Investigating the Link between Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior via Psychological Empowerment of Employees

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Article History	Abstract
  	The challenges of 21ˢᵗ century business world characterized by stiff competition, technological growth and market dynamics require people-oriented leadership that fosters innovative work behaviors amongst employees for organizational sustainability. Therefore, as the employees' innovative work behavior (IWB) has become the key for organizational sustainability, the present study examined the relationship between servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior via psychological empowerment. A well-crafted questionnaire was used to gather data from workers of both private and public organizations in Nigeria. The data were analyzed based on Baron and Kenny approach with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of Macro PROCESS analyses found that servant leadership was positively correlated with innovative work behavior. Also, psychological empowerment was positively correlated with innovative work behavior. Importantly, psychological empowerment moderated the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior such that psychological empowerment amplified innovative work behavior when leaders were seen to demonstrate servant leadership in the organizations. It was therefore recommended that organizations should focus on creating organizational culture that supports servant leadership styles that foster innovative work behavior for effective organizational performance and sustainability. ***Keywords***: *Servant leadership, innovative work behavior, psychological empowerment, organizations, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Today's 21ˢᵗ century business world that relies heavenly on technological and digital platform needs employees with innovative mindset in order to survive (Daud et al., 2022). The stiff competition, technological growth and market dynamics characterizing today's businesses require that corporate firms adapt and innovate by maximizing employees innovative work behavior (Sintaasih et al., 2020). Innovative work behavior refers to the "intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization" (Janssen, 2000, p.23). De Jong and Den Hartog (2008) refer to innovative work behavior as "a deliberate individual actions to apply and/or adapt new concepts, goods, processes and procedures for tasks, units or organizations" (p. 5). It involves creating novel ideas, approaches and inventions, as well as adoption and use of innovative ways concerning business activities in organizations (Sutardi et al., 2022).

Nowadays, scholars have focused on discovering the antecedents of innovative work behavior and how it can be fostered at workplaces owing to its valuable contribution to organizational sustainability (e.g. Khan et al., 2021). However, despite efforts at understanding innovative work behavior and how it can be fostered at workplaces, its antecedents, moderators, and outcomes still remains unclear. According to Zhang et al (2021), the causes of innovative work behavior remain unclear and under-studied. Also, Ratnawati (2023) observed that research on innovative work behavior is scant. Even though extant literatures point to the fact that organizational variables such as fairness, job attributes, implicit contract, innate motivation, incentives, and the quality of working

conditions could foster employees' IWB (e.g. Afsar et al., 2015), not much studies have been done linking leadership and innovative work behavior via psychological empowerment. In other words, there is paucity of empirical studies on the connections between servant leadership, innovative work behavior and psychological empowerment. The present study was therefore undertaken with the objective to fill the gap in knowledge by investigating the linkages between servant leadership, innovative work behavior and psychological empowerment of employees.

Leadership remains a potent factor that can impact employees innovative work behavior. Organizations thrive and blossom if they have leaders that are willing to work towards achieving organizational goals. Among all the leadership models such as transformational leadership, situational leadership, and transactional leadership that can be adopted in organizations; servant leadership stands out clearly and has been found to have significant impact on employee performance (Riquelme et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2021). According to Khan et al (2021), leaders in this 21st century knowledge economy tend to achieve greater success by adopting a servant leadership approach that is employee-centered. Servant leaders attend to the needs of their employees, understand and consider the needs and desires of all their subordinates as well as share the difficulties felt by the people around them (Greenleaf, 1998). Caring for the followers to encourage growth and development is the hallmark of the servant leaders (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017; Bavik, 2020). Servant leadership that makes employees needs a priority supports their personal growth and development which will potentially contribute to their positive attitudes and behaviors including innovative work behavior. Servant leadership may therefore play a critical role in fostering employees' innovative work behavior in organizations. Studies of servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior are necessary for the present workplaces saddled with unethical conduct (Don-Solomon & Ayawei, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2020).

Again, while considerable research exist supporting the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the link between various leadership styles and job outcomes including employees' proactive work behavior, innovative work behavior (e.g. Zein et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2021; Waqas et al., 2021; Kustanto et al., 2020); the valuable insight gained from mediation studies are not enough and need to be complemented by moderating studies. This will lead to a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanism through which effective leadership such servant leadership fosters employees' innovative work behavior. The present study

is also an attempt to cover this research limitation by investigating the moderating effect of psychological empowerment on the nexus between servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior.

Thus, the observed gaps in knowledge culminated in the following research questions: (i) Will there be a relationship between servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior? (ii) Will psychological empowerment have a positive relationship with employees' innovative work behavior? (iii) Will psychological empowerment influence the relationship between servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior such that innovative work behavior will be fostered when leaders demonstrate servant leadership behaviors? Therefore, the objectives of the study include: (i) to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior. (ii) to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and employees' innovative work behavior, and (iii) to determine if psychological empowerment will influence the relationship between servant leadership and employees' innovative behavior in such a way that innovative work behavior will be fostered when leaders demonstrate servant leadership. As the study investigates the linkages of the core variables, the overriding objective of this study remains to identify malleable conditions that promote invention.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses
Servant Leadership

The concept of servant leadership is rooted in religion exemplified by Jesus Christ in the gospel of Mark 10:43 where the disciples were admonished that "Whoever wants to be a leader must be a servant." The concept however, found its way in the modern organizations by Greenleaf in 1970s, an American management and leadership expert (Graham, 1991). Greenleaf suggested that servant leadership is an alternative leadership paradigm; arguing that it is a "better leadership approach that puts serving others -including followers, customers, and community, as the number one priority". According to Greenleaf (1970: p.27) "The servant-leader is servant first... the difference manifests itself in the care taken... to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?" Greenleaf argues that it is the natural desire to serve that distinguishes servant-leaders from other types of leaders. Therefore, the primary motive of servant leadership is to serve others first rather than to acquire power, wealth, or

status at the detriment of others.

Following Greenleaf's initial conceptualization of servant leadership and extensive reviews, multiple efforts have been made at defining its conceptual focus. According to Ehrhart (2004, p. 68), servant leadership is defined as "a leader who places his or her moral responsibility not only to the success of the organization, but also to his or her subordinates, the organization's customers, and other organizational stakeholders." Ehrhart identified seven indicators of servant leadership to include: "forming relationships with subordinates, empowering subordinates, helping subordinates grow and succeed, behaving ethically, having conceptual skills, putting subordinates first, and creating value for those outside organization" (Ehrhart, 2004. P. 68). Initially, Laub (1999) defined it "as an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader" (p. 4). Laub (1999) outlined six attributes of servant leadership including "valuing people, developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership and sharing leadership" (p.4). In their own Hale and Fields (2007, p. 397) defined servant leadership as "a style of leadership which emphasizes leader behaviors that focus on follower development, and de-emphasizing glorification of the leader." For Spears (2002, p. 4) servant leadership is "a model that identifies serving others – including employees, customers, and community – as the number-one priority." Again, Schaubroeck et al (2011) refer to servant leadership as "a group-oriented approach to leadership that emphasizes serving others" (p. 865). Also Lemoine (2015) defined it as "influence behaviors, manifested humbly and ethically within relationships, oriented towards follower development, empowerment, and continuous and meaningful improvement for all stakeholders" (p. 45). Furthermore, Evaa et al (2019), captured the essence of servant leadership in their definition as "an other-oriented approach to leadership; manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of followers needs and interests; and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community" (p. 114). The definition suggests three features that identify servant leadership, which include motive, mode, and mindset of servant leadership.

The primary motive of servant leadership is other-oriented approach to leadership which does not emanate from within but outside the leader. The mode of servant leadership is demonstrated by one-on-one prioritizing of followers' needs, interests, and goals above those of the leader; while the mindset of servant leadership is the outward reorienting of their concern for others within the organization and the larger community.

Taken together, the three attributes (motive, mode, and mindset) are essential for proper understanding of servant leadership. In sum, Greenleaf's idea and related ones are consistent with the belief that servant leadership is uniquely characterized by ethical behavior, considering others first, supporting others grow and succeed, with the aim of serving various stakeholders. Thus, servant leaders consider the needs and goods of others first before their own needs, and tend to exhibit integrity, sincerity, fairness, frankness, probity and uprightness (Cai et al., 2022).

Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)

In the contemporary business world, IWB has been viewed as crucial for increasing competitive advantage (Helmy et al., 2019). IWB is concerned with idea creation, providing support, and helping their implementation. Akram et al (2016) define IWB as the individual behavior of accomplishing the initiation and introduction of ideas in a work role, group, or organization that is advanced and useful for developing of processes, products, or procedures and their implementations. According to Afsar and Umrani (2019), IWB is the employees' capacity to work beyond normal work activities, such as discovering advanced technology, applying advanced work methods, and performing examinations to apply new ideas. IWB addresses the challenges encountered by employees in enhancing creative personal identity (Usmanova et al., 2020). Accordingly, IWB is designing and implementing advanced product and process ideas, which will later improve personal, team, and organizational performance (Kmieciak, 2021).

Psychological Empowerment (PE)

Recently, psychological empowerment has been found to play a crucial role in fostering organizational success (Pradhan et al., 2017). PE is all about the power and autonomy of employees obtained through delegation of power that increase work motivation (Stanescu et al., 2021). They are four domains of psychological empowerment including meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Meaning is concerned with individual emotional experiences when they understand the work and activities required to complete the work. Competence refers to individual's confidence in completing the assigned task effectively by the opportunity and freedom at the disposal of the person to exercise ability, skill and knowledge. Self-determination is the individual's motivation to do the work which makes them more independent in all processes (Van den Broeck et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Impact is the influence of the individual on the execution of work in organizations. Like other dimensions, impact is basically determined by the opportunities and freedom provided that

determine how the work is done (Grass et al., 2020; Nikpour, 2018). Psychological empowerment is therefore the power and control acquired by employees through delegation of roles in organizations to increase motivation. Therefore, the ability of organizations to innovate may rely on the management's willingness to delegate functions that empower employees. Extant literatures suggest that leaders foster creative and inventive work behavior through empowerment (e.g. Abukhait et al., 2019; Minai et al., 2020; Yamin, 2020).

Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

Over the years, the concept of servant leadership has attracted increasing attention in organizational literature. This stems from the fact that it is a leadership approach that places emphasis on the importance of serving the needs of others, thereby fostering a positive work performance and promoting positive outcomes such as creativity and inventiveness in organizations (Eva et al., 2019; van Dierendonck, 2011). As servant leadership gives top priority to employees' welfare, growth, and development, such attitudes and behaviors serve as empowerment, support, and trust-building to employees thereby creating conducive social exchange relationship (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). This valuable social exchange in turn tends to foster high work performance in employees leading to increased innovative work behavior (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Liden et al., 2008). Scholars have discovered that beyond other types of leadership, servant leadership has strong relationship with innovative work behavior (e.g., Dannhauser, 2007; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). This is because, as servant leaders in their characteristic manner exhibit integrity, honesty, sincerity, and forthrightness, they serve as a model for their followers. These exemplary leadership behaviors spur employees to take similar actions thereby propelling them to go beyond the normal call of duty in form of initiative and creative work behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2010). Thus, servant leaders are better inclined to inculcate in their followers new skills and ideas necessary for innovative work behavior. According to Khan et al (2021), servant leaders adopt plans that aid intellectual and social dynamics that are essential for eliciting employee's IWB. Khan et al (2021) further argue that servant leaders relate to their employees in such a way that makes them aware that their honest intention to pursue innovation are recognized and acknowledged, in spite of any obstacles and setbacks. Beyond the aforementioned reasoning, other practical evidences allude to the facts that servant leadership impacts employee's innovative work behavior positively (for e.g., Khan et al., 2021; Zeng & Xu, 2020). We therefore propose the first hypothesis that:

H_1: There will be a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior.

Psychological Empowerment and Innovative Work Behavior

Psychological empowerment is a demonstration of the influence, capability, power and autonomy exerted by employees in the execution of their job roles. Individuals who are mentally empowered tent to be committed to their work processes that lead to innovative behavior (Kustanto et al., 2020; Prabowo et al., 2018). Numerous studies have established direct link between psychological empowerment and positive work outcomes such as self-initiated and future-oriented actions (Kawasaki, 2019), taking charge, identifying and fixing problems (Wang et al., 2021), speaking up and suggesting new ideas (Wei et al., 2020). Highly empowered employees demonstrate increased work engagement and regularly display innovative work behavior (Malik et al., 2020). Also, van de Broeck et al (2021) reported that individuals with high self-determination tend to be highly independent, a critical factor in innovative work behavior. On the basis of the aforementioned literatures, the second hypothesis is put forth thus:

H_2: There will be a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior.

Psychological Empowerment as a Moderator

Social exchange theory serves as possible explanation of PE serving as a moderator in the relationship between servant leadership and IWB. In line with the tenet of theory which reflects on individual's behavior in anticipation of favorable outcome and future expectations (Aristana et al., 2022), when leaders such as managers or supervisors and subordinates develop positive relationships in a work setting to reach a common understanding, both parties (leaders and subordinates) benefit and become satisfied. Generally, in existence of good working conditions, employees tend to have a sense of empowerment as they are supported and encouraged. They are therefore likely to reciprocate by showing more commitment and engagement that fosters affective commitment and innovative behavior. As servant leaders value and develop people, build community, demonstrates authenticity, offer and share leadership; the encouragement tends to empower employees mentally and increase their creativity and innovation. The confidence, support and motivation inculcated in employees' mindset tend to in turn activate and accelerate their willpower for further improvement and productivity.

Several studies have explored and established the intervening role of psychological empowerment in fostering positive work outcomes such as innovation,

commitment, initiation, etc. For instance, psychological empowerment has been found to play a mediating role in the association between servant leadership and innovative work behavior (Cai et al., 2018), transformational leadership and innovative work behavior (Pradhan & Jena, 2019), transactional leadership and innovative work behavior (Kustanto et al., 2020), empowering leadership and employees' proactive behavior (Ul Haq et al., 2019), authentic leadership and proactive behavior among employees (Zhang et al., 2018). Also, employees' perception of job autonomy has been found to play a significant moderating role in the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior (Cai et al., 2018). The third hypothesis is therefore postulated thus:

H₃: Psychological empowerment will moderate the relationship between SL and IWB such that IWB will be high when leaders demonstrate SL in the organization.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1draws from the perspective of social exchange theory, a moderation model involving servant leadership as the predictor variable, innovative work behavior as the criterion variable and psychological empowerment as the moderator variable. The extant literatures are in agreement that servant leadership and innovative work behavior are linked positively. Moreover, the model suggests that servant leadership fosters increased innovative work behavior especially when employees are psychologically empowered. In other words, psychological empowerment tends to potentially strengthen the positive link between servant leadership and innovative work behavior.
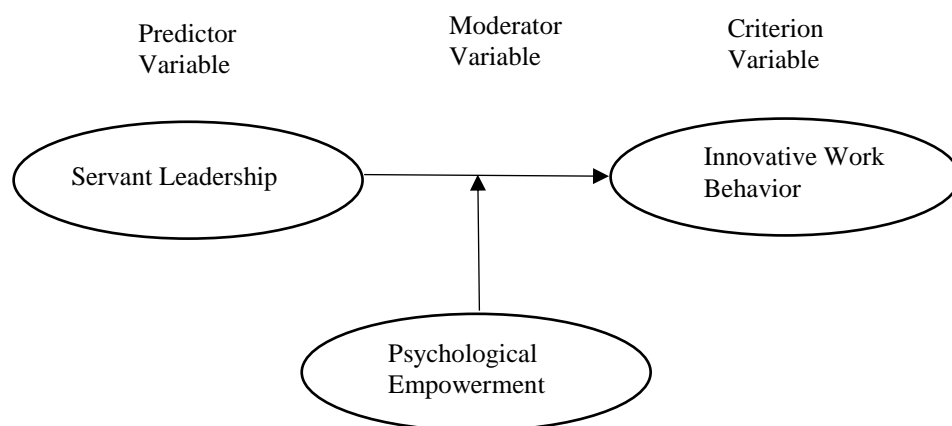
Predictor Variable   Moderator Variable   Criterion Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the hypothesized and moderated relationship among the study variables.

3. Methods

Sampling and procedure
A total of 405 participants that completed online survey questionnaire using social media platform (Google survey form) was used for the study. The platform is mostly used by researchers to select participants because of its efficacy (e.g., Aslam et al., 2022; Muduli & Trivedi, 2020; Ouerdian et al., 2021). As the participants completed the questionnaire, they were requested to as well share the questionnaire with their online friends, thereby adopting "virtual snowball sampling" technique which is ideal for this kind of study (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). To be eligible to participate, the participant must have a full-time employment with an organization and not self-employed. Thus, the participants for this study cut across various establishments including, hospitality industry (15.7%), technical industry (18.4%), manufacturing sectors (14.4%), banking and insurance sector (19.5%), educational sector (15.7%) ministry workers (12.8%) and

others. Out of the participants surveyed, 57.6% were males while 38.9% were females; regarding their age, 56.4% were 30 years and below while the rest were 31 years and above; in terms of job tenure, 68.7% had 5 years or below; with regards to educational qualification, 58.4% were holders of first degrees and below, and 38.1% held a master's degree and above.

Instruments
Servant Leadership Scale developed by Ehrhart (2004) was the instrument used to measure servant leadership. It is a 14-item one-dimensional scale, and recently scholars such as Gnankob et al (2022) and Shim and Park (2019) have applied the scale in public sectors. For the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 was established for the scale. Assessing the convergent validity of the scale yielded a value of 0.69 of the average variance extracted which exceeds the recommended 0.5 benchmark showing acceptable convergent validity.

Innovative Work Behavior Scale developed by De Jong

and Hartog (2010) was used to assess innovative work behavior. Respondents were to report the extent to which they agreed with the statements about their innovative behavior in their workplace. Example of sample items includes "I often systematically introduce innovative ideas into work practices". For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 was established for the scale; while 0.60 value of the average variance extracted was obtained as the convergent validity of the scale. This also indicates satisfactory convergent validity of the scale.

Psychological Empowerment Scale developed by Spritzer (1995) was used to assess psychological empowerment. The scale measures four dimensions of psychological empowerment: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact with each dimension having three items. However, the composite score of the four dimensions was used in the present study to determine the psychological empowerment for the individuals. Some examples of the item of the scale are 'my job activities are personally meaningful to me; 'I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job'. For the present study, a composite reliability of 0.92 and Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 were obtained which demonstrate acceptable reliability of the scale. Also, the validity of the scale was assessed using a convergent approach and the average variance extracted was 0.64 which indicated a satisfactory convergent

validity since the value exceeded the recommended 0.5 benchmark.

All the three main variables (SL, PE, and IWB) of this study were assessed based on five-point Likert format ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Control variables
In a research, control variables also known as confounding variables which are not the variable of interest to the researcher but can affect the outcome of a study due to their impact on the focal variables were considered by holding them constant. In the present study, age, gender and job tenure were considered as control variables, as they have been implicated in related studies (e.g. Akosile & Ekemen, 2022; Choeni et al., 2023).

4. Results

Descriptive Statistics
Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations (SD) and zero-order correlation coefficients of the study variables. The observed means could be assumed to be moderate judging from a 5-point Likert scale format. While none of the control variables was significantly correlated with the study variables, SL was positively and significantly correlated with IWB ($r = 0.45$, p< 0.01). Also, PE had significant positive relationship with IWB ($r = 0.37$, p < 0.01).

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation and Zero-Order Correlation of the Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	33.42	9.85	1.00					
2. Gender	1.54	0.53	0.01	1.00				
3. JT	3.86	0.74	0.07	-0.05	1.00			
4. SL	3.65	0.71	-0.01	-0.08	0.01	1.00		
5. PE	5.57	1.02	-0.02	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	1.00	
6. IWB	3.75	0.84	0.02	-0.04	-0.03	0.45**	0.37**	1.00

Note: JT = Job tenure; SL = Servant leadership; PE = Psychological empowerment; IWB = Innovative work behavior; **< 0.01; *< 0.05 (two-tailed)

Hypothesis testing
To test the hypotheses, bootstrapping approach through Macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) was conducted. In the regression equation model, SL was entered as the predictor, PE was entered as the moderator and IWB was entered as the criterion. Age, gender and job tenure were entered as covariates in the model to control for their effects on IWB. The result indicated that none of the control variables had significant effect on IWB. The predictor variable, SL was significantly and positively correlated with IWB, $\beta = 0.42$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.80], $t = 3.57$, $p = .001$; indicating that as SL increased IWB also increased. Also, PE had a significant positive relationship with IWB, $\beta = 0.30$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.39], $t = 4.12$, $p = .001$; and as PE increased IWB also increased. The result of moderation effect indicated that PE moderated the positive relationship between SL and IWB with a significant interaction, $\beta = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.51], $t = 5.20$, $p = .010$. To interpret the moderation, examination of the simple slopes for the model was conducted.

Table 4.SL, PE, and IWB relationship with 95% bias corrected and accelerate confidence intervals. Confidence intervals and standard errors based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Variables	Beta(β)	SE	T	P-Value	95% CI
SL	0.42	0.04	3.57	.000	[0.37, 0.80]
PE	0.30	0.05	4.12	.001	[0.20, 0.39]
SL×PE	0.35	0.06	5.20	.001	[0.23, 0.51]

NOTE. R = 0.47; R^2 = 0.22, SL = Servant leadership, PE = Psychological empowerment

Simple slope analysis

Using Macro PROCESS for moderation enables computation of the values for the simple slopes of the model which also allows for proper graphing of the moderation effect (Field, 2013). Since the moderation statistics were significant, examination of the simple slopes (Figure 2) was conducted to locate IWB within high and low PE in SL: (1) when PE is high (precisely at the value of 5.1405); and (2) when PE is low (precisely at the value of 3.1201). The results indicated that: (1) when PE is high, there was a significant positive relationship between SL and IWB, β = 0.50, 95% CI [0.49, 1.12], t = 2.02, p< .001; and (2) when SL is low, there was a significant positive relationship between SL and IWB, β = 0.21, 95% CI [0.19, 0.63] t = 0.69, p< .001. As seen in Figure 2, having high PE increased IWB among employees when compared with those who have low PE.
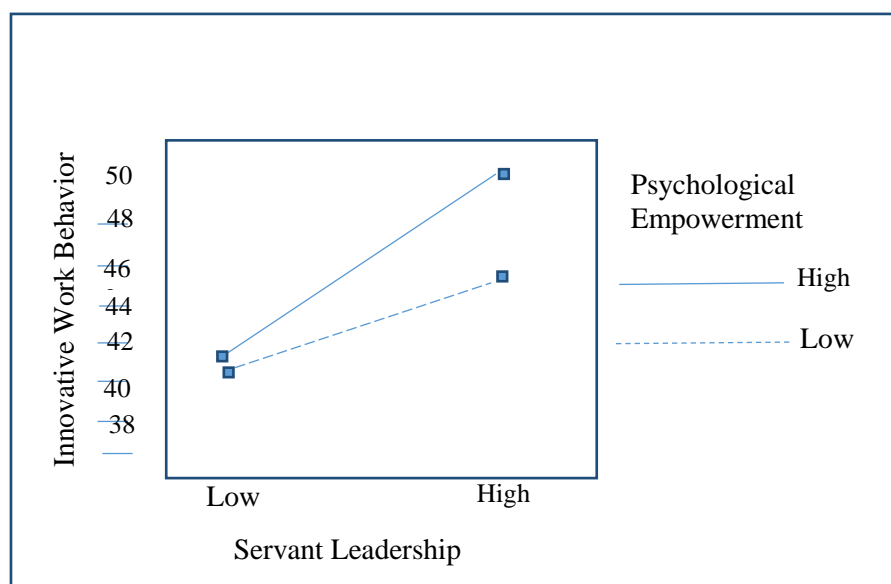

Figure 2. The moderating role of psychological empowerment in the positive relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior

5. Discussion

The findings of this study showed that servant leadership had a significant relationship with employees' innovative work behavior. Consequently, as leaders effectively demonstrate servant leadership, the employees engaged in greater IWB. The finding is in support of the first hypothesis which stated that SL will be significantly and positively correlated with IWB. This agrees with the results of other scholars such as Jin et al (2022), Shailja et al., 2023), Khan et al., 2021), Mahendri et al., 2022, and Khan et al., 2022) which indicated that servant leadership has a positive effect on innovative work behavior. Leadership especially servant leadership that places high priority on their followers plays influential role in fostering creativity and innovative ideas in organizations

(Jin et al., 2022; Stoker et al., 2001; Mumford et al., 2002; Bossink, 2007). Another plausible explanation for the significant relationship between SL and IWB is that as servant leaders prioritize the welfare and needs of workers, it will significantly contribute to enhancing employees' creativity and job crafting which in turn leads to IWB. Again, as servant leadership put the interest of their employees first, it creates work environment that offers employees the stimulating opportunity to grow personally leading to optimal creativity and in turn to innovation. Also, as servant leaders put much value on the needs and well-being of their employees, it gives them a greater sense of independence and autonomy that challenges them with learning opportunity that leads to creativity and innovation. Again, the finding agrees with earlier ones conducted by Carmeli et al (2006) which

demonstrated the value of servant leadership in promoting innovative behavior. Thus, the findings of this study give credence to the fact that leaders who considers the welfare of their workers first will effectively contribute to fostering IWB.

Again, the present study found that PE positively and significantly correlated with IWB as well as moderated the relationship between SL and IWB. Also, the finding is in support of second and third hypotheses which stated that PE will be significantly and positively correlated with IWB and moderate the relationship between SL and IWB respectively. The significant positive relationship between PE and IWB established in this study is in line with other studies (e.g. Kawasaki, 2019; Takaishi et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2020) which found similar results. The likely reason for this could be that as PE is associated with competence, self-determination, sense of autonomy and control over one's actions, and impact; inherently these attributes work together to nurture intrinsic motivation and the end result is increased participation, involvement and proactive work behavior that potentially foster IWB. Employees will therefore tend to demonstrate increased confidence and knowledge that will actively contribute to promoting IWB. Autonomy per se as one of the attributes of PE enables employees to engage in novel thoughts and ideas, explore and execute various work techniques that tend to positively impact IWB.

Moreover, the present study indicated that PE moderated the relationship between SL and IWB. As the slope revealed, the relationship between SL and IWB becomes stronger when PE is high than when it is at moderate or low level. The possible reason for this could be that as meaning, i.e. valued work, capacity, self-determination (autonomy), and impact are the indicators of PE, they furnish work environment that spark IWB.

Implications

Theoretical implications
This study contributes to literature on PE by demonstrating its moderating role in the relationship between SL and IWB. Previous studies have shown the links between SL and IWB, but, to the best of our knowledge, no study has been done on the moderation mechanisms of PE. This seems to be the first kind of the study conducted linking SL with IWB via PE using Nigerian public service organizations; and it found that PE is one mechanism to explain the effects of SL on IWB. Therefore, the study enhances the body of knowledge or literature concerning interactions between SL and IWB via PE in workplaces.

Practical implications
The results of the study point to the following actions to be taken by organizations to encourage IWB and enhance organizational sustainability: First, SL should be supported by organizations by training and developing the behaviors in managers and supervisors. Leaders may play role models for their employees by prioritizing the needs of their workers and exhibiting traits like empowerment, humility, and empathy. Secondly, organizations should empower employees through delegation of work roles that increases work motivation. Thirdly, adoption of approaches that recognize and reward IWB is necessary for sustainability of organizations. Rewarding employees who consistently exhibit these behaviors serve as motivation to encourage creativity that leads to IWB and innovation.

Limitations and future research

Despite all the contributions and implications of this research highlighted above, it also has some limitations. First is the extrapolation of the findings; although the researchers tried to capture a wide number of organizations in Nigeria, the coverage may not have been adequate enough for generalization across cultural setting. Therefore, future research should widen the scope of the study with diverse samples that cut across culture. Again, the study used cross-sectional survey to obtain data from participants which limits causal relationship among the variables; hence future researchers should conduct longitudinal study so as to establish direct causal relationship between the variables. Also, the current study used only self-report measures to collect data from participants thereby making the study vulnerable to the social desirability effect and common method variance which may have biased the responses of the participants. A supervisor-rated IWB in future exploration of these variables may reflect a picture of relationship patterns with more precision. Therefore, future researchers should collect data from different sources.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate thus: (i) servant leadership play a significant positive role on innovative work behavior, (ii) psychological empowerment positively influenced innovative work behavior, and (iii) psychological empowerment exerted a moderating role on the association between servant leadership and innovative work behavior such that psychological empowerment combined with servant leadership to amplify innovative work behavior in employees. The findings in general offer idea for future studies on the basis of the perspective of innovative work behavior. Servant leadership is a crucial factor in propelling employees to act innovatively. Therefore, to sustain innovative work behaviors, organizational leaders ought to carry out holistic

leadership training targeted towards instilling servant leadership skills in managers as well as prioritizing empowerment of employees. Also, organizations should support in skill development, creating environment where every individual feels appreciated and valued in contributing meaningfully to the promotion of innovation. Taken together, this study was conducted dwelling on organizational phenomenon including servant leadership, psychological empowerment, and innovative work behavior. Future research should explore other areas capable of influencing employee innovative behavior. With this, a comprehensive insight will be gained for effective and efficient organization.

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