

## Unpacking Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in Leadership and Support Models

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### Abstract

This study examines the effects of servant leadership and perceived organizational support on employee performance, with job satisfaction acting as a mediating variable. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, the study explains how supportive leadership behaviors and organizational support foster positive employee reciprocity through enhanced work attitudes and performance. A quantitative approach was employed using survey data from 200 employees in the poultry industry within an emerging economy. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that servant leadership and perceived organizational support significantly and positively influence job satisfaction. Job satisfaction, in turn, improves employee performance and mediates the relationship between independent variables and performance outcomes. These findings highlight the importance of relational mechanisms in strengthening employee performance within organizational settings in emerging economies.

### How to Cite

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## Introduction

Employee performance represents a critical determinant of organizational sustainability and competitive advantage. Prior studies emphasize its strategic role in enhancing organizational competitiveness in increasingly dynamic environments (Shabbir et al., 2021). Employee performance refers to individual work achievements evaluated through both quality and quantity outcomes in fulfilling assigned responsibilities (Ahmad Ainul Yaqin et al., 2025), which directly contribute to organizational goal attainment (Rusmita et al., 2022). Consequently, identifying factors that enhance employee performance remains a central concern in human resource management and organizational behavior research.

Servant leadership has emerged as an important leadership approach emphasizing service, empathy, and employee empowerment. Evidence suggests that service-oriented leadership fosters supportive work environments and enhances employee self-esteem (Muzafary, 2025). Prior studies further demonstrate that leadership behaviors prioritizing subordinates' needs positively influence employee performance (Diana Maya et al., 2024).

In addition to leadership, perceived organizational support (POS) constitutes a key factor influencing employee behavior and performance. POS reflects employees' perceptions regarding the extent to which organizations value their contributions and care about their well-being (Mohamed & Ali, 2022). Higher perceived support has been associated with improved performance outcomes (Ariarni & Afrianty, 2017) and significant performance improvements (Mursidta, 2017). However, empirical findings concerning the effects of servant leadership and POS on employee performance remain inconsistent. Some studies report insignificant effects of servant leadership (Yuwono Pala'langan, 2021), while others find no direct influence of POS on performance (Septi & Frianto, 2021). These inconsistencies indicate that the relationship between leadership, organizational support, and performance may operate through underlying psychological mechanisms rather than purely direct effects.

Job satisfaction is therefore proposed as a mediating mechanism. Defined as an emotional response arising from comparisons between expected and actual work outcomes (Zahara & Hidayat, 2017), job satisfaction may translate organizational support into enhanced employee contributions (Cahaya & Rahyuda, 2019). Nevertheless, limited research has simultaneously examined the mediating role of job satisfaction linking servant leadership, perceived organizational support, and employee performance, particularly within operational contexts of emerging economy industries.

This study makes three contributions to literature. First, it integrates servant leadership and perceived organizational support within a single Social Exchange Theory framework to explain employee performance. Second, it clarifies the mediating role of job satisfaction in addressing inconsistent findings in previous studies. Third, it extends the evidence base by examining these relationships in an underexplored operational industry setting within an emerging economy, thereby improving the contextual generalizability of leadership and organizational support research. Based on this framework, the study examines both the direct and indirect relationships among servant leadership, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and employee performance.

This study adopts Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the primary theoretical framework (George C. Homans, 1958) (Peter M. Blau, 1964). SET posits that social relationships are governed by the norm of reciprocity, whereby individuals tend to return favorable treatment received from others (Blau, 1964). In organizational settings, leadership behaviors and organizational support can be viewed as social resources that encourage employees to reciprocate through positive attitudes and behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When employees perceive supportive leadership and strong organizational support, they are more likely to develop positive work attitudes such as job satisfaction, which in turn motivates them to exhibit higher levels of performance as a form of reciprocation (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

## Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the relationships among servant leadership, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and employee performance. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model that illustrates the proposed relationships in this research.

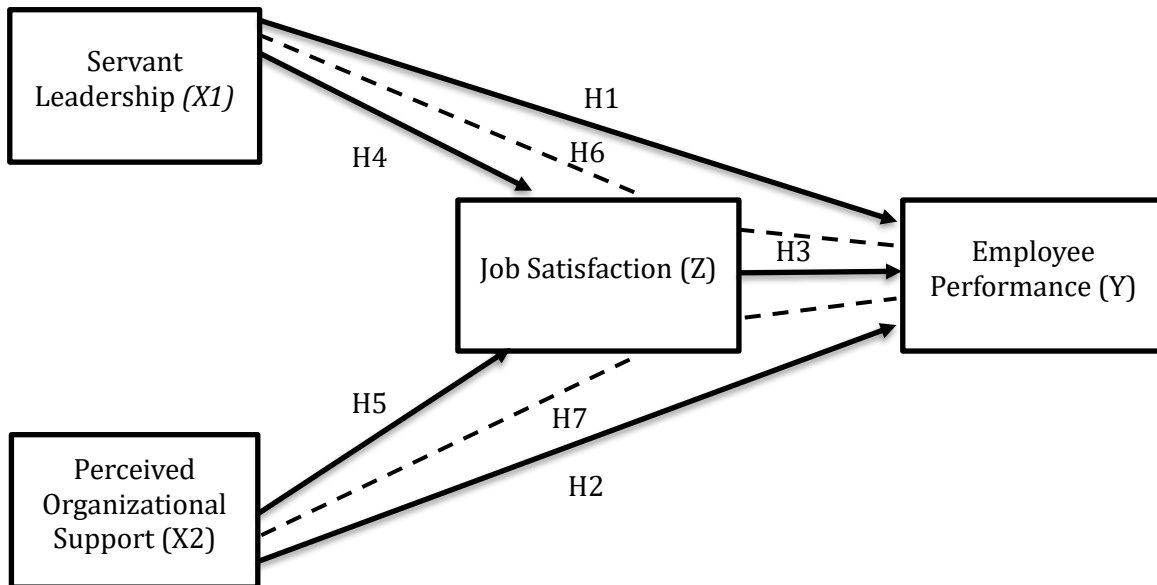


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

Based on the conceptual framework, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Servant leadership positively influences employee performance.
- H2: Perceived organizational support positively influences employee performance.
- H3: Job satisfaction positively influences employee performance.
- H4: Servant leadership positively influences job satisfaction.
- H5: Perceived organizational support positively influences job satisfaction.
- H6: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance.
- H7: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee performance.

The study focused on employees working in the field operations division of the company under study. Given that employees were distributed across multiple operational sites, the study applied a multistage sampling strategy to ensure adequate representation across work locations. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used by grouping employees based on operational units or cage allocations, which served as the cluster units. This approach was appropriate because the employee population was geographically dispersed across several operational areas. In the second stage, purposive sampling was applied to select respondents who met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as having sufficient work experience and being directly involved in operational activities (Taherdoost, 2016).

A total of 200 employees participated in this study. The sample size was considered adequate for Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis, which is suitable for predictive and relationship testing model and does not require large sample sizes compared to covariance-based SEM. Previous methodological literature suggests that SEM-PLS can produce reliable estimates with moderate sample size, particularly when the number of indicators and structural paths is manageable. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Measurement items for servant leadership,

perceived organizational support, job satisfaction and employee performance were adopted from validated instruments used in prior studies and were slightly modified to fit the organizational context while preserving their conceptual meaning. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares approach (SEM-PLS). The analysis consisted of two main stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The measurement model was assessed through convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs. Subsequently, the structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), and predictive relevance. Bootstrapping procedures were applied to test the significance of both direct and indirect relationships among the constructs, including the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationships between servant leadership, perceived organizational support, and employee performance.

**Table 1 Respondent Profile**

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	100%
	Female	0%
Age	<30 years	63%
	31-40 years	27%
	41-50 years	10%
Education	Elementary School (SD)	28,0%
	Junior High School (SMP)	61,0%
	Senior High School (SMA)	11%
Work Experience	>5 years	89,5%
	≤5 years	10,5%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The data show that all respondents were male (100%), indicating that the workforce in the observed operational setting was entirely male. In terms of age, most respondents were under 30 years old (63%), followed by those aged 31–40 years (27%) and 41–50 years (10%). Regarding educational background, the majority had completed junior high school (61%), while 28.0% had completed elementary school and 11% had completed senior high school. In addition, most respondents had more than five years of work experience (89.5%), suggesting that the sample was largely composed of experienced employees.

## Result

The outer model used to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement indicators in this study is presented in Figure 2. The loading factor value on each indicator in the construct indicates that the validity test result converges when using the displayed indicator. For the indicator to be considered valid, the loading factor value must be more than 0.7 so that further testing can be performed. The results of the convergent validity test best on the value of outer loading or loading factor are presented in Table 2.

Based on Table 2, it is known that the loading factors produce numbers >0.7, which means that all indicators pass the convergent validity test, allowing the next process to be carried out. It is known that all research variables, namely Servant Leadership (X1), Perceived Organizational Support (X2), Employee Performance (Y), and Job satisfaction (Z), have AVE values greater than 0.5. This explains that all variables in this study are valid and able to explain more than half that the cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of all variables exceed 0.6. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables studied in this study can be considered reliable.

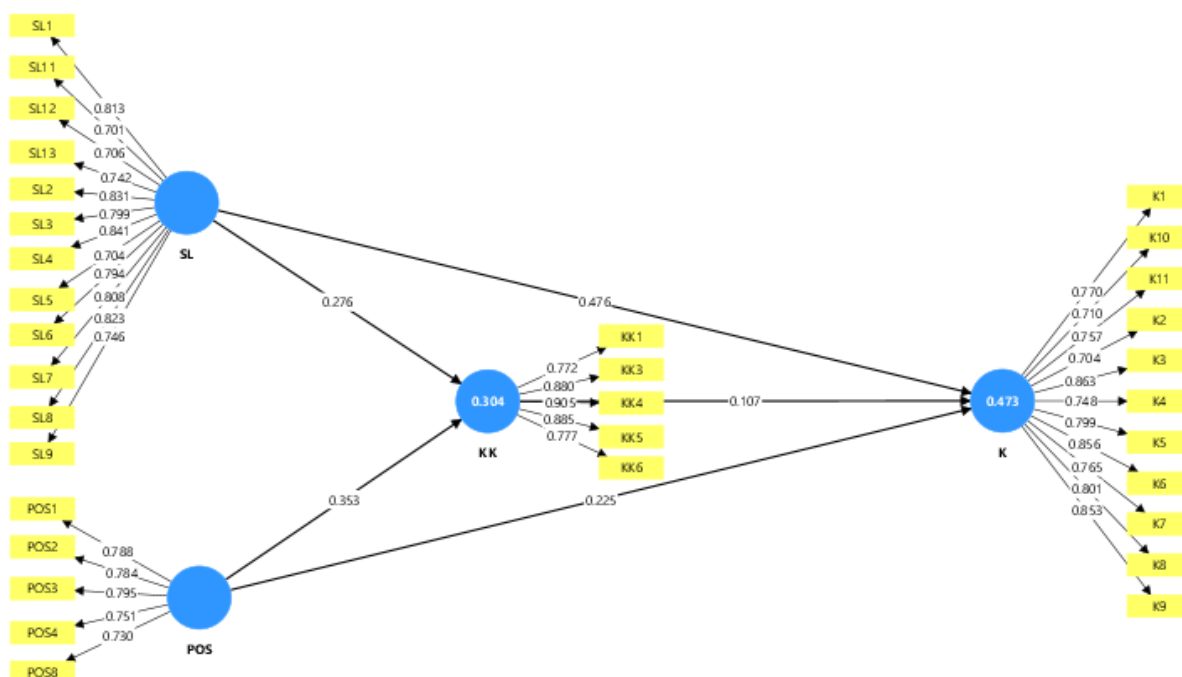


Figure 2 Outer Model

Table 2 Outer Loading

Variable	Item	Loading factors	AVE	CR
Servant Leadership	SL1	0.845	0,659	0,941
	SL2	0.857		
	SL3	0.796		
	SL4	0.874		
	SL5	0.723		
	SL6	0.810		
	SL7	0.824		
	SL8	0.836		
	SL9	0.725		
Perceived Organizational Support	POS1	0.785	0,587	0,877
	POS2	0.770		
	POS3	0.787		
	POS4	0.740		
	POS8	0.748		
Employee Performance	K1	0.724	0,617	0,941
	K3	0.858		
	K4	0.745		
	K5	0.781		
	K6	0.853		
	K7	0.766		
	K8	0.791		
	K9	0.847		
	K10	0.729		
	K11	0.746		
	Job Satisfaction	KK1		
KK3		0.888		
KK4		0.909		
KK5		0.883		
KK6		0.763		

Source: Output SmartPLS4

**Table 3 Discriminant Validity**

	Employee Performance	Job Satisfaction	POS	Servant Leadership	AVE
Employee Performance					0,617
Job Satisfaction	0.653				0,707
Perceived Organizational Support	0.577	0.603			0,587
Servant Leadership	0.635	0.494	0.536		0,659

Source: OutputSmartPLS4

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criteria, namely by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) value for each construct with the correlation value between constructs. Based on the test results in Table 3, it was found that the AVE square root value for each construct exceeded the correlation value with other constructs. This indicates that all research variables meet the criteria for discriminant validity.

**Table 4 Hypothesis Result**

Hypotheses	Variable	T-Value	P-Value	Result
H1	Servant Leadership → Employee Performance	3.413	0.000	Supported
H2	POS → Employee Performance	1.611	0.054	Not Supported
H3	Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance	3.416	0.000	Supported
H4	Servant Leadership → Job Satisfaction	2.688	0.004	Supported
H5	POS → Job Satisfaction	3.662	0.000	Supported
H6	Servant Leadership → Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance	2.008	0.022	Supported
H7	POS → Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance	2.329	0.010	Supported

Source: SmartPLS4

Based on the hypothesis testing results presented in Table 4, most of the proposed relationship in the structural model was statistically significant. Overall, the findings indicate that servant leadership, perceived organizational support (POS), and job satisfaction play important roles in explaining variations in employee performance. These results provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which leadership behavior and organizational support shape employee outcomes within the organizational context.

The analysis reveals that servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ( $T = 3.413$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that leaders who prioritize service, empowerment, and employee development can foster higher levels of employee performance. Servant leadership behaviors such as providing guidance, demonstrating empathy, and supporting employee’s professional growth create a supportive work environment that encourage employees to perform their task more effectively and responsibly.

Underly with leadership theory, such behaviors strengthen employees’ intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment, which ultimately contribute to improved work performance. When employees perceive their leaders as genuinely committed to their well-being and development, they are more likely to reciprocate through greater engagement and stronger performance outcomes.

In contrast, the direct relationship between perceived organizational support and employee performance was not statistically significant ( $T = 1.611$ ;  $p = 0.054$ ). This result suggests that organizational support alone may not immediately translate into improved performance outcomes. Rather, the influence of perceived support appears to operate through employees’ psychological and attitudinal responses toward their work. In many organizational contexts, employees may interpret organizational support as a signal that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. However, the transformation of such perceptions into higher performance may depend on whether that support enhances employee satisfaction and motivation at work.

Further analysis indicates that job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ( $T = 3.416$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding confirms that employees who experience higher levels of job satisfaction tend to demonstrate stronger work commitment, motivation, and productivity. Job satisfaction encourages employees to engage more positively with their tasks and to invest greater effort in achieving organizational goals. These findings reinforce the long-standing perspective in organizational behavior research that satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of performance.

The result also reveals that both servant leadership and perceived organizational support significantly influence job satisfaction. Servant leadership was found to positively affect job satisfaction ( $T = 2.688$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ), indicating that leadership behaviors characterized by service orientation empowerment, and concern for employee well-being contribute to greater employee satisfaction. Leaders who actively support and value their employees foster a work environment that enhances employees' psychological comfort and sense of appreciation within the organization.

Similarly, perceived organizational support was found to have a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction ( $T = 3.662$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that employees who perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being tend to develop stronger satisfaction with their work. Organizational support is the form of recognition, fair treatment, and access to resources strengthens employee positive attitudes toward their jobs and reinforces their emotional attachment to the organization.

Importantly, the mediation analysis shows that job satisfaction plays a central role in linking leadership behavior and organizational support to employee performance. The indirect effect of servant leadership on employee performance through job satisfaction was statistically significant ( $T = 2.008$ ;  $p = 0.022$ ). This finding indicates that servant leadership improves employee performance not only directly but also indirectly through job satisfaction. In other words, leadership behaviors that prioritize employee development and well-being increase job satisfaction, which in turn encourages employees to perform more effectively.

A similar pattern emerged in the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee performance. The indirect effect of POS on performance through job satisfaction was also significant ( $T = 2.329$ ;  $p = 0.010$ ). This finding suggests that organizational support affects employee performance mainly by increasing job satisfaction rather than through a direct effect. Employees who feel supported by their organization tend to develop more positive attitudes toward their work, which in turn motivates them to contribute more effectively to organizational goals.

Taken together, these results highlight the central role of job satisfaction as a key psychological mechanism within the research model. While servant leadership directly enhances employee performance, the influence of perceived organizational support appears to operate primarily through employee's satisfaction with their work. Consequently, job satisfaction serves as an important mediating variable that translates supportive leadership and organizational practices into improved employee performance outcomes.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of leadership practices and organizational environments that prioritize employee well-being and satisfaction. Servant leadership and organizational support not only shape employees' perceptions of the workplace but also influence the psychological processes that drive performance. Therefore, organizations should focus on developing leadership behaviors and policies that strengthen job satisfaction and improve overall work experience.

## Discussion

### Servant Leadership and Employee Performance

The present study confirms that servant leadership exerts a significant and positive direct effect on employee performance ( $T = 3.413$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby supporting H1. This finding is consistent with a growing body of empirical literature documenting the performance-enhancing consequences of servant leadership. For instance, Maya et al. (2024) demonstrated that leadership behaviors prioritizing subordinate needs are positively associated with performance among vocational school teachers, while Widyacahyani et al. (2020) similarly found servant leadership to be among the most influential leadership styles in driving employee outcomes across organizational contexts. The theoretical foundation for this relationship resides within Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that employees who perceive their leaders as genuinely invested in their growth and well-being are motivated to reciprocate such treatment through higher task engagement, discretionary effort, and ultimately, superior performance.

Specifically, servant leaders who exhibit behaviors such as providing individualized guidance, demonstrating authentic empathy, and actively supporting professional development create a psychologically safe environment in which employees feel empowered to take initiative and perform responsibilities more effectively and responsibly. These behaviors align with the ten characteristics of servant leadership articulated by Spears (2010), including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Collectively, these behaviors strengthen employees' intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment — two mechanisms widely recognized as mediating pathways between leadership quality and work output (Greenleaf, 2019). The finding further corroborates the argument that leadership operates not merely through formal authority but through relational and motivational processes that activate employees' potential and encourage them to exceed minimum performance expectations. Notably, the direct effect of servant leadership on performance in the present study was sustained even after controlling for the mediated pathway through job satisfaction, suggesting that leadership behaviors carry an independent motivational influence on performance beyond their effects on affective work states.

### Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Performance

In contrast to the servant leadership finding, the direct relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and employee performance was not statistically significant ( $T = 1.611$ ;  $p = 0.054$ ), leading to non-support of H2. This result, while inconsistent with some prior studies reporting a direct POS–performance link (Ariarni & Afrianty, 2017; Shabbir et al., 2021), is theoretically coherent and aligns with an emerging strand of literature suggesting that POS influences performance primarily through attitudinal mediators rather than directly (Septi & Frianto, 2021; Cahayu & Rahyuda, 2019). From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, the absence of a direct effect implies that perceived organizational support does not automatically translate into behavioral outcomes unless it first generates positive psychological responses in employees. Specifically, employees may interpret organizational support as a signal that the organization values their contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), but this cognitive appraisal requires affective processing — such as increased satisfaction and positive work attitudes — before behavioral reciprocity manifests in the form of higher performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The present finding thus reinforces the importance of examining indirect mechanisms rather than assuming a straightforward input–output model of organizational support and performance. This is particularly relevant in the poultry industry context, where operational employees may perceive organizational support as a structural resource that enhances their work conditions, but the translation of such perceptions into performance improvements depends on whether those resources sufficiently address employees' intrinsic motivational needs and satisfaction. This contextual nuance highlights the value of the mediated model adopted in the present study and suggests that future research should systematically explore boundary conditions — such as task

characteristics, autonomy levels, and organizational culture — that may amplify or attenuate the direct POS–performance relationship within operationally intensive industries.

### **Job Satisfaction and Employee Performance**

The finding that job satisfaction significantly and positively influences employee performance ( $T = 3.416$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) provides strong support for H3 and reaffirms one of the most robust relationships in the organizational behavior literature. This result is consistent with the seminal work of Beliadwi and Moningka (2014), who demonstrated that positive emotional responses arising from favorable comparisons between expected and actual work outcomes motivate employees toward greater productivity. Similarly, Nurrohmat and Lestari (2021), Fajri et al. (2022), and Widayati et al. (2020) collectively confirm across multiple organizational contexts that higher job satisfaction is associated with stronger performance outcomes. The underlying mechanism is well-theorized: job satisfaction increases employees' organizational commitment, reduces withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover intentions, and fosters a pro-organizational orientation that encourages employees to invest greater discretionary effort into task completion (Zahara & Hidayat, 2017).

Within the present study's operational context, job satisfaction likely reflects employees' positive appraisals of multiple facets of their work experience, including the quality of supervision, the adequacy of organizational resources, collegial relationships, and task meaningfulness. When these facets are perceived favorably, employees develop a stronger sense of obligation and willingness to contribute to organizational goals — a process entirely consistent with the reciprocity norm embedded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). The magnitude of the job satisfaction effect in the present model also underscores the conceptual argument that affective work states constitute a pivotal psychological bridge between organizational inputs (leadership and support) and behavioral outputs (performance), a point elaborated further in the mediation discussion below.

### **Servant Leadership, Perceived Organizational Support, and Job Satisfaction**

Both servant leadership ( $T = 2.688$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ) and perceived organizational support ( $T = 3.662$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) were found to positively and significantly influence job satisfaction, supporting H4 and H5 respectively. The positive effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction corroborates findings by Amalia et al. (2024), Iswati et al. (2025), and Mikel et al. (2021), who collectively demonstrate that service-oriented leadership behaviors — characterized by empowerment, ethical commitment, and genuine concern for employee needs — create favorable workplace conditions that enhance employees' psychological comfort and sense of appreciation. When leaders prioritize subordinates' growth, actively listen to their concerns, and demonstrate consistent supportive behaviors, employees develop a stronger identification with their work roles and the organization, which in turn elevates their satisfaction with the employment relationship (Rayatin et al., 2018; Spears, 2010).

The positive effect of POS on job satisfaction is equally well-grounded theoretically and empirically. Consistent with Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and Oubibi et al. (2022), the present finding suggests that employees who perceive the organization as valuing their contributions and caring about their well-being tend to develop more positive attitudes toward their work. Such perceptions activate the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964), leading employees to respond with heightened affective attachment to the organization, which manifests as greater job satisfaction. In operationally demanding environments such as the poultry industry, where physical conditions and job demands may be challenging, access to organizational support in the form of recognition, fair treatment, and adequate resources becomes particularly important for maintaining positive work attitudes. The relatively stronger effect of POS on job satisfaction compared to servant leadership ( $T = 3.662$  vs.  $T = 2.688$ ) may reflect the specific operational context of this study, in which structural and material support from the organization may be more immediately salient to field employees' daily work experience than leadership behavior alone.

## Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

A central contribution of the present study lies in its examination of job satisfaction as a mediating mechanism. The results confirm that job satisfaction significantly mediates both the servant leadership–performance relationship ( $T = 2.008$ ;  $p = 0.022$ ) and the POS–performance relationship ( $T = 2.329$ ;  $p = 0.010$ ), thereby supporting H6 and H7. These findings carry important theoretical implications for the interpretation of the inconsistent direct effects observed in literature. In particular, the non-significant direct effect of POS on performance becomes theoretically interpretable when understood through the lens of full mediation: organizational support influences performance entirely through its capacity to generate positive affective responses, specifically job satisfaction, which in turn motivates higher performance (Nasution & Karneli, 2023; Mursidta, 2017).

For servant leadership, the mediation is partial rather than full, given the sustained significance of the direct path. This pattern is theoretically important: it suggests that servant leadership operates through dual mechanisms — a direct behavioral channel, whereby leadership behaviors immediately enhance employee competence and task orientation, and an indirect affective channel, whereby leadership behaviors first improve job satisfaction and subsequent performance. This dual-pathway model is consistent with the broader organizational behavior literature on leadership effectiveness, which recognizes that effective leadership influences performance through both cognitive/behavioral and affective routes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Yuanita & Padmantlyo, 2022). The mediation findings also speak directly to the theoretical contribution of integrating Social Exchange Theory as the unifying framework of this study. SET would predict precisely this pattern: supportive inputs from leaders and organizations generate positive attitudinal reciprocation (job satisfaction), which employees then translate into behavioral contributions (performance). The empirical results align tightly with this theoretical logic, thereby strengthening the theoretical coherence of the proposed model.

## Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence on the interrelationships among servant leadership, perceived organizational support (POS), job satisfaction, and employee performance. The findings confirm that job satisfaction exerts a positive and significant influence on employee performance, underscoring the critical role of employees' psychological states and work attitudes in shaping outcomes beyond formal organizational structures and policies.

Moreover, servant leadership is shown to enhance both job satisfaction and employee performance. Leadership behaviors grounded in service orientation, empathy, and empowerment foster trust-based relationships and strengthen intrinsic motivation, thereby contributing to superior performance. In contrast, perceived organizational support does not directly predict employee performance but significantly improves job satisfaction, indicating that its impact on performance is mediated through employees' affective responses toward their work.

The mediating role of job satisfaction reinforces the relevance of Social Exchange Theory, suggesting that supportive treatment from leaders and organizations is reciprocated by employees through stronger commitment and productive work behaviors. Conceptually, these results highlight that organizational support influences performance primarily via affective work conditions. Practically, the study emphasizes the necessity of integrating servant leadership practices with authentic organizational support to cultivate job satisfaction as a foundation for sustainable performance enhancement.

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