

Emotional Alchemy in Hospitality: Transforming Discontent to Delight through Servant Leadership and Strategic Emotional Labor in Hotel Service Recovery Performance

Merkebu Limenih Getinet^{ID} & Xiao-Yu Liu

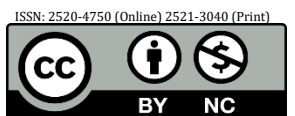
Abstract

Hotel service dissatisfaction necessitates recovery for sustainable operations. Frontline employees, crucial for customer interactions, ensure quality service delivery and bear responsibility for rectifying service failures. Swift service complaint resolution is customer's priority, with leader support impacting emotional labor and performance outcomes. This study explores servant leadership's vital role in fostering an environment where employees feel valued, contributing to successful service recovery. Employing SPSS, AMOS, and SEM, this study empirically extends existing leadership literature by exploring the uncharted relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance within an underdeveloped nation's hotel industry, significantly contributing to the conservation of resource theory. Using a comprehensive survey of 625 frontline employees, findings of the study reveal servant leadership's positive impact on deep acting and negative effect on surface acting. The study confirms servant leadership fosters deep acting, positively influencing service recovery. Grounded in the conservation of resources theory, it proves hotels with servant leadership exhibit effective service recovery. This research contributes theoretically by linking emotional labor to the servant leadership and service recovery performance relationship, demonstrating its impact on genuine customer interaction restoration.



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1. Introduction

In the hotel sector, providing effective services to clients directly depends on employee participation, especially for frontline employees (FLEs) who deal directly with clients. Customer service, covering all operations aiming at customer happiness, is crucial for corporate success (Kaňovská, 2010). Customer satisfaction, a company concept that emphasises managing expectations, providing value, and responsibly meeting customer demands, is essential to this (Dominici & Guzzo, 2010). Notably, key components of company success are excellent service delivery and the resulting happiness of customers (Parasuraman et al., 1988). According to Bakaus et al. (2003), FLEs are essential to the delivery of services since they not only satisfy customer expectations but also address service failures, also known as service recovery performance. Unsatisfactory service interactions in the hotel sector may call for restoration in order to ensure the long-term viability of the firm (Luo et al., 2018). FLEs' emotional behavior becomes vital in preserving client satisfaction following service failures (Boshoff & Allen, 2000).

The link between service recovery performance (SRP) and customer outcomes is greatly impacted by the emotional labor of FLEs (Liao, 2007). Customers evaluate the emotional relationships between workers and the quality of the services they get, highlighting the significance of employees' emotions in customer satisfaction (Tronvoll, 2007). Emotional labor is essential for efficient service delivery in the service sector, particularly in the hotel industry (Mesmer-Magnus, 2012). On the other hand, FLEs' emotional labor and ensuing performance results are influenced by leader support (Luo et al., 2018). According to Lu et al. (2018), servant leadership is a useful method that puts the welfare of employees ahead of organizational interests. Employee confidence, motivation, and satisfaction are all positively impacted by supportive leadership, such as servant leadership, in the hotel business, which is known for its repetitive tasks and demanding atmosphere (Neubert et al., 2008).

The needs of their followers are given priority by servant leaders, who promote empowerment, teamwork, and employee happiness (van Dierendonck, 2011). In result, empowered staff members improve client retention and optimize employee potential in the hotel industry (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019). Strong social contacts are another benefit of servant leadership, which increases workers' personal social capital and is essential to the service recovery process (Ozturk et al., 2021). While existent research emphasizes servant leadership in the hospitality sector (Brownell, 2010; Ye et al., 2019), the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance remains understudied (Luo et al., 2018). In particular, there is a paucity of scholarship examining this link in the context of underdeveloped nations' hotels. This study intends to close this gap by investigating the mediating function of emotional labor in this connection and how FLEs' emotional labor and service recovery performance are influenced by supervisors' servant leadership.

By examining the unexplored link between servant leadership and service recovery performance in the hotel business of an underdeveloped nation, the study makes a theoretical contribution. It fills up a significant need in the literature by extending theories of leadership and the conservation of resource theory (COR). Additionally, the real-world applications help hotels create servant leaders who improve customer happiness, service quality, and overall business performance. The link between servant leadership and service recovery performance in the hotel business is the specific topic of this study. The study used the COR to investigate the direct impact of servant leadership on emotional labor and service recovery performance, as well as the intermediary function of emotional labor in the correlation between these two variables.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Servant Leadership

Leadership research has transitioned from transformational to a relational, global perspective, emphasizing ethical and compassionate leadership for innovation and employee well-being (van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership, adding social responsibility to transformational leadership, focuses on followers' needs and values (Graham, 1991). Personality traits, like agreeableness and self-confidence, influence leaders practicing servant leadership (Eva et al., 2018). Servant leaders prioritize the development of followers, creating a unique organizational attitude and motivation (van Dierendonck, 2011). The approach correlates with various performance outcomes at individual, team, and firm levels (Lee et al., 2020).

2.2 Service Recovery Performance

In the service industry, service failures are inevitable, demanding effective service recovery to restore customer satisfaction. Successful service recovery positively impacts customer satisfaction, loyalty, and behavioral intentions (Boshoff & Allen, 2000). FLEs' performance in rectifying service failures significantly influences customer perceptions and loyalty, presenting a crucial source of competitive advantage for hospitality organizations (Luo et al., 2018). Despite extensive studies on service recovery, the role of leadership styles, particularly servant leadership, in restoring a failed service remains unexplored.

2.3 Emotional Labour

Unique to the hospitality industry, emotional labor involves managing feelings to meet customer expectations (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). Employees are required to control emotions to align with organizational display rules, influencing customer service performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Emotional labor is crucial in service recovery scenarios, where FLEs face emotional challenges in dealing with customer complaints. Existing literature identifies surface acting and deep acting as significant strategies in emotional labor, with potential costs for employees (Chi & Grandey, 2016). However, the impact of emotional labor on service recovery performance in different service contexts and industries remains underexplored.

2.4 Servant Leadership and Service Recovery Performance

Effective service recovery performance (SRP) hinges on frontline employees' (FLEs) adaptive responses to unique challenges (Jong & ruyter, 2004). Managerial actions significantly influence employee behaviors, with top management commitment playing a crucial role (Bramson, 1991; Boshoff & Allen, 2000). Servant leadership, emphasizing service to followers, positively impacts organizational performance through behavioral advantages (Panaccio et al., 2015). Servant leaders foster a learning environment, encouraging trial-and-error processes and accepting mistakes (Chen et al., 2014). Studies suggest a positive link between servant leadership and job crafting, influencing customer and service-oriented behavior (Bavik et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2016). Servant leaders act as role models, shaping a service climate that enhances FLEs' service recovery performance (Berry et al., 1994).

2.5 Servant Leadership and Emotional Labour

Leaders play a pivotal role in evoking follower emotions, with effective leaders providing consistent positive feedback to alleviate daily hassles (Dasborough, 2006). FLEs' emotions significantly impact service recovery performance, requiring appropriate displays (Luo et al., 2018). Servant leaders, through empowerment and sympathy, motivate FLEs to excel in service recovery (van Dierendonck, 2011). Emotional labor, the regulation of emotions, may mediate the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance (Hur

et al., 2015). Empirical evidence supports the positive impact of servant leadership on performance and behavioral outcomes (Bavik et al., 2017). The Conservation of Resource Theory further substantiates the positive association between servant leadership and service recovery performance.

2.6 Servant Leadership, Emotional Labour and Service Recovery Performance

Frontline employees' actions, requiring positive emotional displays, influence the relationship between service recovery performance and customer outcomes (Luo et al., 2018). Servant leadership fosters organizational support, reducing the need for surface acting and promoting deep acting in FLEs during service interactions (Yang & Chen, 2021). Deep acting leads to sincere and positive customer interactions, enhancing FLEs' ability to recover failed services (Xu et al., 2020).

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1 The conservation of resources theory

Conservation of Resources Theory posits that individuals collect resources they may employ to tolerate, endure, or overcome dangers. They could maximize material resources like money, condition resources like prestige and social support, and personal resources like self-esteem. These resources are depleted by stressful or traumatic experiences, making them more vulnerable to other stresses (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources are actively created and maintained by people, and leaders are essential to this process (Hobfoll, 2011). Businesses that value employees foster perceived organizational support, contributing to a flow of resources (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Servant leadership, especially in cultures valuing and respecting individuals, aligns with organizational values, enhancing leaders' support and professional development (Liden et al., 2014). Applying COR theory, leaders' support enables them to fulfill employees' needs, while followers reciprocate by sharing information, mitigating resource drain (Eva et al., 2018; Tuan, 2016). The first hypothesis posits a positive relationship between servant leadership and followers' deep acting.

Hypothesis 1a: Servant leadership is positively related to FLEs' deep acting.

Although theoretical support exists for the negative correlation between servant leadership and surface acting (Bono & Ilies, 2006), empirical evidence is limited. More research is needed to understand the precise causal link. The second hypothesis suggests a negative relationship between servant leadership and followers' surface acting.

Hypothesis 1b: Servant leadership is negatively related to FLEs' surface acting.

Organizational reciprocity is emphasized in the context of FLEs who, having acquired resources, demonstrate commitment through emotional displays supporting organizational goals (Yang & Chen, 2021). Studies suggest that deep acting improves customer interactions and service outcomes (Grandey, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). However, empirical evidence linking deep acting to service recovery performance is limited. Hence, this study posits the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a: FLEs' deep acting is positively related to service recovery performance.

Conversely, surface acting may lead to exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and reduced performance, impacting service recovery outcomes (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Hence, this study puts forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b: FLEs' surface acting is negatively related to service recovery performance.

Eva et al. (2018) advocate applying COR theory to understand servant leadership's impact. COR theory emphasizes resource acquisition to protect against loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Servant leaders invest in employees, potentially viewed as a resource drain but can result in gains such as proactive and adaptive employees (Eva et al., 2018). In a hotel context, when FLEs realize that they have access to socio-emotional resources at work due to the existence of a

servant leadership style, they pay back the hotel with positive emotional and behavioural responses (Ozturk et al., 2021). The following hypothesis proposes a positive relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance.

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership is positively related to FLEs' service recovery performance. COR theory provides a foundation for understanding how servant leadership mitigates the negative effects of service failure on employees. Servant leaders place a strong emphasis on their followers' emotions, thereby improving their genuine feelings, which in turn will help their followers be engaged in deep acting at work (Lu et al., 2018). FLEs may need an extra resource in dealing with customers, but they also know they are going to be recognized by their leaders for their achievements. Employees under servant leadership are more inclined to show their inner feelings rather than hide or limit their facial expressions, as they feel they are safe (Tuan, 2016).

Hypothesis 4a: Deep acting positively mediates the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance.

While there is a theoretical basis for the negative correlation between surface acting and servant leadership, empirical evidence supporting mediation is limited. According to studies by Hochschild (1983) and Bono and Ilies (2006), servant leadership creates a supportive work environment that deters surface acting, which in turn may have a favorable effect on service quality. The following hypothesis suggests the mediating role of surface acting in the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance.

Hypothesis 4b: Surface acting negatively mediates the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance.

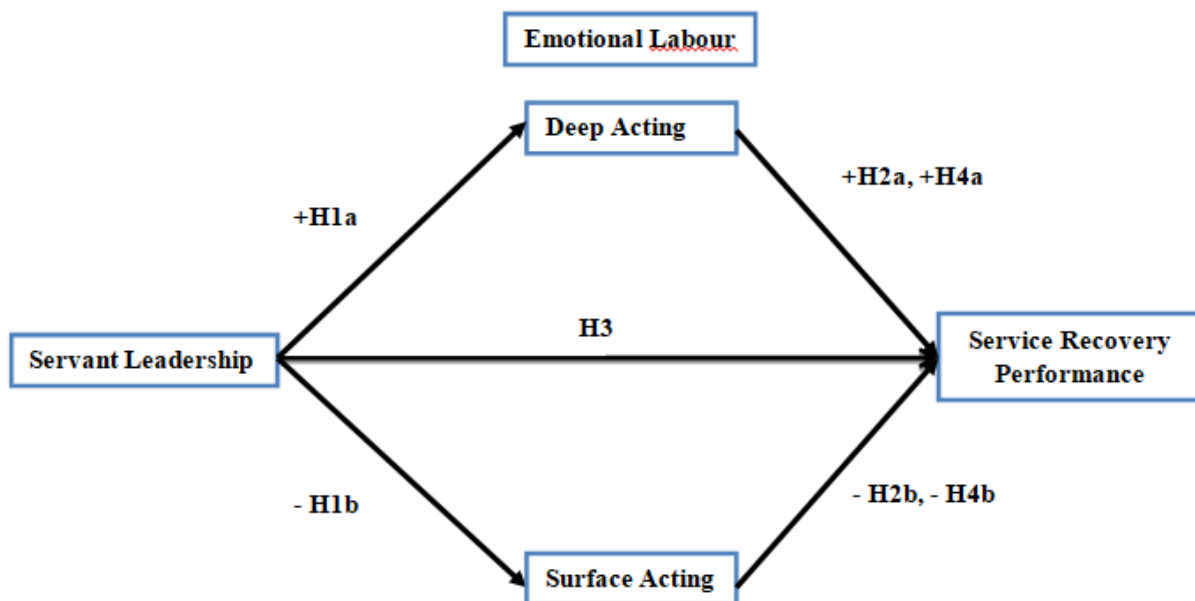


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 Alt Text: A visual representation of a conceptual model illustrating the relationships between Servant leadership, Emotional Labour and Service Recovery Performance. The arrows indicate the direction of influence, with Servant Leadership as an independent variable, Emotional Labour (Deep and Surface – Acting) as mediating variable, and Service Recovery Performance as dependent variable.

4. Research Methods

4.1 Population and Study Sample

The study targeted FLEs in star-rated hotels in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa - a city known for superior service in the country due to the presence of hospitality training institutes and international chain hotels. Five hotels from each star category were purposively selected. Data were collected using questionnaires from FLEs with at least one year of experience in hospitality, emphasizing face-to-face customer interaction. A screening question, rated on a 10-point scale, ensured participant relevance. A total of 625 employees from various hotel roles (including front desk agents, waiting staff, sales persons, and managers) participated.

Data Collection: Data were collected in two time waves over a one month period. The first wave surveyed 625 FLEs, analyzing the emotional labour strategies being used in the hotels. The second wave, after thirty days, involved supervisors or managers completing a survey about FLEs' service recovery performance.

4.2 Measures

A seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 7 = 'Strongly Agree') measured all survey items.

Servant Leadership: The study used a seven-item scale by Liden et al. (2015) to evaluate FLEs managers' behavior, assessing aspects like seeking help and ethical principles.

Emotional Labour: Eleven items from Diefendorff et al.'s (2005) scales measured deep and surface acting in hotel work settings. Questions like "I try to actually experience the emotions I must show" and "I hide my true feelings" captured these dimensions.

Service Recovery Performance: Boshoff and Allen's (2000) five-item measure assessed service recovery performance on a 7-point Likert scale, addressing aspects like handling dissatisfied customers.

Control Variables: Variables such as FLEs' educational status, job position, experience, and hotel star rating were considered to reduce potential bias.

5. Results of the Study

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables, revealing high servant leadership (SVL) levels (mean = 4.13), with low variability (SD = 0.962). Surface acting (SA) and service recovery performance (SRP) exhibit high means (4.66 and 4.53), with SA showing higher variability (SD = 2.10) than SVL. Table 1 also demonstrates that the Cronbach's Alpha values exceed 0.70, affirming strong internal consistency for all variables and ensuring consistent reliability across all variables, emphasizing robustness and trustworthiness.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variables	Items	Mean	SD	Chr.Alpha
Servant leadership	5	4.13	0.962	0.960
Surface acting	3	4.66	2.10	0.952
Deep acting	3	3.29	2.19	0.934
Service recovery performance	5	4.53	2.09	0.955

Structural model testing of the Study

The overall compatibility model that compares the data entered with the standards found was tested by using AMOS. Table 2 below depicts the results:

Table 2 below presents Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) fit results, indicating a good fit for both absolute and incremental fit models (GFI = 0.999, RMSEA = 0.024, NFI = 1.000, CFI = 1.000, IFI = 1.000, RFI = 0.997). The model aligns well with data, meeting testing measures.

Table 2: Model fit result for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Measure GOF	Measurement		Structured Result	
	Margin fit	Good fit		
Absolute fit model				
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	0.8 - < 0.90	≥0.90	0.999	Good Fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error)		< 0.08	.024	Good Fit
Increment fit Model				
NFI (Normal Fit Index)	0.8 - < 0.90	≥0.90	1.000	Good Fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.8 - < 0.90	≥0.90	1.000	Good Fit
IFI (Incremental Fit Index)	0.8 - < 0.90	≥0.90	1.000	Good Fit
RFI (Relative Fit Index)	0.8 - < 0.90	≥0.90	0.997	Good Fit

The SEM yield of AMOS 23 is displayed in Table 2 above, along with information obtained for absolute fit size models. The general expectation level of the model (the structural model) should be set based on the Absolute Fit Model and the suitability of the data. This includes a GFI of 0.999 ≥0.90 (good fit) and an RMSEA of 0.024 <0.08 (good fit). Similar to this, the incremental matched model's CFI value of 1.000, NFI of 1.000, IFI of 1.000, and RFI of 0.997 all showed that the model matched the data well. The results indicated that the primary condition model should be accepted as it satisfies the requirements of the Incremental Fit Model and contains sufficient testing measures. It was deduced from the yield that the model should have met the requirements of the stingy fit model and performed very well at the test standard level.

The coefficients calculated for the causal links between the constructs (Table 2) were assessed after the structural model's fit was verified. The study of the size, direction, and significance of the standardized coefficients calculated using the structural model was used to verify each research hypothesis.

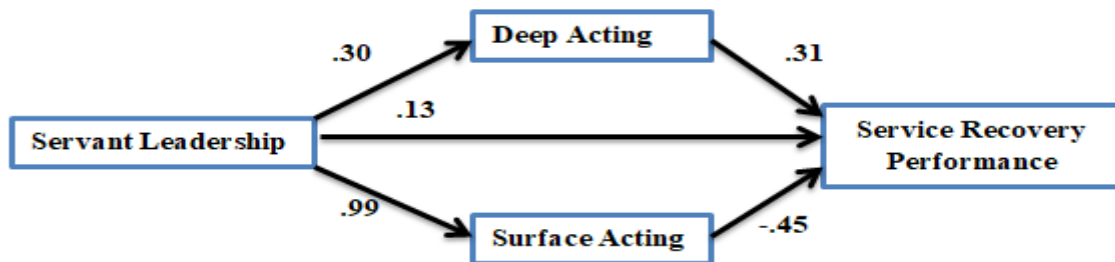


Figure 2: The Path Diagram Model of the study

Figure 2 Alt Text: A visual representation of the Path Diagram model of the study illustrating the relationships between Servant leadership, Emotional Labour and Service Recovery Performance.

Table 3: Standardized Path Coefficients of Direct Effects of the Study

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
DA	<---	SVL	.487	.011	13.933	***	
SA	<---	SVL	-.677	.049	-22.965	***	
SRP	<---	DA	.051	.013	2.802	.005	
SRP	<---	SA	-.073	.003	-3.378	***	
SRP	<---	SVL	.841	.005	35.811	***	

(Note: SVL – Servant Leadership, DA – Deep Acting, SA – Surface Acting, SRP – Service Recovery Performance)

The Direct Effect

This study aims to test the hypothesis that servant leadership enhances FLEs' deep acting (DA) and surface acting (SA) to a large degree, hence improving their service recovery performance. Concurrently, surface acting and deep acting are used as proxies to study the mediation impact of emotional labor. Iacobucci et al. (2007) and Zhao et al. (2010) provided relevant instructions for carrying out mediation analysis using a structural equation model for this reason. Therefore, it was determined that the mediator factors of servant leadership and the service recovery performance of FLEs were surface acting and deep acting. As a result, the factors that explained the connection between servant leadership and the service recovery effectiveness of FLEs were surface acting and deep acting. There are two connected phases in the analysis. The path from SVL to SRP, DA, SA, SRP to DA, SA to SRP, and SRP to SRP are examples of the paths that must be evaluated in order to determine the direct effect. Additionally, the bootstrapping approach was employed in the second stage to assess the mediating impact. All of the variables included in the research are significant at the 1% and 5% level of significance for the available alternatives, as shown in the route diagram model of Figure 2 and the standardized path coefficients of Table 3 above.

The Direct effect of Servant Leadership on Surface Acting and Deep Acting

H1a is supported by the results of the study's Model, which are shown in Table 3 and indicate a positive and significant association ($\beta = .487$, $p < 0.001$) between DA and SVL. With a path coefficient of 0.487 and a C.R. = 13.933, ***, it is very statistically significant. This implies that SVL has a significant and favourable direct impact on DA. According to Hypothesis H1b, there is a substantial and negative direct influence of SVL on SA, as indicated by a standardised coefficient of ($\beta = -.677$; p-value 0.001). It is extremely statistically significant (C.R. = -22.965, ***) that the route coefficient is -0.677. This shows a negative and substantial direct influence of SVL on SA. As a result, it is also agreed upon that servant leadership has a negative relationship with FLEs' surface acting (SA).

The Direct effect of Emotional Labour on Service Recovery Performance

With a standardized coefficient of ($\beta = .051$; p-value <0.05), the result in Table 3 above demonstrates that the relationship between DA and SRP is positive and significant. The path coefficient is 0.051, and it is statistically significant (C.R. = 2.802, $p = 0.005$). This indicates a positive direct effect of DA on SRP. As this result supports H2a, the hypothesis that 'FLEs deep acting is positively related to service recovery performances' is accepted. Table 3 also shows that there is a negative and significant relationship between SA and SRP at the 0.05 alpha level ($\beta = -.073$, $p < 0.001$). The path coefficient is -0.073, and it is highly statistically significant (C.R. = -3.378, ***). This suggests a negative and significant direct effect of SA on SRP. As this result supports H2a, the hypothesis that 'FLEs surface acting is negatively related to service recovery performances' is accepted. This result is consistent with the empirical finding of Lu et al. (2018). The higher the surface acting, the lower the FLEs' service recovery performance, and vice versa.

The Direct effect of Servant Leadership on Service Recovery Performance

The direct effect of SVL on SRP is large and significant, with a standardized coefficient of ($\beta = 0.841$; p-value 0.001), as shown in Table 3. The path coefficient is 0.841, and it is highly statistically significant (C.R. = 35.811, ***). This indicates a strong and positive direct effect of SVL on SRP. Thus, the H3 that says 'SVL is positively related to FLEs SRP' is accepted. This result is in line with Ghosh & Khatri (2017) and Saleem et al.'s (2020) findings of servant leadership's positive relationship with FLEs' service recovery performance. Besides, Chen et al. (2014) have also found out that servant leadership is positively related to FLEs' service recovery performance. In summary, these results indicate that SVL has significant direct effects on both DA and SA, with a positive effect on DA and a negative effect on SA. Furthermore, all three variables have an impact on SRP, with SVL exerting strong positive effects, DA having a weaker positive effect, and SA having a negative effect. All these relationships are statistically significant.

The Mediating Effects

The study used AMOS bootstrapping and a sample size of 2000 to see if there is a link between SVL and SRP through FLEs deep acting and FLEs surface acting. Bootstrapping would provide much greater statistical power than the normal theory technique, according to MacKinnon et al. (2004). Even if one assumes that paths a and b are normally distributed, Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008) showed that the Sobel test is not appropriate for analyzing indirect effects as the parametric assumptions (i.e., normality) of the two paths do not hold for the product term of the two paths (i.e., a,b). Hence, this study has applied a non-parametric inferential technique (the bootstrapping procedure) to test the significance of the indirect effect $a \times b$. In addition, the indirect effect is the product of the indirect effect between the servant leadership variable and service recovery performance via both of FLEs' deep acting and FLEs' surface acting mediator constructs. The study used the bootstrapping technique in PROCESS macro (Hayes and Preacher, 2013) to further confirm Hypothesis 4a (Deep acting mediates the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance) and Hypothesis 4b (Surface acting mediates the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance). The results of 2,000 bootstrap samples at a 95% confidence interval (CI) show significant indirect effects (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Standardized Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	a	b	a*b (Indirect)		Total effect (C)
	Path coeff.	Path coeff.	Path coeff.	P-value	Path coeff.
SVL →DA→SRP	.487	.051	0.025	0.000	0.865
SVL →SA→SRP	-.677	-.073	0.05	0.011	0.890
a = the path from SVL →DA, b= the path from DA→SRP for row 1 a = the path from SVL →SA, b= the path from SA→SRP for row 2					

(Note: SVL – Servant Leadership, DA – Deep Acting, SA – Surface Acting, SRP – Service Recovery Performance)

Hypothesis H4a argues that FLEs deep acting mediates the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance. As Table 4 above depicts, the indirect effect of servant leadership via FLEs deep acting on service recovery performance is positive and significant ($\beta = .025$ and $p < 0.001$). The path from SVL to DA (a) has a positive effect of 0.487; the path from DA to SRP (b) has a positive effect of 0.051; the indirect effect (SVL → DA →

SRP) is 0.025, which is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$); and the total effect (C) is 0.865. The result showed that DA mediates the relationship between SVL and SRP. Hypothesis H4b argues that FLEs SA mediates the relationship between SVL and SRP. From Table 4 above, the indirect effect of SVL via FLEs SA on SRP is significant ($\beta = 0.05$ and $p < 0.05$). The path from SVL to SA (a) has a negative effect of -0.677; the path from SA to SRP (b) has a negative effect of -0.073; the indirect effect (SVL → SA → SRP) is 0.050, which is statistically significant ($p = 0.011$); and the total effect (C) is 0.890.

Since the direct effect (the path from SVL to SRP) and the indirect effect are significant, both FLEs DA and FLEs SA have a partial mediation effect on the SVL and SRP relationship. Hence, both of the proposed hypotheses (both H4a and H4b) are, therefore, accepted.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2) for the Study

The structural model is commonly assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2) value. All of the exogenous factors' cumulative impacts on endogenous variables are represented by this coefficient. In order to evaluate a model's predictive capacity, the coefficient of determination score is employed. To put it another way, the R^2 gauges how predictive a certain model is. A range of 0.75, 0.5, and 0.25 was suggested by Hair et al. (2017) as typical considerable, moderate, and modest levels of predictive accuracy, respectively.

Table 5: R^2 Value for study

Endogenous variables	R^2 value	Remark
FLEs Deep Acting	0.24%	Weak effect
FLEs Surface Acting	46%	Relatively Moderate effect
Service Recovery Performance	84%	Strong effect

As Table 5 above depicts, the servant leadership variable explains a small amount (0.24%) of the variance in FLEs deep acting, while it explains a relatively moderate effect in the FLEs surface acting variable (46%). In addition, the servant leadership variable, together with FLEs deep acting and surface acting, strongly explains 84% of the variance in service recovery performance. That means the R^2 value for the overall model here is strong and predictive (84%). This model explains a substantial 84% of the variance in service recovery performance, which infers that the independent variables in the model have a strong explanatory power for service recovery performance. The model accounts for a significant portion of the variability in this variable, indicating a robust relationship.

6. Discussion

The study significantly expands the Conservation of Resources Theory by investigating the interplay between emotional labor, service recovery performance, and servant leadership in the hotel sector of an underdeveloped nation. The empirical findings establish key relationships and shed light on the impact of servant leadership on FLEs and their service recovery performance. Servant leadership emerges as a crucial factor influencing emotional labor, with a positive effect on FLEs' deep acting and a negative impact on surface acting. Over two time waves, the data suggests that servant leadership fosters deep acting, enabling FLEs to authentically express emotions aligned with organizational norms. This aligns with the findings of Lu et al. (2018). Importantly, FLEs engaged in deep acting exhibit a significantly positive effect on service recovery performance, while those displaying surface acting have a negative influence on the recovery process.

The study demonstrates a substantial positive influence of servant leadership on FLEs' service recovery performance, establishing hotels led by this style as conducive to effective

service recovery. This novel exploration in the hotel sector of a least developed country adds valuable insights to the existing knowledge base. The findings highlight a strong correlation between servant leadership and service recovery performance, consistent with prior studies by Chen et al. (2014), Ghosh & Khatri (2017), and Saleem et al. (2020). Servant leadership, known for prioritizing follower growth, having a robust service orientation, and building emotional connections, proves to enhance service recovery performance. A second noteworthy contribution lies in linking emotional labor to the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance. The study reveals that this relationship is positively mediated by deep acting and negatively mediated by surface acting. FLEs, influenced by excellent service from their managers, reciprocate by providing outstanding service to clients, aligning with the insights of Berry et al. (1994). The distinctive qualities of servant leadership, such as a strong service orientation and fostering emotional bonds with followers to achieve organizational goals without positional power, play a pivotal role. FLEs' motivation to provide exceptional service stems from the exceptional service they receive from their servant leaders.

The study theoretically contributes by integrating emotional labor into the servant leadership and service recovery performance relationship. Positive mediation of deep acting and negative mediation of surface acting underscore the importance of genuine emotions in influencing service outcomes. The research aligns with prior literature, emphasizing servant leadership's distinct attributes and its motivational impact on FLEs. This motivation leads to genuine and positive emotions, essential in a servant leadership setting, as suggested by Grandey (2000), resulting in higher customer service performance. Theoretical enrichment is evident in how servant leadership induces deep acting in FLEs, enabling them to genuinely understand customer dissatisfaction and address complaints in line with organizational guidelines. The study aligns with the reciprocal nature of servant leadership, where FLEs reciprocate excellent service to customers based on positive experiences with their managers. Consequently, the emotional labor, service recovery performance, and COR theories all undergo expansion as a result of this study. This research substantially contributes to understanding the complex dynamics between emotional labor, servant leadership, and service recovery performance in the hotel sector of a least developed country. The findings emphasize the positive impact of servant leadership on FLEs' emotional authenticity and service recovery performance, offering valuable insights for organizational practices.

7. Conclusion, Contributions, and Limitations

Conclusion

This study explores the impact of servant leadership on frontline employees' service recovery performance in Ethiopian star-rated hotels. The empirical findings confirm that: servant leadership significantly influences deep acting and FLEs' service recovery performance; deep acting positively mediates the relationship between servant leadership and service recovery performance; and surface acting FLEs negatively mediate the connection between servant leadership and service recovery performance. The study also extends the Conservation of Resources theory by investigating the interplay among servant leadership, emotional labor, and service recovery performance. The results provide valuable contributions to both existing literature and practical implications for hotel professionals seeking effective service recovery procedures.

Theoretical Contributions

Service Recovery Performance: This study significantly expands the literature by empirically examining the unexplored relationship between FLEs' service recovery performance and their supervisors' servant leadership. It establishes that practicing servant leadership positively affects the restoration of failed services by influencing FLEs' behavior (Chen et al., 2014; Ghosh & Khatri, 2017; Saleem et al., 2020).

Emotional Labor: The study introduces a theoretical contribution by linking emotional labor to the servant leadership-service recovery performance relationship. It identifies positive mediation of deep acting and negative mediation of surface acting, showcasing that servant leadership prompts FLEs to engage genuinely in service recovery (Grandey, 2000; Chon & Zoltan, 2019).

Conservation of Resources Theory: The study extends the COR theory by demonstrating that servant leaders motivate deep acting, providing FLEs with resources necessary for emotional display rules during service provision. FLEs engaged in deep acting, in turn, possess additional resources for effective service recovery (Ozturk et al., 2021).

Practical Implications

Beyond theoretical insights, the study offers practical implications for professionals in the hotel sector:

Servant Leadership: Implementing servant leadership in hotels is recommended, particularly for its positive impact on service recovery performance. Servant leaders, with a strong service orientation, can provide FLEs with the necessary resources for successful service recovery (van Dierendonck, 2011; Ozturk et al., 2021).

Service Recovery Procedure: Hotel professionals should establish effective service recovery procedures to mitigate the negative effects of service failures, increasing the likelihood of customer return visits and loyalty (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Oentoro et al., 2016).

Training and Recruitment: Considering the variables identified in the study, recruitment and training of FLEs should encourage deep acting and discourage surface acting. This approach enhances service recovery performance, contributing to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Berry et al., 1994).

Limitation and Future Research Directions

The study, while contributing valuable insights to the relationship between servant leadership, emotional labor, and service recovery performance in Ethiopian star-rated hotels, is not without limitations. The narrow focus on Addis Ababa's star-rated hotels may limit the generalizability of findings to different cultural or organizational contexts, prompting the need for broader sampling. Confounding variables, albeit efforts to control for them, might still exist and influence the observed relationships. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for bias, suggesting the need for diverse data sources in future research. The cross-sectional design used poses challenges in establishing causality, recommending the adoption of longitudinal or experimental approaches for more robust evidence. Additionally, the exclusive focus on frontline employees limits the study's holistic understanding of leadership dynamics within the organizational hierarchy. Future research opportunities include exploring cultural variations in leadership impact, identifying additional influencing factors, conducting longitudinal studies for a nuanced perspective, comparing different leadership styles, and incorporating mixed-methods approaches for richer insights. Addressing these limitations and pursuing these avenues for further exploration will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of servant leadership's implications for service recovery performance in the hotel sector.

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