedented change in university education, from the reduction of personnel, migration to virtual teaching, and learning of technological tools to the generation of high rates of burnout and stress in collaborators due to the work overload they faced during this crisis (Turner, 2022). However, as time passed, opinions have emphasized the value of the collaborator in the organizations (Kubátová, 2019). Thus, since Elton May's studies, it has been sought to determine if happy workers are more productive (Erazo Muñoz & Riaño Casallas, 2021).

As a result, the focus is shifting to deepen the studies on happiness at work (Rehwaladt & Kortsch, 2021). Thus, during this decade, studies have grown exponentially, suggesting that happiness at work is generated (Eckhaus, 2021) through the experience of positive emotions in the workplace (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Indeed, it generates pleasure, institutional commitment, and meaning (Duckworth et al., 2005).

In addition, some postures indicate "work hard" and "be successful, and then you will be happy." Happiness is a cause of success (Walsh

et al., 2018); it is not conditioned to attaining achievements, academic degrees, or managerial positions. However, these aspects are important factors of happiness. Also, it is a high-priority goal in life due to the many benefits that this generates with personal interest. Nevertheless, for organizations that invest in the happiness of their employees (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021), it is closely related to personal aspects, such as:

- a) friendships;
- b) travel;
- c) health;
- d) financial stability;
- e) joy of children;
- f) intimacy with God;
- g) greater professional success;
- h) job performance; and
- i) helping others (Botolotto et al., 2021; Singh & Aggarwal, 2018).

This is why the concern for the care of the collaborator must be constant, given that the world is going through an unprecedented crisis and the return to normality is causing an emotional imbalance in teachers and support staff. Happiness at work has also been studied in the field of educational organizations. Thus, teachers, support staff, and managers must be in optimal conditions (physical and emotional) to provide quality service to students (Kubátová, 2019). In that order of ideas, it is interesting to comprehend how servant leadership and emotional salary influence the happiness of teachers and support staff.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant leadership has been around forever. In biblical times, Jesus was the character that literature considers to be the model of this type of leadership (Maglione & Neville, 2021): his love for others, his concern for others, and his lifestyle made him different from others. In this regard, the literature argues that one of the characteristics of a servant leader is that he presents an ethical perspective. It is paradoxical to compare a leader with a servant. However, he is motivated by the mission of service, where the sole purpose is to achieve the satisfaction of those he leads (Liden et al., 2008; Spears, 2010). In the same vein, the actions of a servant leader make subordinates respect and value the organization (Song et al., 2022). In addition, they are focused on service to followers, even above their own interests (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2022).

Teachers and support staff are significant for educational quality in the university setting. Teacher with servant leader traits no longer looks at students vertically, nor do they address students through orders or expect obedience; rather, they consider students as partners to be perfected to prepare them for good professional performance and success. In addition, a

servant leader has a close relationship with voice behavior and spirituality (Song et al., 2022; Maglione & Neville, 2021). This allows such leaders to achieve high levels of acceptance (Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022). This form of leadership offers a new perspective on the efficacy of alleviating students' depressive symptoms in times of uncertainty, such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2022).

Finally, servant leadership helps the student body perform better, improves engagement, and decreases burnout (Kaltainen & Hakanen, 2022). In addition, it is linked with feedback-seeking behavior (Qin et al., 2021). However, this must be handled with great care, as teachers with servant-leader traits may be victims of manipulation by the student body (Fatima et al., 2021).

The emotional salary has become essential to obtaining better organizational results, such as improving burnout and job satisfaction (Lee, 2019). It helps to keep employees motivated during their workdays (Carpio & Urbano, 2021). However, the research analyzes the organizational culture focusing on emotional salary – a significant link to adequate psychological well-being and good

work culture (Cordero-Guzmán et al., 2022). On the other hand, when inequality is perceived in an organization, employees respond with anger and apathy; the monetary wage can contain and diminish the emotional reactions of individuals who feel in response to inequality (Maitner, 2015). Rode et al. (2017) examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of salary levels. Having a mentor indirectly helps to improve wages for employees. Personality has been implicated as a predictor of wages, suggesting the advantages of using emotional intelligence to complement more readily available measures, such as ability or personality (De Haro et al., 2020).

In order to achieve satisfaction in the collaborators, something more than just money must be delivered, where collaborators feel well remunerated for the sacrifice they make (Salvador-Moreno et al., 2021). In addition, flexible schedules, teleworking, health insurance, bonus system, reconciliation between work time, leisure time, family and personal time, and professional promotion are characteristics of the emotional salary (Carpio & Urbano, 2021). Also, the conditions to perform effective work (environments, laboratories, materials, equipment, and software) and good relations between collaborators and collaborator-boss complement the remuneration that the collaborators receive at the end of the day (M. Giraldo-Osorio & J. Giraldo-Osorio, 2020). The reason is that employees are not only happy monetarily, but emotional factors also play an important role (M. Giraldo-Osorio & J. Giraldo-Osorio, 2020).

Finally, organizations are always concerned about getting the maximum return on each employee's hours. In that sense, the emotional salary also makes employees more effective at work (De Peña, 2020; Carpio & Urbano, 2021).

Workplace happiness is a term that refers to how to achieve employee well-being through a balance of those factors that make employees happy, such as servant leadership and emotional salary. This term is often used, although no absolute definition exists (Kubátová, 2019). People who feel medium or high levels of positive emotions and attitudes are considered happy since positive affect encompasses positive experiences, feelings, moods, and attitudes toward work (Fisher, 2010).

Happiness at work is seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, there is the hedonic spectrum. According to this view, happiness is determined by pleasure, the accumulated experience of achieved affection, centralized fundamentally in the person's feelings. On the other hand, there is the eudaimonic spectrum. This refers to the fact that happiness is the level of inner coherence of self-realization and expression of the individual's potential capabilities (Daniels, 2000; Ferreira et al., 2008; Diener, 2000).

In summary, happiness is the sum of the factors that depend on the control of the will, the circumstances, the living environment, and especially the factors inherited from parents (Velásquez & D'aleman, 2019). Therefore, even though well-being is subjective and circumstantial (Ramirez-Garcia et al., 2019), it is a valuable component, considered an essential aspect of happiness at work, richer and more complex than well-being (Diener, 2000; Pitt & Nally, 1999; Onusic, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of servant leadership on happiness at work, with emotional wage as a moderating variable. After conducting a thorough review of the literature, this paper developed the following hypotheses:

- H1: *Servant leadership significantly influences employees' emotional pay.*
- H2: *Emotional pay significantly influences employees' happiness at work.*
- H3: *Emotional salary has a significant influence on employees' happiness at work.*

2. METHOD

This study has targeted the Peruvian Union University, Peru. Although it is true that in Peru, as in all countries on the planet, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused university education to go through an unprecedented crisis, today, every effort is being made to provide a quality service, gradually returning to face-to-face attendance. The theoretical model is proposed (Figure 1), considering this institution's three university campuses (Lima, Juliaca, and Tarapoto).

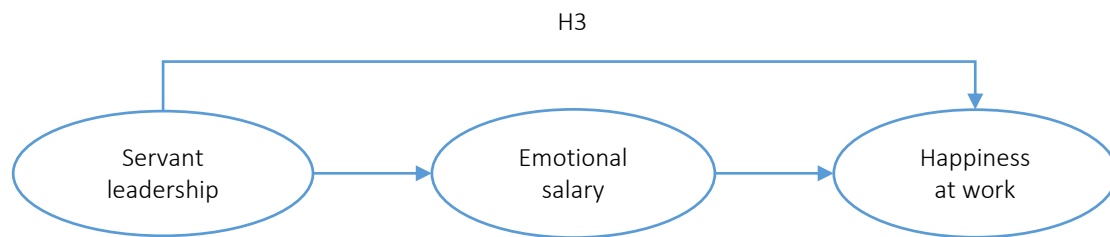


Figure 1. Theoretical model

2.1. Instruments

The study used three instruments. First, the unidimensional scale composed of fourteen items designed by Rivera et al. (2017) was used to measure servant leadership. This scale has seven Likert-type response options, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 is “strongly agree.” It presents adequate internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha higher than the original proposal (Table 2). Second, the paper adopted the scale proposed by Salvador-Moreno et al. (2021) to measure emotional salary. It is composed of three factors: work environment and professional development. It also has five response options, where 1 is “never” and 5 is “always”. Finally, the two-dimensional instrument (job-related and worker-related), validated by Ramirez-Garcia et al. (2019), was used to measure happiness at work. In addition, it has seven response options where 1 is “never” and 7 is “always.” All instruments present adequate internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.7$); therefore, they are viable for application (Cronbach, 1951).

2.2. Sampling and data collection

For the selection of sampling units, this study adopted quota sampling (Chiu et al., 2016; Ragb et al., 2020). The study included collaborators over 18 years of age with a current employment relationship with the institution. For data collection, the authorization of the institution’s ethics committee and the consent of each collaborator were obtained. The data collection instrument was elaborated in a Google Form and subsequently sent to the collaborators with the help of the Human Resources area of each study center. In addition, to comply with the adequate amount, telephone calls were made to the collaborators asking for their participation in this study.

2.3. Data analysis

Data were processed in SPSS V28 and AMOS 24 statistical software. Prior to data analysis, data cleaning was performed. Based on the multivariate distance measure of Mahalanobis (1936), 36 cases were removed, and a final sample of 269 remained. In addition, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to examine the underlying structure of the constructs. Subsequently, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to investigate the relationships between variables through a two-stage approach, as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). First, the measurement model was evaluated using various fit indices (X^2 , GFI, RMSEA, NFI, CFI, AGFI) to determine how well the model matched the observed data, as recommended by Ragb et al. (2020). Next, the structural relationships between servant leadership, emotional salary, and job happiness were examined.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Sample characteristics

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. First, there is a minimal disparity in the gender distribution (53.2% men and 46.8% women). Regarding age, a substantial proportion of the participants (60.6%) belonged to the 18-30 age group. In reference to marital status, there are not many differences, since 54.3% are single and 40.5% are married. Next, 53.5% belong to the contracted group, 37.5% are employees, and 8.9% work full-time at the university.

The religion professed by the respondents is: 78.1% are Adventists, 16.0% are Catholics, 1.9% are Evangelicals, and 4.1% profess other religions. The level of education is also observed, and greater proportion is graduates and teachers. In addition, the study has considered the three campuses of the in-

stitution, from which the following proportion has been obtained: Lima– 18.2%, Juliaca – 28.3% and – Tarapoto 53.5%.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents

| Variables | Categories | Distribution |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Genre | Male | 143 (53.2%) |
| | Female | 126 (46.8%) |
| Age | 18-30 | 163 (60.6%) |
| | 31-40 | 64 (23.8%) |
| | 41-50 | 37 (13.8%) |
| | 51-60 | 5 (1.8%) |
| Marital status | Single | 146 (54.3%) |
| | Married | 109 (40.5%) |
| | Cohabitant | 5 (1.9%) |
| Employment status | Divorced | 9 (3.3%) |
| | Hired | 144 (53.5%) |
| | Employee | 101 (37.5%) |
| Religion | Exclusive dedication | 24 (8.9%) |
| | Adventist | 210 (78.1%) |
| | Catholic | 43 (16.0%) |
| | Evangelical | 5 (1.9%) |
| | Another | 11 (4.0%) |
| Level of education | Technician | 27 (10.0%) |
| | Bachelor | 69 (25.7%) |
| | Licensed | 86 (32.0%) |
| | Master | 75 (27.8%) |
| Campus | Doctor | 12 (4.5%) |
| | Lima | 49 (18.2%) |
| | Juliaca | 78 (28.3%) |
| | Tarapoto | 144 (53.5%) |

Barlett’s test of sphericity resulted in a significant Chi-square value of 3259. 098 and a P value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the variables under investigation are significantly correlated (Pan et al., 2017).

To achieve the objective of the study, the principal component extraction and varimax rotation method (Kaiser, 1960).

In addition, the factor structure of servant leadership is detailed, where the total variance explained is 65.093%. It can be seen that it is above the suggested value (60%). Similarly, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.940, indicating adequate internal consistency in the unidimensional scale (Swales & McIntyre-Bhatty, 2002).

Also, the emotional salary construct obtained $KMO = 0.902$, $\chi^2 = 2702.456$, and $P\text{-value} = 0.000$. Likewise, the total variance explained is 65.159%, with a Cronbach’s alpha for the environmental factor of 0.843; for the development factor, 0.885, and for the flexibility factor, 0.859. On the other hand, for the emotional salary construct, $KMO = 0.949$, $\chi^2 = 3717.790$, $P\text{-value} = 0.000$. Similarly, the total variance explained is 84.541%; with a Cronbach’s alpha for the job-related happiness factor of 0.936 and for the worker-related happiness factor of 0.954.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis of the instruments

| Factors | Emotional Salary | | | Servant Leadership | | Happiness at work | | | | |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------|--------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| | Items | Factor loadings | | Items | Factor loading | Factors | Items | Factor loadings | | |
| Environment | Amb1 | 0.562 | – | – | Liser1 | 0.801 | Happiness at work | F. Trab1 | 0.868 | – |
| | Amb2 | 0.792 | – | – | Liser2 | 0.852 | | F. Trab2 | 0.70 | – |
| | Amb3 | 0.730 | – | – | Liser3 | 0.736 | | F. Trab3 | 0.779 | – |
| | Amb4 | 0.835 | – | – | Liser4 | 0.741 | | F. Trab4 | 0.711 | – |
| | Amb5 | 0.857 | – | – | Liser5 | 0.830 | | F. Trab5 | 0.741 | – |
| Development | Des1 | – | 0.734 | – | Liser6 | 0.862 | Happiness with colleagues | F. col6 | – | 0.659 |
| | Des2 | – | 0.752 | – | Liser7 | 0.838 | | F. col7 | – | 0.783 |
| | Des3 | – | 0.808 | – | Liser8 | 0.826 | | F. col8 | – | 0.825 |
| | Des4 | – | 0.775 | – | Liser9 | 0.860 | | F. col9 | – | 0.774 |
| | Des5 | – | 0.627 | – | Liser10 | 0.857 | | F. col10 | – | 0.804 |
| | Des6 | – | 0.730 | – | Liser11 | 0.734 | | F. col11 | – | 0.885 |
| Flexibility | Flex1 | – | – | 0.515 | Liser12 | 0.867 | – | – | – | |
| | Flex2 | – | – | 0.797 | Liser13 | 0.833 | – | – | – | |
| | Flex3 | – | – | 0.849 | Liser14 | 0.619 | – | – | – | |
| | Flex4 | – | – | 0.593 | – | – | – | – | – | |
| | Blex5 | – | – | 0.814 | – | – | – | – | – | |
| | Flex6 | – | – | 0.711 | – | – | – | – | – | |
| % variance | | 43.380 | 12.161 | 9.619 | – | 65.275 | – | 78.653 | 5.888 | |
| α | | 0.843 | 0.885 | 0.859 | – | 0.940 | – | 0.936 | 0.954 | |

Note: N = 269.

3.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

Table 3 presents the values obtained for different measures of absolute fit to evaluate the goodness of fit of the model. The values obtained indicate that the proposed model fits the observed data well. The Chi-square is acceptable, with a value of 330.774 and a P-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). GFI, RMSEA, NFI, CFI, and AGFI fit index are all above acceptable values. This indicates that the proposed model has a good overall fit and is adequate to explain the relationship between the study variables (Chaulagain et al., 2019).

Table 3. Absolute fit indices of the model

| Absolute adjustment measures | Acceptable values | Values obtained | Result |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Chi-square | - | 330.774 | Accepted |
| P-value | < 0.05 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) | ≥ 0.80 | 0.881 | Accepted |
| Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) | ≤ 0.08 | 0.070 | Accepted |
| Normalized Fit Index (NFI) | > 0.90 | 0.918 | Accepted |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI) | > 0.90 | 0.952 | Accepted |
| Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) | ≥ 0.80 | 0.842 | Accepted |

Note: A = environment, D = development, F = flexibility, FL = job-related happiness, FT = worker-related happiness.

3.3. Hypotheses testing

After developing the model in Figure 2, the structural equation method (SEM) was applied to test the research hypotheses. Thus, it was obtained that *H1* and *H2* are acceptable (see Table 4). The effect of servant leadership on emotional salary (*H1*) is positive with a $\beta = 0.306$ and a $p < 0.001$. The effect of emotional salary on job happiness (*H2*) is positive with a $\beta = 0.724$ and a $p < 0.001$. While *H3* presents different values; thus, the study rejects this hypothesis with a $\beta = 0.101$ and a $p < 0.085$.

Table 4. Research hypotheses testing

| Research hypothesis | | | Path coefficient | P value | Decision |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------|----------|
| H1 | Servant Leadership | → Emotional Salary | 0.306 | *** | Accepted |
| H2 | Emotional Salary | → Happiness at Work | 0.724 | *** | Accepted |
| H3 | Servant Leadership | → Happiness at Work | 0.101 | 0.085 | Rejected |

Note: *** → are significant at .001 level; P-value < 0.05 the hypothesis is accepted.

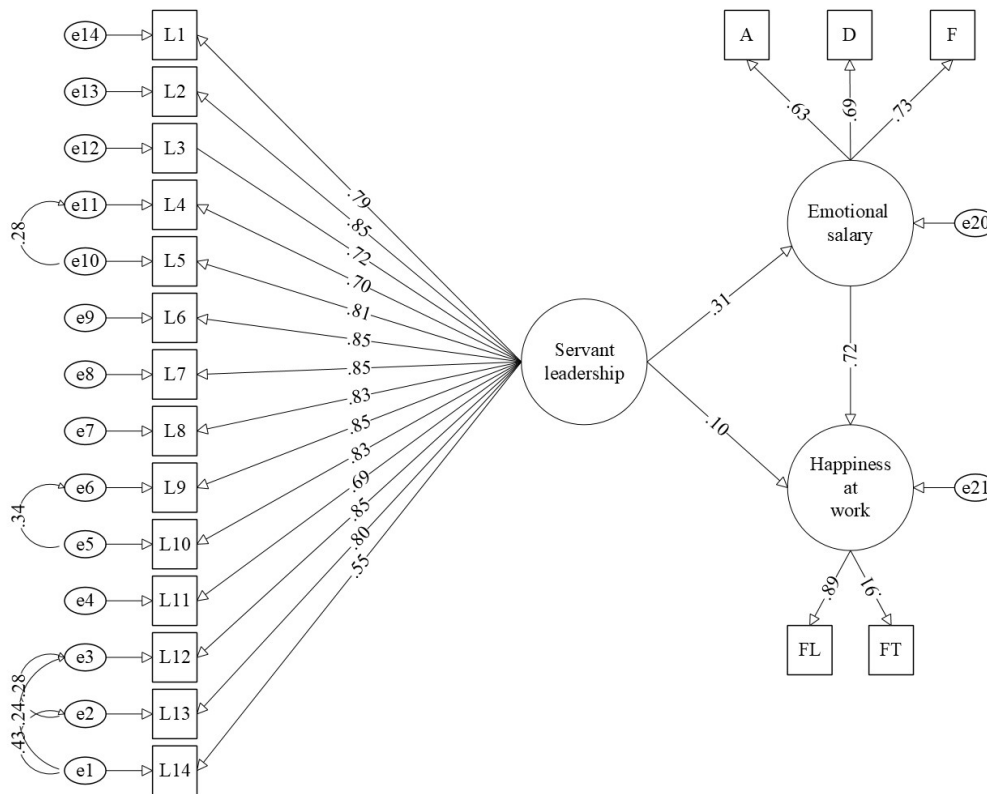


Figure 2. Final structural model

4. DISCUSSION

The study explains how servant leadership generates happiness, with emotional salary as a moderator. In recent years, there has been an interest in studying the influencers of happiness at work (Bailey et al., 2017; Salas Vallina & Guerrero, 2018). However, the topic still requires more attention. Also, universities are service-providing institutions; in that sense, faculty and support staff must have the traits of servant leaders. A particularity of this type of leaders is that they focus on satisfying the student body's needs; hence, universities must strengthen this bond and, consequently, become more competitive. Therefore, the results of this analysis show the need to continue strengthening these concepts (servant leadership, emotional salary, and happiness at work).

According to the findings, servant leadership is a predictor of emotional salary ($\beta = 0.339$ and $p < 0.001$), and emotional salary is a predictor of work happiness ($\beta = 0.770$ and $p < 0.001$), having servant leadership as the main actor (see Figure 2). This paper contributes to previous studies by analyzing a critical aspect of servant leadership that has not been explored to date: the relationship between emotional salary and happiness at work. Previous literature has focused primarily on exploring servant leadership with organizational enablers, satisfaction, trust, creativity, recognition, and satisfaction (Salas Vallina & Guerrero, 2018), satisfaction, trust, creativity, recognition, and independence at work (Alahbabi et al., 2021), levels of effectiveness (de Peña, 2020), organizational culture (Cordero-Guzmán et al., 2022), satisfaction, coaching, and motivation (Carpio & Urbano, 2021). However, servant leadership is essential for generating happiness in teachers and support staff. For this type of leaders, the institutional goals are the main focus, as they concentrate primarily on

meeting the needs of the people (Stone et al., 2004). On the other hand, when students perceive that teachers focus on meeting their needs, there is a more outstanding commitment to the institution (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

However, there is a clear gap between the effects of servant leadership, emotional salary, and happiness at work. Therefore, faculty and staff with servant leadership traits could more effectively meet the student's needs. On the other hand, leaders of academic units should encourage their departments to support faculty to demonstrate growth in faculty competencies, which will affect the fulfillment of commitment, doing things properly, being willing to make sacrifices, and valuing each of its members.

Derived from the above, this paper has some limitations. Namely, the study addresses the effects of servant leadership on emotional salary and job happiness in teaching and non-teaching staff at the university level. Unfortunately, this analysis has not examined satisfaction and engagement in the student body. Also, the study was conducted in one institution, so these results could not be generalized, because it would generate a significant bias.

Future research can further explore this topic, considering other institutions as an essential contribution. The happiness of the collaborator could be better understood by analyzing personal aspirations, family nucleus, the types of leaders they have, and other socio-demographic variables. In this line, COVID-19 has marked a before and after in the academic field. Although health restrictions are increasingly permissible and the return to face-to-face classes is evident, teleworking and digitalization will continue to be of greater importance. In that sense, adding these variables to leadership, emotional salary, and happiness at work is recommended.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to provide a broader picture of servant leadership, emotional salary, and happiness at work in a post-pandemic university context. The results analyze the effect of servant leadership on happiness at work, with emotional salary as a moderating variable.

According to the exploratory factor analysis, the latent structure was confirmed. It should be noted that, for the servant leadership instrument, the theory held that the data were grouped into a single dimension, which was confirmed in this study. Likewise, concerning the emotional salary construct, it also

coincides with the theory since it was grouped into three factors. Similarly, the emotional salary instrument shows a two-dimensional structure.

This study shows a significant effect of servant leadership ($\beta = 0.306$; p -value = 0.000) on emotional salary and indirectly on happiness at work. Emotional salary significantly predicts ($\beta = 0.724$; p -value = 0.000) happiness in teachers and support staff. The paper contributes to studying servant leadership, emotional salary, and work happiness because it supports the proposed constructs, as they can be replicated in a university context. On the other hand, this study empirically confirms the proposed model, in which servant leadership indirectly influences work happiness through emotional salary.

In a scenario of uncertainty, such as the one the world is going through, it is vital to understand the needs of employees. In that sense, this paper is relevant to human talent management: it can help to reflect on the type of leaders that are being put to manage people as this impacts happiness and job performance. On the other hand, the concern of each company, in theory, is always to keep its employees happy; however, achieving this challenge is complex and uncertain due to variations in the personality, culture, and context of the collaborators.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Writing – original draft: Viancy Gonzales-Macedo, Maria Flores-Lozano, Flor Diaz-Saurin.

Writing – review & editing: Viancy Gonzales-Macedo, Maria Flores-Lozano, Flor Diaz-Saurin, Jose Joel Cruz-Tarrillo.

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