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## Fostering the Human Resource Productivity in Sport Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of servant leadership on the human resource productivity through whistleblowing considering the moderating role of work ethics. The current research method is correlation, which was carried out in the field. The statistical population of the research was the employees in track and field sport in Iraq, 152 people were selected as a sample using the convenient method. The servant leadership questionnaires of Luu (2019), the whistleblowing of Park and Blenkinsopp (2009), the Human resources productivity of Hersey and Goldsmith (1980), and the work ethics of Bateman and Snell (2004) were used. SPSS version 18 and PLS version 3 software were used for data analysis. The results showed that servant leadership has a significant relationship with human resource productivity and whistleblowing. Also, there is a significant relationship between whistleblowing and human resource productivity. Finally, there is a significant relationship between servant leadership and human resource productivity with the moderating role of work ethic. Servant leadership is a management approach that prioritizes the well-being and growth of employees, leading to improved human resource productivity and organizational performance. This leadership style, which involves serving employees rather than commanding them, has been shown to have a significant positive impact on productivity and whistleblowing within organizations. By fostering an employee-centric approach and a culture of trust, safety, and open communication, servant leaders can encourage employees to speak up about unethical practices, leading to a more transparent and accountable work environment.

## Introduction

Tangen (2005) defines productivity as how much and how we produce from the resources used. This researcher states that if we produce more or better services or goods from the same resources, we have increased productivity; or if we produce the same services or goods from fewer resources,

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we also increase productivity. "Resources" means all human and physical resources, i.e. people who produce goods or provide services and assets with which people can produce goods or provide services. Human resource efficiency in sports organizations is important and vital for various reasons. For example, effective human resource management practices are necessary to manage professionals and volunteers in sports organizations (Taylor & McGraw, 2006). These practices are critical for optimizing the performance of employees and volunteers, ensuring their participation, and fostering a positive organizational culture (Aisbett & Hoye, 2015). In addition, leadership styles adopted in sports organizations play an important role in organizational learning and overall productivity (Megheirkouni, 2017). The productivity of human resources in sports organizations is also influenced by external factors such as the economic and financial environment of society (Wicker & Breuer, 2015). Understanding and managing these external factors is crucial to ensure that sports clubs have the necessary human, infrastructural and financial resources to operate effectively. In addition, human resource management in sports organizations can directly affect employee outcomes, organizational image, and overall success (Safwan et al., 2023). In this regard, it is necessary to develop human resource management systems according to the specific needs of sports organizations to achieve organizational goals (Javadipour et al., 2020). These systems help to effectively manage resources, including time, energy, activities, and finances, to enhance organizational performance and achieve strategic goals. As a result, the efficiency of human resources in sports organizations is important and necessary to optimize performance, strengthen employee participation, effectively manage resources, and increase the overall success of the organization. However, sports organizations have several challenges, especially in the efficiency of human resources (Weerakoon, 2016). Thus, this research came up to address this issue.

Studies have investigated various dimensions of human resource management in service organizations and clarify the key factors affecting productivity. Schneider and Bowen (1993) highlight the vital role of human resource management in service organizations and emphasize the importance of effective human resource practices in increasing the overall performance of the organization. Li et al. (2018) discuss the importance of service learning in the development of service human resources that serves as a foundation for sustainable service-based social innovation. These studies emphasize the need for continuous learning and human resource development to drive innovation and sustainability in service organizations. Roth and Menor (2003) provide insights into service operations management and emphasize the importance of designing, delivering and evaluating services effectively. They emphasize the need for a comprehensive framework that addresses the unique challenges of human resource management in service businesses. In addition, Yusuf et al. (2021) highlight the impact of human resource development on public service performance and emphasize the role of superior human resources in increasing service quality and public satisfaction. Chelladurai and Kim (2022) emphasize the importance of understanding the three main groups that make up human resources in sport organizations: paid professional staff, volunteers and customers. This highlights the diverse nature of human resources in the sports sector. Also, Weerakoon (2016) emphasizes the importance of investing in human resources for effective organizational operations in sports businesses. This highlights the pivotal role of human resources in achieving the goals of sports organizations. These studies collectively emphasize the importance of strategic human resource management, continuous learning and development, and strategic alignment of human resource practices with organizational goals to increase productivity in service organizations such as sports organizations. However, although researchers examined human resource productivity from some angles, so far research have paid little attention to the role of leaders and their style, as well as ethical concepts on human resource productivity, and there is a scientific gap in this field. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine these gaps.

While existing literature has extensively explored various aspects of servant leadership, organizational behavior, and leadership styles, the proposed research stands out in several keyways. Firstly, the study delves into the intersection of servant leadership, organizational whistleblowing, and work ethics, offering a novel perspective on how these factors interact to influence human resource productivity. By examining the moderating role of work ethics in the relationship between servant leadership and organizational whistleblowing practices, the research sheds light on the nuanced dynamics at play within organizational settings. Secondly, the focus on organizational

whistleblowing as a mechanism for fostering productivity sets this study apart from previous research that has primarily concentrated on the positive outcomes of servant leadership in terms of employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior. By exploring how servant leadership practices can encourage a culture of transparency and ethical behavior through whistleblowing mechanisms, the study addresses a critical gap in literature. Moreover, the incorporation of work ethics as a moderating factor adds a layer of complexity to the analysis, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in shaping leadership practices and organizational outcomes. By highlighting the significance of work ethics in influencing the effectiveness of servant leadership behaviors and their impact on human resource productivity, the research offers valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in the field. Therefore, in this research, we seek to investigate whether servant leadership has an effect on the productivity of human resources and organizational whistleblowing, taking into account the moderating role of work ethic. This research was conducted in Iraq as a developing country with an emerging market. Burgess and Steenkamp (2013) stated that researchers should develop new models and theories that are applicable in emerging markets with different conditions. Therefore, in this study, the proposed conceptual model is tested for sports clubs in Iraq as an emerging market in November 2023.

## **Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development**

### **Theoretical Basis**

The theoretical underpinning of this study lies in the social learning theory, which suggests that individuals learn from observing the behavior of others, particularly leaders (Decker, 1986). Servant leaders model ethical behavior and prioritize the needs of their followers, creating a culture where ethical conduct is valued (Lemoine et al., 2019; Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). This, in turn, influences employees to uphold ethical standards and engage in whistleblowing when necessary to maintain organizational integrity.

### **Servant Leadership and Productivity**

Servant leadership, “a leadership approach by which leaders set aside their self-interest and altruistically work for the benefit of their followers, and the communities in which they operate” (Newman et al., 2017, p. 49), has been shown to have a positive effect on various aspects of organizational behavior. In the field of human resource productivity in the service industry, servant leadership plays an important role. Studies have shown that servant leadership enhances intrinsic motivation (Su et al., 2020), service-oriented behaviors (Bentein et al., 2022), and innovative behavior (Ji & Yoon, 2021). This leadership style is associated with increased employee involvement (Ali Hossein et al., 2023), organizational performance (Jalali Farahani & Freydoni, 2020), and service quality (Liu et al., 2023). In addition, servant leadership is associated with increased job involvement (Mubin et al., 2022), organizational identification (Omanwar & Agrawal, 2022), and decreased turnover intention (Khan et al., 2022). The theoretical foundations of servant leadership support its effectiveness in increasing productivity in human resources. Servant leadership theory is based on the principle of prioritizing service to others (Ogochi et al., 2022), which aligns with the service-oriented nature of the industry. By focusing on employee needs and development, servant leaders create a supportive environment that can lead to increased productivity. In addition, it has been found that servant leadership has a positive effect on employee self-efficacy (Zeeshan et al., 2021) and increases their performance and productivity. Servant leadership has been associated with promoting proactive behavior (Moreno et al., 2021), fostering customer service behaviors (Yang et al., 2018), and enhancing service quality (Liu et al., 2023). These results are very important in the service industry, where customer satisfaction and service quality are a priority. By emphasizing empathy, ethical behavior, and employee development, servant leaders can create a work environment conducive to high levels of productivity among human resources. As a result, empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that servant leadership affects the productivity of human resources in the service industry by positively affecting various aspects of employee behavior and performance. Servant leadership helps to increase the productivity of human resources in service-oriented organizations by prioritizing the needs of employees, fostering internal motivation, and fostering a service-oriented culture. Therefore, it is

imperative to examine the relationship between servant leadership and productivity in sport context. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H1.** Servant leadership is positively associated with the productivity of human resources.

### **Servant Leadership and Whistleblowing**

Research on servant leadership has highlighted its role in promoting ethical behavior, trust, and organizational culture (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Whistleblowing, “refers to the disclosure by organization members of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action” (Nayir et al., 2018, p. 147), is critical to maintaining transparency and ethical standards. Servant leaders prioritize the well-being of their followers and create an environment in which ethical behavior is valued (Kauppila et al., 2022). This emphasis on ethical behavior is consistent with the principles of whistleblowing, as it encourages employees to speak up against misconduct. In addition, servant leadership has been associated with fostering a culture of openness, psychological safety, and empowerment (Liu et al., 2015). These factors are essential to creating an environment where employees feel comfortable reporting wrongdoing without fear of retaliation. Servant leaders build strong relationships with their followers and instill a sense of loyalty and responsibility for the well-being of the organization. In addition, servant leadership is associated with the promotion of organizational citizenship behavior (Theng et al., 2021), which includes actions that go beyond formal job requirements to benefit the organization. Whistleblowing can be considered a form of organizational citizenship behavior, where employees go beyond their duties to protect the integrity of the organization. Servant leaders who encourage organizational citizenship behavior through their leadership style are likely to create a culture where whistleblowing is seen as a positive contribution to the organization. In conclusion, the theoretical underpinnings of servant leadership support its potential impact on organizational disclosure in the service context. By fostering ethical behavior, trust, openness, and commitment, servant leaders create an environment conducive to the disclosure of activities that support organizational values and integrity. It is thus important to test the relationship between servant leadership and whistleblowing in sport context. This leads to our second hypothesis:

**H2.** Servant leadership is positively associated with whistleblowing.

### **Whistleblowing and Productivity**

Research shows that whistleblowing can lead to improved organizational performance by addressing issues that hinder productivity (Santhanam et al., 2017). When employees feel empowered to report wrongdoing, it can help identify and correct inefficiencies and ultimately increase productivity levels. In addition, whistleblowing can strengthen the culture of accountability and transparency in the organization (Santhanam et al., 2017). When employees are encouraged to speak up about their transgressions, a sense of responsibility and ownership is created among the workforces. This culture of accountability can lead to improved communication, problem solving, and collaboration, all of which are essential for increased productivity in the service industry. Accordingly, examining the relationship between whistleblowing and productivity in sport context is warranted. We posit the following hypotheses:

**H3.** Whistleblowing is positively associated with the productivity of human resources.

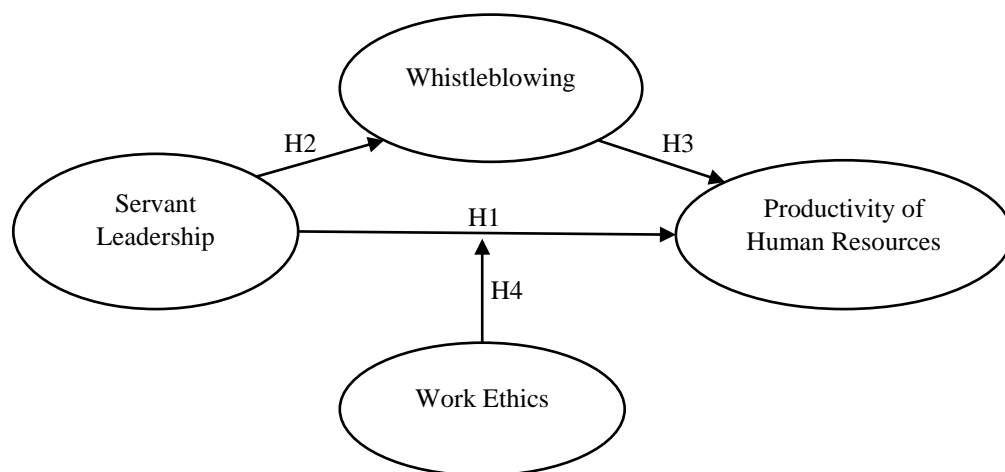
### **The Moderating Role of Work Ethics**

Servant leadership, characterized by a focus on serving others and promoting their well-being, has been found to significantly impact various outcomes such as work effort, flourishing, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee productivity (Özkan et al., 2023). Additionally, the presence of an ethical work climate has been shown to moderate the relationship between servant leadership and employee-based brand equity, further emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in the context of leadership (Zhang & Guo, 2022). Work ethics is defined as “a set of moral rules for professions and behavior in the workplace” (Tadesse Bogale & Ayenew Birbirs, 2023, p. 4). Research has indicated that group job satisfaction can moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee work engagement, highlighting the significance of organizational factors in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020). Studies have also explored the interplay between ethical leadership, work engagement, and (counter) productive work behavior, shedding light on the complex relationships between leadership styles and employee



outcomes (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Moreover, a meta-analysis has suggested that servant leadership, along with other leadership styles, can have a similar effect on work engagement, underscoring the importance of leadership in driving employee engagement (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021). In the context of servant leadership and productivity, it has been proposed that corporate work culture may act as a moderating factor in strengthening or weakening the relationship between servant leadership and innovation self-efficacy, ultimately influencing employee productivity (Sudarmo et al., 2022). Additionally, the presence of an employee-oriented human resource policy has been identified as a moderator that strengthens the relationship between servant leadership and job performance, highlighting the role of organizational practices in enhancing the effects of leadership on employee outcomes (Ludwikowska, 2023). Overall, the theoretical justification for the hypothesis that work ethics moderate the relationship between servant leadership and human resource productivity is supported by research emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations, organizational factors, and leadership styles in shaping employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. Therefore, the positive association between servant leadership and productivity proposed in Hypothesis 1 will be strengthened when employees have higher work ethics compared to when they have lower work ethics. Correspondingly, work ethics may moderate the relationship between servant leadership and productivity. Our final hypothesis is: **H4.** Work ethics will moderate the association between servant leadership and productivity such that the effect is stronger (weaker) at higher (lower) levels of work ethics.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypothesized relationships investigated in the current study.



**Figure 1** - Hypotheses of structural model.

## Methodology

The current research method is correlation, which was carried out in the field. The statistical population of the research included all the employees who work in track and field sports in Iraq. Due to the impossibility of access to all members (around 260 members throughout country), 152 people were selected as a sample based on Morgan's table through convenience sampling. The data was collected face-to-face.

First, the library method was used to review literature. In order to select the tool, after a deep review of the previous literature, especially in the field of services, the researchers used the following standard questionnaires, which are from reliable scientific publications, to collect data. Servant leadership: The questionnaire of Luu (2019) was used, which has 23 questions. For example, questions were "My supervisor spends the time to form quality relationships with others." "My supervisor holds department employees to high ethical standards." Whistleblowing: the eight-question questionnaire of Park and Blenkinsopp (2009) was used. For instance, some questions were "Let the upper level of management know about it". "Report it to the appropriate persons within the organization." Human resources productivity: the seven-question questionnaire of Hersey and Goldsmith (1980) was used. Some questions include "How encouraged are you to question the

right way to do things?”. “To what extent are you warned by the managers for mistakes due to lack of proper understanding of the work?”. Work ethics: The questionnaire of Bateman and Snell (2004) was used, which has 23 questions. For instance, we have asked “When the workday is over, people should forget about their work and enjoy their time”. “Hard work does not make a person a better person”. To measure validity, the questionnaires were reviewed by 8 sports management professors. The reliability of the questionnaires was also calculated in a preliminary study that included 30 sample people through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the coefficient was higher than 0.74 on the questionnaires. In the results section, the reliability of the questionnaires is fully reported.

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the data in the descriptive section. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was employed for data analysis. Note that PLS makes less demand compared to covariance-based approaches such as distributions, sample sizes, and measurement scales (Chin, 1998). All the measurements in this study were reflective, and the internal consistency, indicator reliability, and convergent validity were assessed (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2016). Internal consistency reliability was tested by calculating composite reliability (CR) (Chin, 1998; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), while indicator reliability was tested using outer indicator loadings. Both values should exceed the threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2016). Convergent validity was inspected using the average variance extracted (AVE) (Chin, 1998), which should exceed the threshold of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, SPSS version 18 and PLS version 3 software were used.

## Results

The results of the descriptive statistics section showed a total of 152 participants, 50.7% of whom are men (77 people) and 49.3% women (75 people). In terms of education, the highest frequency with 42.8% (65 people) is master's degree and the lowest frequency with 21.7% (33 people) is related to doctorate. Regarding the age distribution of the samples, the highest frequency with 36.8% (56 people) is 41 to 50 years old and the lowest frequency with 11.8% (18 people) is related to 60 years and above.

Cronbach's alpha value higher than 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability. Of course, some statistical researchers have introduced the value of 0.6 as the upper limit of Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the case of variables with a small number of questions. According to the results presented in table (1), it can be concluded that the research variables have high internal reliability. Since Cronbach's alpha criterion is a traditional criterion for determining the reliability of constructs, the PLS method uses a more modern criterion than alpha called composite reliability. The superiority of composite reliability over alpha is that the reliability of structures is not calculated in absolute terms but based on the correlation of their structures with each other. It is also very important to calculate those indicators with higher factor loading. If the combined reliability value for each structure is higher than 0.7. It shows good internal consistency for measurement models and a value less than 0.6 indicates lack of reliability. According to the values presented in table (1) and the model has good reliability.

**Table 1.** Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	composite reliability
Servant leadership	0.87	0.90
Whistleblowing	0.83	0.88
productivity	0.85	0.89
Work ethics	0.89	0.92

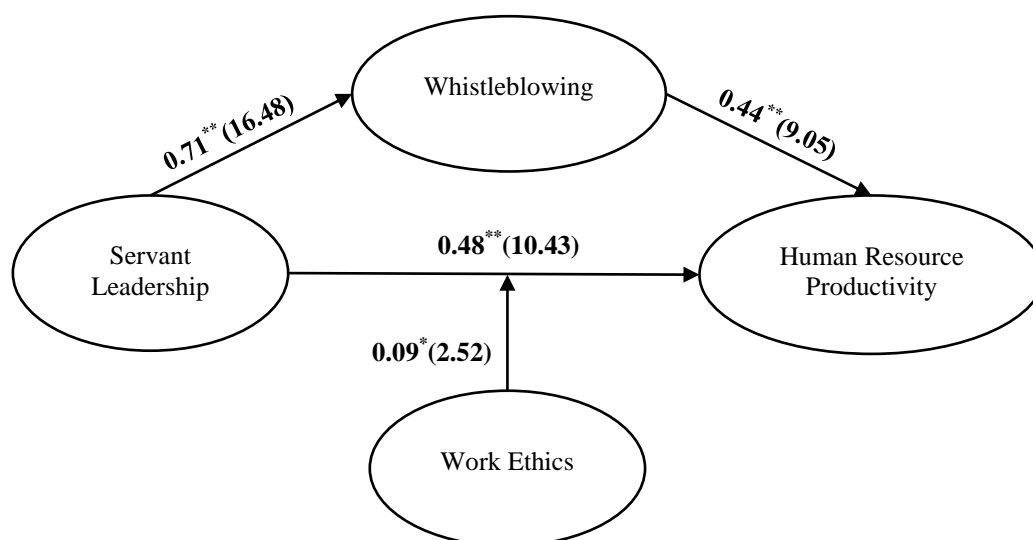
For the validity of the constructs (discriminative validity), Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that the root mean of the extracted variance of each variable should be greater than the correlation of that variable with other variables. This means that the correlation of each hidden variable and its

indicators (manifest variables) must be higher than the correlation of that variable with other variables. The root mean variance extracted is given at the end of each row in Table 2. The values of each variable are higher than the correlation of each variable with other variables, and this indicates the acceptable validity of the measurement tools.

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix of research variables and square root of AVE

Variable	1	2	3	4
<b>Servant leadership</b>	<b>0.75</b>			
<b>Whistleblowing</b>	0.56	<b>0.78</b>		
<b>productivity</b>	0.43	0.46	<b>0.73</b>	
<b>Work ethics</b>	0.29	0.48	0.23	<b>0.80</b>

To determine the appropriate fit of the research model in PLS software, we used Q<sup>2</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> coefficients. Q<sup>2</sup> coefficient or predictive power for whistleblowing is 0.29 and for human resource productivity is 0.5, which is higher than 0.15 and 0.35. These coefficients indicate the good fit of the structural model. Also, R<sup>2</sup> coefficient or determination coefficient of 0.79 was obtained, which is higher than 0.67. This coefficient also indicates the appropriate fit of the structural model. Based on the data analysis algorithm in the PLS method, after checking the fit of the measurement, structural and general models, the research hypotheses are tested by checking the significant coefficients of each of the paths as well as the standardized coefficients of the factor load related to the paths. If the t value of each path is more than 1.96, the corresponding path is confirmed at the 95% confidence level and the related hypothesis is confirmed. Based on the conceptual model tested in Figure (1), the output shows the t coefficients. Therefore, at the 95% confidence level, the predicted paths of servant leadership - whistleblowing, servant leadership – human resource productivity, whistleblowing - human resource productivity, and servant leadership \* work ethics - human resource productivity are significant.



**Figure 1.** Structural model with path coefficients and T values. (\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .001$ )

**Table 3.** Standardized Structural Model Results

Path	Coefficient	t-value
<b>Direct effects</b>		
Servant leadership → Human resource productivity ( <b>H1</b> )	.48**	10.43
Servant leadership → Whistleblowing ( <b>H2</b> )	.71**	16.48
Whistleblowing → Human resource productivity ( <b>H3</b> )	.44**	9.05
<b>Indirect effects</b>		
Servant leadership * Work ethics → Human resource productivity ( <b>H4</b> )	.09*	2.52

\* $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

After the standard estimation was done, the cause-and-effect relationship between the research constructs was examined. As can be seen in table 3, the relationship between research variables is confirmed because their significant numbers are not between 1.96 and -1.96. In other words, servant leadership has a direct, positive, and significant relationship with human resource productivity ( $t=10.43$ ;  $\beta=0.48$ ). Servant leadership has a direct, positive, and significant relationship with whistleblowing ( $t=16.48$ ;  $\beta=0.71$ ). Whistleblowing has a direct, positive, and significant relationship with human resource productivity ( $t=9.05$ ;  $\beta=0.44$ ). Work ethics has a moderating role in the relationship between servant leadership and human resource productivity ( $t=2.52$ ;  $\beta=0.09$ ).

## Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, servant leadership was positively associated with the productivity of human resources. Servant leadership, characterized by humility, authenticity, and a focus on serving others, has been recognized for its potential impact on human resource productivity (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2020). This leadership style emphasizes creating a supportive and empowering environment for employees, which can lead to increased job resources and a more productive working climate (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2020). By prioritizing the well-being and development of employees, servant leaders can enhance job satisfaction, engagement, and overall productivity within organizations. Furthermore, servant leadership has been examined concerning job boredom and crafting, highlighting its role as a contextual resource that can mitigate boredom and enable employees to enhance their resources and engagement (Harju et al., 2018). By fostering a culture of trust, support, and autonomy, servant leaders can empower employees to take ownership of their roles, leading to increased job satisfaction and productivity (Harju et al., 2018). In human resource management, servant leadership has been studied to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement (Uktutias et al., 2022). The results suggest that servant leadership can positively impact emotional well-being, reduce emotional tiredness, and contribute to the development of healthier partnerships at work, ultimately enhancing productivity (Uktutias et al., 2022). Servant leadership can contribute to curbing burnout and enhancing psychological safety among employees, which are crucial factors for maintaining high levels of productivity (Ma et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 2 was supported, as servant leadership was positively associated with whistleblowing. Research has shown that servant leadership is associated with positive deviant behavior through self-determination theory (Brière et al., 2021). This suggests that servant leaders, by prioritizing the needs of their followers and promoting autonomy, can encourage behaviors that go beyond the norm in a positive manner (Brière et al., 2021). These findings highlight the role of servant leadership in nurturing positive employee attitudes and behaviors. In the context of whistleblowing, servant leadership's emphasis on ethical behavior, empathy, and creating a supportive environment could encourage a culture where employees feel safe and empowered to speak up about misconduct or unethical practices. By fostering trust, open communication, and a sense of responsibility



towards others, servant leaders may create a climate that values transparency and accountability, thus positively influencing whistleblowing behaviors within an organization. Implementing servant leadership practices involves training managers to embody humility, authenticity, and a focus on serving others (Ludwikowska, 2023).

H3 was supported, as whistleblowing was positively associated with the productivity of human resources. Organizational whistleblowing, the act of employees reporting unethical behavior or misconduct within an organization, has been found to have an effect on human resource productivity. This relationship carries significant theoretical implications for understanding the dynamics between organizational transparency, employee behavior, and productivity levels. The study by Combs et al. (2006) emphasizes the impact of high-performance work practices (HPWPs) on organizational performance. While HPWPs are known to affect organizational outcomes, the varying sample characteristics and research designs make estimating the overall effect challenging. This complexity underscores the importance of considering contextual factors, such as whistleblowing, in understanding the relationship between organizational practices and productivity. (Datta et al., 2005) highlight the role of human resource management in influencing labor productivity. The contextual conditions that moderate the efficacy of human resource practices are crucial in determining their impact on organizational effectiveness. This perspective suggests that the effectiveness of whistleblowing in enhancing human resource productivity may be influenced by the broader organizational context and the interplay of various human resources practices.

Finally, we showed that work ethics play a crucial role in moderating the relationship between servant leadership and human resource productivity. Strong work ethics within an organization can enhance the effectiveness of servant leadership by reinforcing ethical standards and promoting a culture of integrity and accountability. resource productivity is influenced by various factors, including leadership styles, organizational culture, and employee engagement. Servant leadership has been shown to positively impact productivity by fostering trust, collaboration, and employee development (Zada et al., 2022). When combined with strong work ethics, servant leadership can further enhance human resource productivity by aligning individual values with organizational goals.

### **Practical Implications**

Our study generates several important managerial implications. First, we established servant leadership's crucial role in stimulating human resource productivity and whistleblowing. To drive servant leadership, organizations can focus on promoting servant leadership behaviors that prioritize employee well-being to create a positive work environment conducive to productivity. Also, servant leadership has been associated with promoting creativity and innovation among employees (Liu et al., 2022). By encouraging a culture of servant leadership, organizations can stimulate employees' creativity, leading to the generation of innovative ideas and solutions that can enhance productivity and organizational performance. Also, by integrating human resource policies with servant leadership, organizations can enhance employee performance and job satisfaction, which in turn may positively influence whistleblowing behaviors (Ludwikowska, 2023). This highlights the importance of aligning leadership styles with organizational policies to create a cohesive and supportive work environment. Furthermore, organizations can leverage the positive deviant behavior associated with servant leadership to encourage employees to engage in ethical behaviors that uphold organizational values (Brière et al., 2021). In addition, by promoting a culture of ethical conduct and accountability, servant leaders can set the tone for employees to feel comfortable and encouraged to speak up about wrongdoing (Anita et al., 2021). This can contribute to a more ethical organizational climate and reduce the likelihood of unethical practices going unnoticed.

Second, the results of the study indicate that managers should create a positive interaction with employees to feel comfortable speaking up about wrong things in the workplace. Encouraging and supporting whistleblowing within the organization can foster a culture of transparency and accountability. Organizations should establish clear channels for reporting misconduct and ensure

that whistleblowers are protected from retaliation. This transparency can contribute to a more ethical work environment, enhancing employee trust and commitment, which are essential for improving human resource productivity (Kang, 2023).

### Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations in the current study. First, this research is based on a single context, which limits the generalizability of the current research model. In order to generalize the results, it is recommended that future studies be performed in other sports contexts or industries. Second, the cross-sectional data do not consider the impact of the past causal association of servant leadership, human resource productivity, and whistleblowing. A longitudinal study would further strengthen the results and overcome this limitation. We considered work ethics as a moderating variable that would influence the relationship between servant leadership and human resource productivity. Several other factors may be related to productivity (e.g., operational capabilities, Saunila et al., 2020). Future studies could consider additional factors such as employee engagement as moderating variables. Our study has investigated antecedents of human resource productivity that are mutual between employees and organizations. It is helpful that future research considers variables that can affect human resource productivity such as employees' psychological factors.

### Ethical Considerations

**Compliance with ethical guidelines:** Ethical points have been observed.

**Funding:** No specific financial resources have been used.

**Authors' contribution:** All authors have contributed to the design and implementation of this study.

**Conflict of interest:** there is no conflict of interest.

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