PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AS A PATHWAY BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE WELL-BEING IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY CONTEXT

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Abstract: The hospitality industry presents a uniquely demanding work environment, characterized by high levels of stress, emotional labor, and continuous guest interaction, making employee workplace well-being (WPW) a crucial factor for sustainable organizational success. Leadership practices are central to fostering WPW, with servant leadership (SL) emerging as a people-centered approach that emphasizes employee growth, empowerment, and ethical conduct. While previous research has linked SL to various positive employee outcomes, the mechanisms through which SL influences WPW are still underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the mediating role of psychological capital (PsyCap) - comprising hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy - in the relationship between SL and WPW within the hospitality sector. This study employed a cross-sectional research design to explore the relationship between servant leadership (SL) and workplace well-being (WPW), with psychological capital (PsyCap) examined as a mediating variable. Data were collected from 442 frontline employees working in five-star hotels located in major cities across Saudi Arabia. Validated measurement instruments were used to assess perceptions of SL, PsyCap, and WPW. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test both direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The results revealed that SL has a significant positive effect on WPW, both directly and indirectly. PsyCap was found to partially mediate this relationship, indicating that servant leadership enhances WPW not only through its direct influence but also by fostering key psychological resources - hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy - in employees. This mediation highlights PsyCap as a critical psychological mechanism linking leadership behaviors to employee well-being outcomes. Theoretically, the study contributes to the leadership and organizational behavior literature by validating the role of PsyCap within the Conservation of Resources (COR) framework. From a practical standpoint, the findings emphasize the importance for hospitality managers to cultivate servant leadership qualities and invest in developing employees' psychological capital. Doing so can significantly improve employee well-being, strengthen organizational resilience, and enhance service performance in demanding hospitality environments.

Keywords: PsyCap, Well-being, service-oriented leadership, eco-centric leadership, environmentally specific leadership, hotel industry, Employee Well-Being, occupational health, Saudi Arabia, hospitality sector

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INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is a rapidly expanding global sector that provides extensive employment opportunities, particularly for women, youth, and migrant workers. However, despite its growth, it faces significant workforce challenges, primarily high employee turnover and mental health concerns (Karatepe et al., 2021; Abdou et al., 2022). Turnover rates in the industry surpass those of other sectors due to factors such as irregular and demanding work schedules, heavy workloads, job insecurity, and low wages (Dogru et al., 2023). Salama et al. (2022) identified role stressors, job strains, and negative work attitudes as key predictors of turnover in the hospitality sector. The impact of high turnover was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when the hospitality sector in the United States lost 3.5 million jobs, accounting for over a third of national unemployment (Croes et al., 2021).

Mental health concerns are another pressing issue in the hospitality industry, significantly influencing employee well-being and turnover rates (Karatepe et al., 2021). Hospitality jobs are inherently stressful due to high-pressure work environments, unpredictable workloads, and demanding customer interactions (Abdou et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, leading to an increase in anxiety, depression, and stress among employees (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2021). Studies indicate that quarantine hotel employees, in particular, faced heightened fear of COVID-19, which resulted in severe mental health issues such as depression and stress (Rahimi et al., 2023). These psychological burdens have contributed to higher turnover rates as employees seek more stable and supportive work environments. Given the industry's reliance on service quality and customer satisfaction, workplace well-being (WPW) has become a critical area of focus for organizational success (Suneera et al., 2024; Koutiva et al., 2020).

WPW refers to employees' overall mental, emotional, and physical health within the work environment, encompassing job satisfaction, psychological health, and a sense of purpose (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012). WPW is particularly critical within the hospitality sector as a result of the high-pressure nature of frontline roles, which often involve emotional labor, irregular schedules, and constant customer interactions. High levels of WPW lead to favorable outcomes such as increased employee engagement, retention, productivity, and reduced turnover, all of which are vital in service-oriented

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industries (Gelencsér et al., 2023, Pratiwi & Davina, 2023; Isham et al., 2021). Conversely, poor WPW can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and diminished service quality. Given its significance, fostering WPW requires supportive leadership, adequate resources, and a culture that prioritizes employee health and development. Leadership styles like servant leadership (SL) play a pivotal role in enhancing WPW by creating a supportive environment and addressing employees' psychological and emotional needs (Roberts, 2021; Swanson et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2022)

SL is recognized as a leadership model emphasizing prioritizing the needs, growth, and well-being of employees over traditional authority-driven approaches. Based on Greenleaf (1977), SL focuses on creating a supportive and empowering environment where leaders act as role models, foster trust, and prioritize ethical behavior. Key traits and values associated with servant leadership include empathy, integrity, competence, benevolence-caring, humane orientation, empowerment, humility, and a commitment to helping employees achieve their personal and professional goals (Cogswell et al., 2023). SL is particularly impactful in the hospitality industry, where employees frequently face high-pressure situations and must deliver exceptional service (Bavik, 2020; Gui et al., 2021). By addressing employees' emotional and psychological needs, servant leaders can enhance job satisfaction, reduce stress, and foster a culture of care and collaboration (Widayanthi et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024). Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a core concept in positive organizational behavior, representing a person's positive psychological condition distinguished by four key dimensions: hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy (Luthans et al., 2007). Hope reflects an individual's ability to set meaningful goals and find pathways to attain them, regardless of the barriers encountered. Optimism is the tendency to expect positive outcomes and attribute successes to personal efforts. Resilience involves the ability to restore balance after setbacks and face challenges effectively, while self-efficacy represents confidence in one's ability to accomplish tasks and overcome difficulties. Collectively, these dimensions equip employees with the mental resources needed to navigate workplace challenges effectively, enhancing engagement, performance, and well-being (Brunetto et al., 2022; Amish & Biswal, 2024). PsyCap has been demonstrated to act as a mediator between various leadership styles and workplace outcomes, making it a critical factor in understanding how positive leadership, such as servant leadership, fosters employee well-being and organizational success (Batool et al., 2022; Baykal, 2020; Clarence et al., 2021; Gao & Huang, 2024; Bakri et al., 2023). This research suggests that leadership styles, including SL, play a pivotal role in fostering PsyCap, which in turn can positively impact workplace well-being.

While the positive effects of SL and PsyCap on various employee outcomes have been well-documented, there is a lack of empirical research addressing the intermediating role of PsyCap in the SL-WPW association within the hospitality sector. Furthermore, most existing studies have been conducted in non-hospitality contexts or focused on broader organizational outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding how SL and PsyCap jointly contribute to WPW in service-oriented environments. Accordingly, this research aims to investigate the effect of SL on employees' WPW in the context of the hospitality industry, specifically focusing on PsyCap as an intermediating variable. More specifically, this study aims to achieve a fourfold objective. First, it examines the direct impact of servant leadership (SL) on workplace well-being (WPW) in the hospitality industry. Second, it explores the effect of SL on employees' psychological capital (PsyCap), assessing how leadership behaviors contribute to enhancing psychological resources such as hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy. Third, it investigates the relationship between PsyCap and WPW, determining whether employees with higher PsyCap experience greater WPW. Furthermore, this study investigates the mediating role of PsyCap in the SL-WPW relationship, providing empirical insights into the psychological mechanisms through which SL influences employee well-being. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions: 1) How does servant leadership influence employees' psychological capital and workplace well-being in the hospitality industry? 2) To what extent PsyCap affect employee WPW? 3) What role does PsyCap play in mediating the relationship between SL and WPW? Regarding the contribution of the study, this research enhances the understanding of leadership's role in promoting employees' workplace well-being (WPW) within the hospitality industry by providing empirical evidence of the mechanisms linking servant leadership (SL) and WPW through psychological capital (PsyCap). By emphasizing the significance of PsyCap resources, the study highlights how SL fosters a supportive and resource-rich work environment, leading to improved workplace well-being. The findings offer practical insights for hospitality managers, suggesting that cultivating servant leadership behaviors and investing in PsyCap development may significantly enhance employees' WPW. In summary, this research introduces a nuanced perspective on the relationship between SL and WPW, mediated by PsyCap. The findings expand academic literature by deepening the theoretical insights into the SL's dual pathways of influence, direct and mediating, and providing actionable strategies for hospitality organizations aiming to create a healthier, more supportive workplace culture.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT
The interplay between Servant leadership (SL) and workplace well-being (WPW)

The term SL was introduced by Greenleaf in his seminal work *The Servant as Leader*, emphasizing that effective leadership arises from prioritizing the service and well-being of followers (Zeng et al., 2022). Greenleaf (1977) conceptualized SL as a leadership philosophy emphasizing service to others—particularly employees—over traditional models focused on authority and control. This approach centers on addressing employees' needs, fostering trust, and positively influencing them through service-oriented leadership. Earlier research identified twelve primary characteristics of SL, including "valuing people, humility, listening, trust, caring, integrity, service, empowering, serving others' needs before their own, collaboration, love/unconditional love, and learning" (Focht & Ponton, 2015). These attributes highlight SL's relational, emotional, and ethical dimensions (Eva et al., 2019). Compared to transformational leadership, servant leadership prioritizes employee well-being, empowerment, and ethical behavior over organizational goals. While transformational leaders inspire innovation and performance by acting as visionaries and role models, servant leaders take a

people-centered approach, ensuring employees' needs are met first, which in turn fosters organizational success. Although transformational leadership enhances engagement, motivation, and creativity through inspiration, empowerment, and individualized support—fostering a work environment where employees feel motivated, valued, and committed to organizational goals—it may also lead to burnout if employees feel pressured to meet ambitious expectations. In contrast, servant leadership builds trust, emotional well-being, and long-term commitment, creating a more supportive and ethical workplace culture (Goestjahjanti et al., 2022; Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023; Martinez & Leija, 2023) .

In the context of the SL-WPW relationship, numerous studies suggested that SL has been associated with various positive organizational outcomes. In the context of the hospitality sector, SL has been shown to significantly predict organizational citizenship behavior (Demissie et al., 2024), employee satisfaction and performance (Sudiarti & Hedi Saepudin, 2024), employee creativity (Song et al., 2024; Aboramadan, 2021), and some tourism business outcomes such as work engagement, innovative work behavior, person-job fit, work-life balance, and job crafting (Al-Azab & Al-Romeedy, 2024). Furthermore, research by Ortiz-Gómez et al. (2022) and Alzghoul et al. (2023) indicates that SL fosters a supportive work environment, enhancing employees' subjective well-being while reducing job burnout and anxiety. These findings underscore the effectiveness of servant leadership in promoting employee satisfaction, well-being, and creativity, as well as driving organizational success in service-oriented sectors. WPW refers to an employee's subjective positive assessment and emotional experience within the context of their work (Litchfield, 2021).

Derived from the broader concept of well-being, workplace well-being encompasses multiple dimensions, such as interpersonal compatibility, flourishing at work, acknowledgment, active involvement, and career growth (Saito et al., 2025). The emphasis on WPW has grown significantly in recent years due to its pivotal role in driving organizational performance (Pratiwi & Davina, 2023). Research shows that higher workplace well-being can lead to positive outcomes, including enhanced job performance and promoted employee retention (Gelencsér et al., 2023), increased engagement (Pratiwi & Davina, 2023), promoted physical and psychological well-being (Ryan et al., 2021), and enhanced labor productivity (Isham et al., 2021). These outcomes are particularly significant in the hospitality industry as they directly influence customer satisfaction and service quality.

In the context of the SL-WPW relationship, various studies have emphasized that SL is the key determinant for promoting WPW. By practicing humility, empathy, and active listening, servant leaders build meaningful relationships with their employees, strengthening a favorable work environment and boosting employees' happiness and well-being (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2022; Song et al., 2024). Further, servant leaders create an atmosphere where employees feel safe expressing their concerns and ideas without fear of negative repercussions, which reduces workplace stress and promotes psychological, social, and physical well-being (Coetzer et al., 2017; Westbrook et al., 2022; Swanson et al., 2022). Based on the findings of their empirical investigation involving 215 young teachers from Chinese institutions, Zeng et al. (2022) concluded that SL is significantly positively correlated with WPW, suggesting that higher perceived SL in the higher education context leads to greater WPW. Similarly, a review study examined the impact of SL on WPW through 22 studies revealed that SL adds substantial incremental value compared to other leadership models, such as transformational and authentic leadership, by fostering foundational trust through ethical principles and cultivating supportive workplace relationships (Roberts, 2021). This leadership style effectively promotes global employee well-being, irrespective of geographical, cultural, or occupational contexts, highlighting its versatility and efficacy (Wang et al., 2022). Lastly, the COR theory developed by Hobfoll (1989) posited that employees strive to acquire, protect, and build resources, which are essential for managing stress and achieving well-being. Through its core attributes, such as empowerment, emotional support, trust-building, and addressing employees' needs, servant leadership can be seen as a key predictor that fosters the acquisition and replenishment of these resources leading to WPW. Hence, we assumed that:

H1: SL is significantly positively associated with WPW.

The interplay between Servant leadership (SL) and Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

PsyCap is recognized as a positive state of mind that includes a person's mental and emotional strengths, helping them succeed in difficult situations. Luthans et al. (2007, P. 3) defined PsyCap as "an individual's positive psychological state of development characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success."

Research has shown that these positive resources are strongly influenced by various factors such as organizational climate, organizational support, and different leadership styles (Yan et al., 2024; Moustafa et al., 2024). Among sports employees, Kim et al. (2019) found that a supportive organizational climate and meaningful work significantly influenced PsyCap. These factors positively impact employees' PsyCap, increasing job satisfaction and psychological well-being. Regarding the relationship between leadership styles and PsyCap, various studies have demonstrated that transformational, transactional, authentic, inclusive, and servant leadership styles significantly enhance employees' PsyCap (Clarence et al., 2021; Sürücü et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2019). Numerous studies have explored the relationship between SL and PsyCap, revealing a consistent positive association (Jan & Imran, 2024; Brohi et al., 2021; Bouzari & Karatepe, 2017; Coggins & Bocarnea, 2015; Gui et al., 2021; Safavi & Bouzari, 2020). For example, through their empirical investigation on a sample of 400 hotel employees in Pakistan, Jan & Imran (2024) found that, rooted in Social Exchange Theory (SET), servant leaders' supportive and caring approach, characterized by forgiveness and guidance, directly and indirectly through person-job fit strengthens employees' psychological capital. In addition, a cross-culture study examined the link between SL and followers'

PsyCap in the United States and Cambodia revealed that the five components of SL "altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship" are positively associated with the four components of PsyCap "hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience" highlighting its effectiveness in cultivating a supportive and empowering work environment only across Cambodian context (Coggins & Bocarnea, 2015). Accordingly, they concluded that through its core attributes such as "altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship" servant leadership inspires employees to set and pursue meaningful goals (hope), believe in their ability to succeed (self-efficacy), maintain a positive outlook on future outcomes (optimism), and recover from setbacks with confidence (resilience).

Similarly, a meta-analysis review carried out by Gui et al. (2021) to explore the impact of SL on followers' outcomes illustrated that SL is the key predictor of employees' PsyCap in the hospitality sector context. Furthermore, in the context of North Cyprus hotels, Safavi & Bouzari (2020) indicated that SL enhances PsyCap among front-line employees by improving their perceptions of person-organization fit and person–supervisor fit. Lastly, aligning with the COR theory, SL may act as a resource generator for employees, providing them with emotional, social, and psychological support that directly contributes to the promotion of PsyCap resources. Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis is suggested.

H2: SL is significantly positively associated with employees' PsyCap.

The interplay between PsyCap and WPW

Research in positive psychology and organizational behavior underscores the significant relationship between PsyCap and WPW. PsyCap, an individual-level construct, influences employees' emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Recent studies have demonstrated this relationship, suggesting that employees with high PsyCap are more intrinsically motivated, receptive to meaningful work, and constructive in their interpersonal relationships (Al Kahtani & M, 2022; Brunetto et al., 2022; Amish & Biswal, 2024). For instance, results from a Multiple Linear Regression analysis of 92 permanent employees revealed a significant positive association between PsyCap and WPW ($R^2 = 0.263$), concluding that greater perceived PsyCap corresponds to higher WPW, while lower PsyCap results in reduced WPW (Rengganis et al., 2024). A study conducted on a random sample of 395 employees in Saudi Arabia found a significant relationship between PsyCap, including its four dimensions, and workplace well-being ($\beta = 0.781$) (Alkahtani et al., 2020). Theoretically, a review by Youssef-Morgan & Luthans (2015) highlighted PsyCap's potential to enhance well-being both at and beyond the workplace by strengthening individuals' capacities for flourishing and optimal functioning. In an educational context, Sun et al. (2022) empirically demonstrated that PsyCap significantly predicts WPW among Chinese teachers. Furthermore, recent research involving 100 employees identified optimism, hope, and resilience as key predictors of overall workplace well-being (Amish & Biswal, 2024). Finally, based on COR theory, it could be posited that in the hospitality workplace context, PsyCap - comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—may be a pivotal resource that employees utilize to manage job demands and challenges. More specifically, in the hospitality industry, where employees often face high levels of job demands and emotional labor, PsyCap enables individuals to conserve their resources effectively, which may lead to positive workplace attitudes and enhance employees' WPW. Accordingly, this study suggests that.

H3: PsyCap is significantly positively associated with employees' WPW.

The mediating role of PsyCap

In examining the mediating role of PsyCap, several empirical studies have confirmed its significant mediating effect in the relationship between SL and various positive outcomes. For example, Clarence et al. (2021) found that PsyCap resources partially mediated the association between SL and employees' affective commitment and psychological well-being. Similarly, Baykal (2020) demonstrated that PsyCap significantly mediated the connection between SL and employees' productivity, highlighting how SL positively influences PsyCap, which, in turn, enhances productivity. In the Chinese higher education context, Gao & Huang (2024) observed that teachers' PsyCap has a partial intermediating effect of perceived SL on organizational citizenship behavior. Further, in the banking context and grounded in servant leadership theory, Qamar & Soomro (2025) conclude a significant relationship between SL, PsyCap, and service excellence. PsyCap was identified as a key mediator, demonstrating that SL enhances service excellence by fostering employees' psychological resources.

Among hotel salespeople, Bouzari & Karatepe (2017) revealed that PsyCap fully mediated the influence of SL on outcomes such as reduced lateness, increased service–sales ambidexterity, intention to remain, and service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors. Further, in the Malaysian hotel sector, Batool et al. (2022) confirmed the partial mediation of resilience - a key component of PsyCap - in the link between SL and organizational sustainability. Moreover, data collected from 370 newly hired employees across 13 hotels in China revealed that PsyCap emerged as a significant mediator, demonstrating that servant leadership fosters affective commitment by enhancing employees' psychological resources (Zhou et al., 2024). These findings collectively underscore the pivotal role of PsyCap in translating the positive effects of SL into tangible benefits for both employees and organizations. Based on the critical analysis of recent studies, several gaps exist in the current literature on the relationship between servant leadership (SL), psychological capital (PsyCap), and workplace well-being (WPW), particularly in the hospitality industry. Although the positive impact of SL on WPW is well-documented, few studies have explored the psychological mechanisms through which SL fosters employee well-being. PsyCap is a potential mediator in this relationship; however, its exact role remains underexplored.

Furthermore, most existing studies on SL and WPW have been conducted in corporate or educational settings, with limited research in the hospitality industry, where employee experiences and challenges may differ significantly. Additionally, there is a need to examine whether PsyCap functions differently in high-turnover industries like hospitality. Moreover, the majority of studies on SL and WPW have been conducted in Western or Asian contexts, leaving Middle Eastern hospitality settings

largely underexplored. Accordingly, this study, grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and supported by empirical findings on the positive effects of SL on PsyCap and PsyCap on WPW, hypothesizes that a service-oriented leader, as an organizational resource, creates supportive and resource-rich environments by offering guidance, fairness, and emotional support, which may enhance employees' PsyCap. Employees with higher PsyCap are expected to experience greater WPW, highlighting its role as a mediator in the SL-WPW relationship. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: PsyCap significantly positively mediates the SL-WPW relationship.

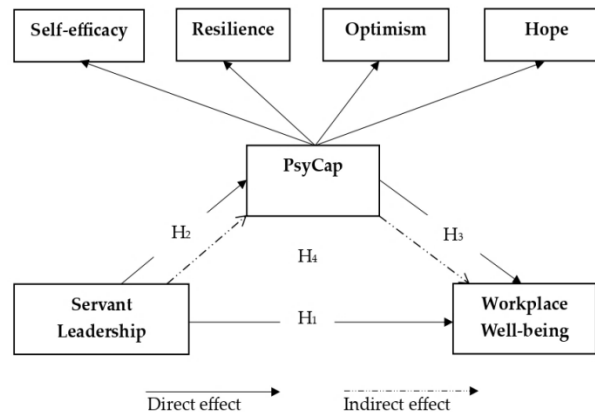Figure 1 demonstrates the study's theoretical framework.

Figure 1. The study's theoretical framework

MATERIAL AND METHODS
Instruments and measures of the study

A cross-sectional survey was conducted to investigate the relationship among SL, and WPW, with the intervening role of PsyCap. A self-administered questionnaire, derived from a detailed literature review, was employed for data collection to ensure the inclusion of reliable and widely used measures. The survey was composed of four sections: the first gathered demographic characteristics. The second, third, and fourth sections assessed participants' perceptions of SL, PsyCap, and WPW respectively. To validate the content, three psychology experts and two hospitality management experts reviewed the questionnaire to ensure it effectively captured the intended variables. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with 30 individuals who did not take part in the main study and was carried out to evaluate the clarity, simplicity, and consistency of the study's survey and identify any ambiguous terms or interpretations.

A seven-item instrument formulated by Liden et al. (2015) was utilized to measure the degree to which leaders exhibit characteristics focused on serving and supporting their team members. A Sample question used to evaluate SL is "My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own." To measure PsyCap, the study employed the CPC-12, a scale introduced by Lorenz et al. (2016) and later updated by Lorenz et al. (2022). The scale comprises four dimensions, each containing three items that reflect the respective resources. Self-efficacy items assess an individual's self-confidence and willingness to invest effort to accomplish complex tasks. A self-efficacy item states, "I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.". Resilience items evaluate the employee's capacity to recover and persevere in the face of challenges and difficulties to achieve success. A sample of these items states, "When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it." Optimism measures an employee's capacity to maintain a hopeful perspective and expect favorable outcomes in current and future situations. One item is "I am looking forward to the life ahead of me."

Finally, hope items measure a person's capacity to stay committed to their goals and adjust their strategies to achieve success. One item of this scale states. "I can think of many ways to reach my current goals." The items used to measure workplace well-being (PWB) were derived from the scale developed and validated by Pradhan & Hati (2022). A modified version of their nine-item scale was used to assess the WPW of participants, with one example item being "My workplace is very conducive." Generally, all the investigated participants rated their perceptions towards SL, PsyCap, and WPW on a five-point Likert scale where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree".

Sampling and data collection

As mentioned before, this study aims to investigate the relationship among SL, and WPW, with the intervening role of PsyCap. Hence, participants were chosen using purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling refers to a non-probability method where participants are chosen deliberately for their knowledge, skills, or characteristics that are pertinent to the study (Etikan, 2016). In this technique, the researcher chooses individuals who are considered to provide the most useful or insightful information for addressing research questions or hypotheses. In this study, frontline employees in five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia were selected. These employees are the ones who interact directly with guests and are heavily influenced by leadership practices, especially servant leadership (Ozturk et al., 2021). While purposive sampling enhances the relevance of responses, it may limit generalizability, which is acknowledged as a study limitation.

The study focused on this category of employees for several reasons. First, frontline employees have more direct contact with managers and leaders, meaning they are more likely to experience and be influenced by servant leadership practices, such as empathy, empowerment, and ethical decision-making. Second, since frontline employees often face high-

pressure situations, leadership styles can significantly affect their sense of well-being. Their insights into SL practices can provide a more accurate representation of the impact on workplace well-being and psychological capital.

Before data collection, hotels located in Saudi Arabia's major cities, such as Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam, were chosen due to their high concentration of five-star properties. To gain access to participants, formal emails containing a research objective letter were sent to hotel management. Only ten hotels confirmed their participation.

For data collection, self-administered questionnaires were used. These were distributed during employees' break periods to ensure minimal disruption to their work schedules. The data collection was organized with the help of designated coordinators at each hotel (Figure 2). The guidelines provided by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) were followed to establish the optimal number of participants for this research, which recommends a 1:10 ratio of items to participants.

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│              Study Design                    │
│          Cross-sectional Survey              │
│       Self-administered questionnaire        │
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│           Instrument Development             │
│              Literature review               │
│  Expert validation (3 psychology & 2 hospitality experts) │
│          A pilot test with 30 participants   │
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│            Measurement Scales                │
│        SL (Liden et al., 2015) – 7 items     │
│     PsyCap (Lorenz et al., 2016, 2002) – 12 items │
│        WPW (Pradhan and Hati, 2022) – 9 items │
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│         Sampling & Data Collection           │
│  Purposive Sampling (frontlines employees in 5-star hotels) │
│  Hotels in Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam were contacted │
│        10 hotels confirmed participation     │
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│          Sample Size Calculation             │
│  Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) 1: 10 ration  │
│            Minimum sample: 280               │
│            Total distributed: 500            │
│       Completed; 442 (88.4% response rate)   │
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│          Bias Reduction Measures             │
│            informed consent obtained         │
│       anonymity and confidentiality assured  │
│        voluntary participation emphasized    │
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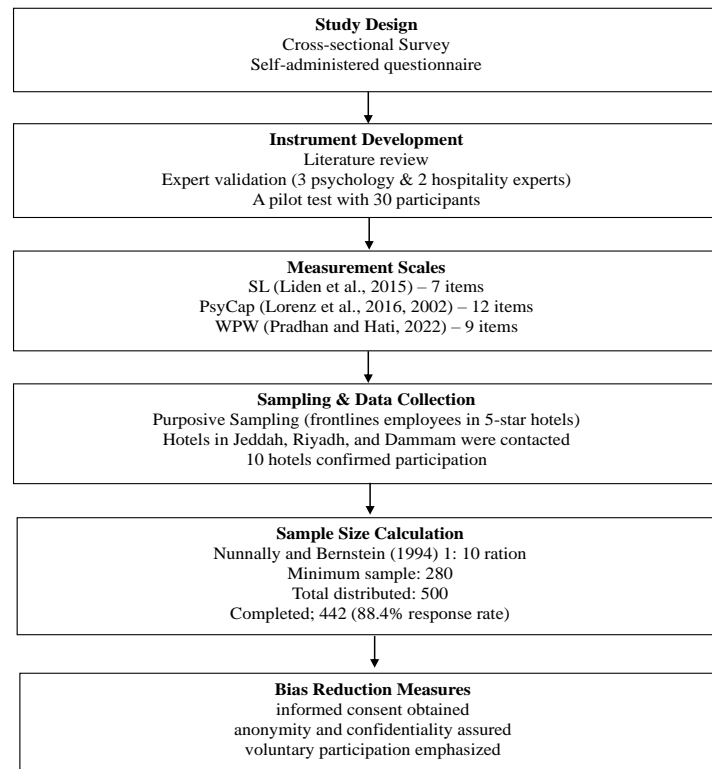
Figure 2. A flow chart of the methodology steps

Since the study involved 28 items, the minimum required sample size was 280 respondents. A total of 500 forms were distributed, and 442 completed questionnaires were returned, representing an 88.4% response rate deemed more than adequate.

Table 1. Participants' demographic details (N= 442)

Baseline characteristics	No.	%
Gender		
Male	365	82.6
Female	77	17.4
Age		
20 to 30 years	101	22.9
31 to 35 years	166	37.6
36 to 40 years	140	31.7
More than 40 years	35	7.8
Educational attainment		
High school or equivalent	139	31.4
Bachelor's degree	201	45.5
Postgraduate degree	102	23.1
Department		
Food & beverage	172	38.9
Housekeeping	143	32.4
Front Office	112	25.3
Other	15	3.4
Experience in this hotel		
Less than 3 years	89	20.1
From 3 to less than 5 years	182	41.2
From 5 to 10 years	122	27.6
More than 10 years	49	11.1

This sample size also aligns with Boomsma's (1984) recommendation of at least 200 samples for structural equation modeling. The demographic data of the participants are summarized in Table 1 and visually displayed in Figure 3.To minimize potential bias, the following measures were implemented. All participants provided informed consent before their inclusion in the study. They were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their answers, which encouraged honesty and reduced the likelihood of social desirability bias.
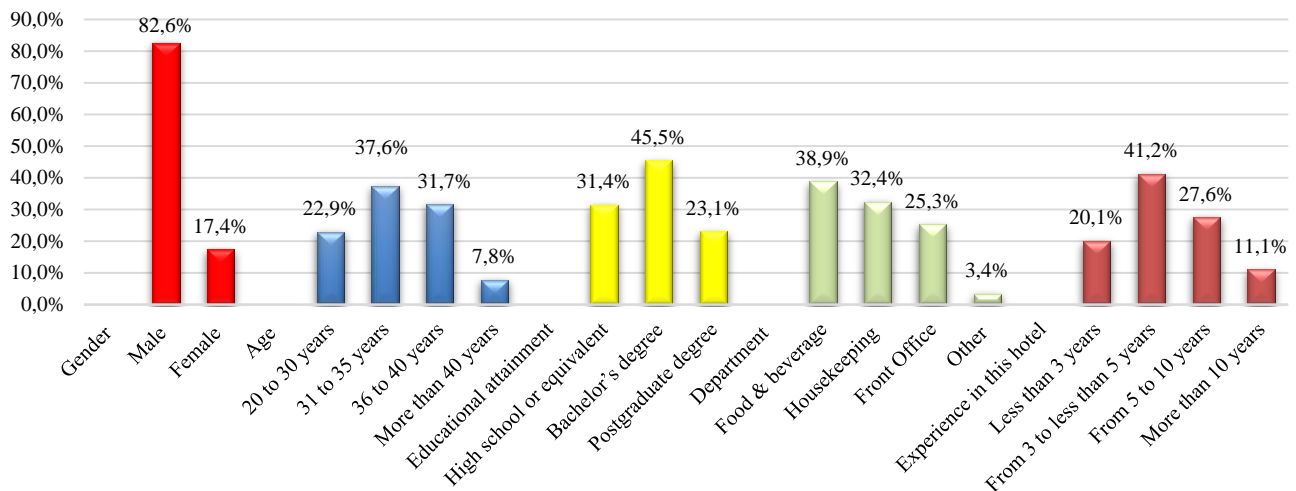
Figure 3. Participants' demographic details

Further, employees were informed that "participation was voluntary but encouraged." In addition, respondents were requested to share honest opinions, as the questionnaire did not have definitive right or wrong answers (Randall & Fernandes, 1991; Phillips & Clancy, 2002). From a statistical point of view, Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was employed to assess common method bias (CMB), where a single factor explaining more than 50% of the variance indicates a problem. The exploratory factor analysis results in this study revealed that one factor accounted for only 42.7% of the variance, suggesting that CMB is not a concern. Finally, hotels from multiple regions were included to capture diverse perspectives across the Saudi hospitality industry.

Data Analysis

Our research utilized a two-step procedure, as advised by Hair et al. (2019). The first step involves the assessment of the measurement model to examine its psychometric properties, such as validity and reliability. PLS-SEM was utilized for this issue. In the second step, we assessed the structural model including direct and indirect hypothesized paths. The bootstrapping technique was employed to verify the significance of the direct and mediating effects.

RESULTS
Measurement model assessment

As previously stated, PLS-SEM was used to assess the measurement model. Hair et al. (2019) identified four key steps for evaluating the measurement model. First, the evaluation of the indicator loadings. Indicator loadings greater than 0.708 are recommended. According to Table 2, all standardized indicator loadings (SIL) are significant and meet the threshold value (e.g. SIL ranged from 0.717 to 0.986). Second, internal consistency reliability was assessed. To ensure this, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (α) values higher than 0.70 are suggested. Table 2 reveals that all CR values for SL, PsyCap, and WPW are above 0.70, with a range between 0.944 (SL) and 0.964 (PsyCap), demonstrating high reliability. Similarly, the results for α values show strong internal consistency, with values ranging between 0.903 (SL) and 0.953 (PsyCap). Third, the convergent validity (CV) was addressed.

Table 2. Constructs' reliability, and validity measures

Construct	Items	SIL	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Servant leadership (SL)	SL1	0.726***	0.903	0.944	0.710
	SL2	0.819***			
	SL3	0.872***			
	SL4	0.717***			
	SL5	0.918***			
	SL6	0.904***			
	SL7	0.916***			
Psychological Capital (PsyCap)			0.959	0.964	0.689
Optimism	PsyCap1	0.914***	0.907	0.942	0.843
	PsyCap2	0.892***			
	PsyCap3	0.948***			
Resilience	PsyCap4	0.878***	0.922	0.951	0.867

Construct	Items	SIL	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
	PsyCap5	0.941***			
	PsyCap6	0.971***			
Self-efficacy	PsyCap7	0.961***	0.969	0.980	0.942
	PsyCap8	0.965***			
	PsyCap9	0.986***			
Hope	PsyCap10	0.963***	0.939	0.961	0.892
	PsyCap11	0.929***			
	PsyCap12	0.942***			
Workplace wellbeing (WPW)	WPW1	0.859***	0.936	0.954	0.700
	WPW2	0.910***			
	WPW3	0.892***			
	WPW4	0.883***			
	WPW5	0.812***			
	WPW6	0.890***			
	WPW7	0.772***			
	WPW8	0.771***			
	WPW9	0.720***			

Note: SIL= Standardized indicator loading, Cr= composite reliability, AVE= average variance extract, ***: $p < 0.001$

The CV was established based on the average variance extracted (AVE), where a value of 0.50 or greater is considered acceptable. Table 2 reveals that all AVE values are above the threshold, confirming that CV is supported.

Fourth, discriminant validity (DV) was examined according to Henseler et al.'s (2015) recommendations. They note that DV problems arise when HTMT values surpass 0.90. Table 3 shows that no HTMT values exceed the 0.90 threshold, confirming that DV is not an issue in this study.

Table 3. HTMT discriminant validity (Note: HTMT less than 0.90)

Construct	PsyCap	SL	WPW
PsyCap			
SL	0.574		
WOW	0.620	0.580	

Table 4. Structural parameter estimates (Note: ***: $p < 0.001$)

Hypothesized Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	Confidence Intervals		Results
					2.5%	97.5%	
Direct effect							
SL -> WPW	0.427	0.432	0.053	8.063	0.324	0.534	Accepted
SL -> PsyCap	0.682	0.685	0.023	29.666	0.638	0.728	Accepted
PsyCap -> WPW	0.323	0.319	0.056	5.764	0.206	0.425	Accepted
Indirect effect							
SL -> PsyCap -> WPW	0.221	0.219	0.040	5.458	0.139	0.296	Accepted

Testing hypotheses: structural parameter estimates

In this study, the researcher utilized PLS-SEM to test the proposed hypotheses. The bootstrapping method, with 5,000 iterations, was employed to gauge the strength and significance of the path coefficients. The results reveal that all direct and indirect paths were significant and positive, validating the study's hypotheses (Table 4 and Figure 4).

The results displayed in Table 4 and Figure 4 highlight the direct relationships between SL and WPW, SL and PsyCap, as well as PsyCap and WPW. In addition, the findings further shed light on PsyCap as a mediator in the connection between SL and WPW. More specifically, concerning the SL-WPW relationship, the results outlined in Table 2 indicate that SL is significantly positively correlated to WPW (β = 0.427, t= 8.063, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 1. This finding indicates that a higher level of servant leadership is positively associated with workplace well-being.

Further, in terms of the SL-PsyCap relationship, the analysis confirms that SL also exhibited a strong positive effect on PsyCap (β = 0.682, t = 29.666, p < 0.001), confirming Hypothesis 2. The magnitude of this effect suggests that SL plays a crucial role in enhancing employees' psychological resources. Similarly, the study's empirical evidence supports a significant positive effect of PyCap on perceived WPW (β = 0.323, t= 5.764, P < 0.001), thus confirming Hypothesis 3. This result underscores the importance of psychological capital in shaping employees' perceptions of well-being at work.

Regarding the indirect impact of SL on WPW via perceived PsyCap, bootstrapping results indicate that PsyCap acts as a significant intervening variable in the interrelationship among SL and WPW (β = 0.221, t= 5.458, p < 0.001), confirming H4. The 95% confidence interval (0.139 – 0.296) does not include zero, further assuring the mediation effect. In line with Zhao et al. (2010) guidelines for mediation analysis, with both H1 and H4 showing significant support, results confirm that PsyCap partially mediates the relationship between SL and WPW. This result highlights that servant leadership (SL) significantly predicts psychological capital, which, in turn, positively influences employees' workplace well-being (WPW).
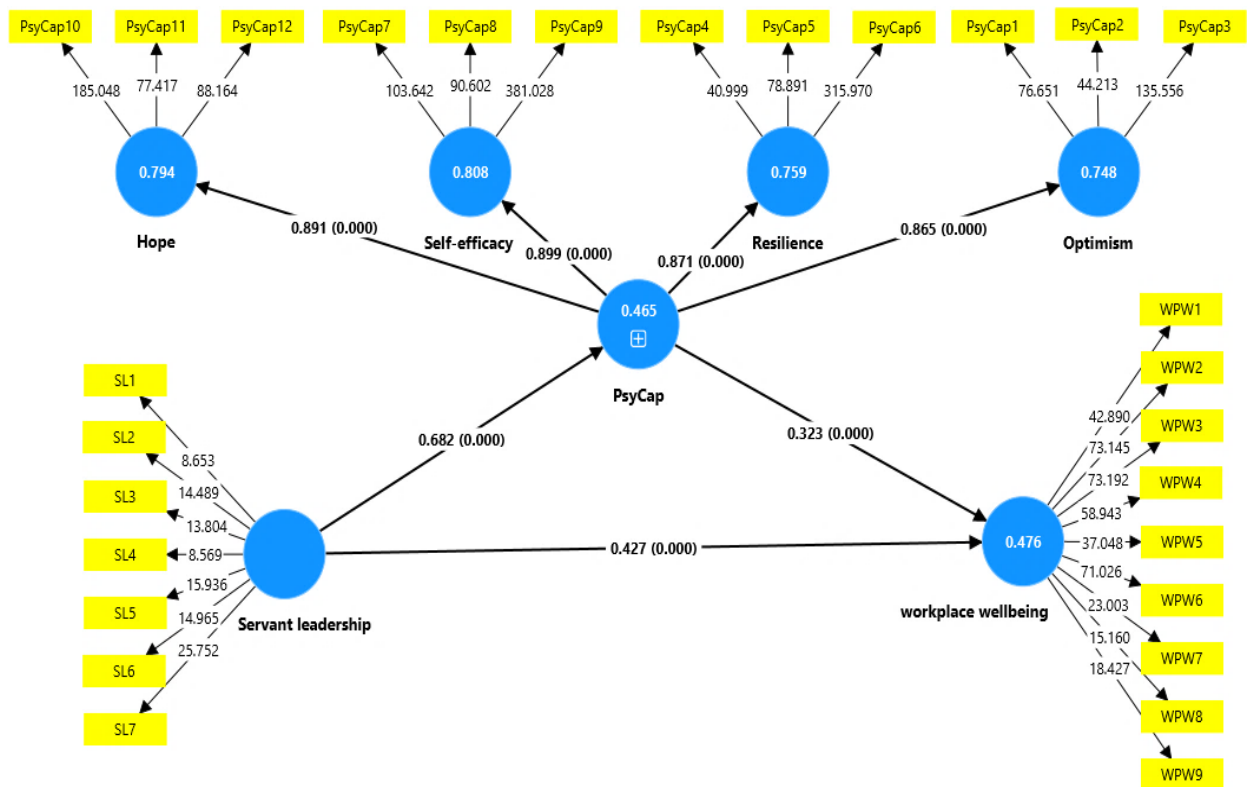
Figure 4. Structural model (Note: Numbers inside the circles signify the R² values)

The findings in Figure 4 highlight R², the coefficient of determination, which assesses the predictive power within the sample, reflecting the influence of exogenous constructs on endogenous ones (Rigdon, 2012; Hair et al., 2019). According to Hair et al. (2019), R² values are categorized as weak at 0.25, moderate at 0.50, and substantial at 0.75. The R² value of 0.465 for SL's impact on PsyCap indicates that SL explains 46.5% of the variation in PsyCap, demonstrating moderate predictive power. Additionally, the R² value for the combined effect of SL and PsyCap as a mediator on WPW is 0.476, indicating that the model explains 47.6% of the variance in WPW, reflecting a moderately predictive model.

These results affirm that servant leadership not only directly enhances workplace well-being but also does so indirectly by fostering employees' psychological capital, a key resource that helps them navigate workplace challenges.

DISCUSSION

This research proposed and empirically validated a model examining the interrelationships between servant leadership (SL), psychological capital (PsyCap), and workplace well-being (WPW) among frontline employees in the hospitality industry. All the study's hypotheses were validated, and several noteworthy findings emerged. First, the findings underscore the pivotal role of SL in predicting WPW. The significant positive association between SL and WPW (β = 0.427, t = 8.063, p < 0.001) confirms Hypothesis 1, illustrating that servant leaders who prioritize their employees' needs, offer guidance, and act as role models positively impact employees' overall well-being. This finding aligns with prior research (e.g. Coetzer et al., 2017; Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2022; Roberts, 2021; Song et al., 2024; Swanson et al., 2022; Westbrook et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2022) that links servant leadership to favorable employee outcomes, emphasizing its potential in creating a supportive and thriving organizational environment.

Second, the strong positive interplay between SL and PsyCap (β = 0.682, t = 29.666, p < 0.001) validates Hypothesis 2, supporting the idea that servant leadership significantly contributes to the development of employees' psychological resources. These resources include key dimensions such as optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy—core elements of PsyCap that enhance employees' ability to cope with challenges and pursue goals with a positive mindset. This result aligns with existing literature on servant leadership, which emphasizes the role of leaders as an organizational resource that can significantly enhance the psychological capital of employees, making them more resilient, optimistic, hopeful, and self-efficacious in their roles (Brohi et al., 2021; Jan & Iman, 2024; Gui et al., 2021; Safavi & Bouzari, 2020).

Third, the study's findings also demonstrated the significant positive effect of psychological capital (PsyCap) on workplace well-being (WPW) (β = 0.323, t = 5.764, p < 0.001) confirming Hypothesis 3. This result indicates that frontline employees exhibiting higher levels of PsyCap tend to have better well-being in the workplace. This finding reinforces the importance of nurturing psychological resources, as they contribute significantly to employees' overall satisfaction and mental health within the workplace. This finding also supports the works of Amish & Biswal (2024), Rengganis et al. (2024), Sun et al. (2022), and Youssef-Morgan & Luthans (2015), revealing that PsyCap has emerged as a crucial source in promoting positive outcomes in the workplace. Employees who are more optimistic about their tasks, resilient in the face of challenges, hopeful about achieving their goals, and confident in their ability to succeed are better equipped to exhibit greater levels of engagement and job satisfaction, as well as navigate workplace demands more effectively. This, in turn, leads to improved well-being.

Fourth, regarding the mediation effect of PsyCap in the SL-WPW association, the bootstrapping results confirm that PsyCap significantly and partially mediates the SL-WPW relationship (β = 0.221, t = 5.458, p < 0.001), providing strong support for Hypothesis 4. This partial mediation offers valuable insights into the complex mechanisms through which SL influences WPW, highlighting the pivotal role of psychological capital (PsyCap) as a key mediator. This finding aligns with broader literature, which confirms the significant mediating influence of PsyCap in the connection between SL and various positive outcomes (Battol et al., 2022; Baykal, 2020; Clarence et al., 2021; Gao & Huang, 2024). This finding reinforces the proposed theoretical framework, suggesting that a servant leader acts as a critical organizational resource, fostering supportive and resource-rich environments by providing guidance, fairness, and emotional support, thereby enhancing employees' PsyCap, which subsequently improves their workplace well-being.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS
Theoretical implications
Through a theoretical lens, the present study provides valuable insights into the existing literature in several ways. First, the findings enrich the body of research on servant leadership (SL) by demonstrating its significant positive impact on psychological capital (PsyCap) and workplace well-being (WPW). These findings extend theoretical perspectives, such as the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that leaders can serve as resource generators.

By confirming PsyCap's mediating role, the study highlights SL's dual pathway of influence—both direct and indirect—on WPW, offering a nuanced understanding of how leadership styles contribute to employee well-being. Second, the study's findings, particularly in the hospitality industry context, underscore the substantial role of PsyCap as a critical psychological resource mediating the relationship between SL and WPW.

This supports existing theories (e.g., COR theory) by showing how psychological resources like optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy function as essential mechanisms through which leadership practices influence workplace well-being. Third, the findings validate the integration of SL, PsyCap, and WPW into a cohesive theoretical framework. This integration advances leadership studies by presenting a comprehensive model that connects leadership practices, psychological resources, and employee well-being.

Practical implications
Practically, the following suggestions should be considered. First, hotel management should prioritize training programs that foster servant leadership traits such as empathy, empowerment, and ethical behavior. Leaders equipped with these qualities can create supportive environments that enhance employees' PsyCap and overall well-being, leading to higher engagement and productivity. Second, investing in initiatives that build employees' PsyCap - through workshops, mentoring, and well-being programs - can result in significant improvements in workplace satisfaction and mental health. The findings highlight PsyCap as a critical tool for managing workplace stress and enhancing resilience, optimism, and goal attainment. Third, given the study's focus on frontline employees, hospitality organizations should implement tailored interventions to address the unique challenges faced by these workers.

Enhancing leadership support and psychological resources for employees in high-stress roles can improve service quality and customer satisfaction. Fourth, incorporating servant leadership principles into organizational policies and strategic goals can positively influence employee outcomes. Policies that prioritize leadership accountability and psychological resource development can help create a thriving and sustainable workplace culture.

Fifth, updating organizational policies to prioritize employee well-being—including transparent communication, equitable treatment, and consistent recognition of employee contributions—is essential. Finally, organizations in the hospitality industry should emphasize hiring and promoting leaders with servant leadership qualities. Including behavioral assessments in recruitment processes to identify servant leadership traits, alongside offering ongoing leadership development programs to cultivate these qualities, should be prioritized.

Limitations of the study and further research
This study has some limitations as follows. First, the study relied on a cross-sectional research design, which limits the possibility of concluding causality. Longitudinal designs should be utilized in future research to determine better causal relationships among servant leadership, psychological capital, and workplace well-being. Second, the study was conducted within the hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia, focusing on frontline employees. This limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to other industries or cultural environments.

Further research incorporating different industries and cultural settings could broaden the applicability of these results. Third, the study mainly focused on PsyCap as an intervening factor in the association between SL and WPW. Testing other potentially influential variables, such as perceived organizational support, emotional intelligence, organizational trust as well as demographic variables, may influence the relationships between SL and WPW.

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