

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE; HOTEL INDUSTRY OF ERBIL

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ABSTRACT

Tourism industry and particularly, hotels are among the highly competitive markets, which also include variety of cultures that are involved from management level to staff. This paper is dedicated to investigate the topic of servant leadership, and its relationship with organizational change. This research is directed towards staff and employee of hotels. These hotels are located in Erbil, Iraq, as this city as capital is one of the major touristic locations of the country. Total number of 231 employees participated in the research addressing mediating effects of organizational commitment and cultural intelligence on the linkage between servant leadership and organizational change. Each hotel, had a recruitment level of minimum four nationalities, which is suitable for the settings of our research as cultural intelligence requires cultural variety as a framework. Characteristics of a servant leader is close to the mindset of Iraqi culture. Findings show that managers of hotels, especially in Erbil, can adopt servant leadership to further increase commitment level of their staff and further foster organizational change. Servant leader can enhance acceptance and readiness of staff towards change and smoothen implementation of change.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Organizational Change, Commitment, Cultural Intelligence, Iraq

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive markets, organizations need to not only maintain their level of competitiveness, but to improve in a market, where change is constant and on a fast-pace (ZargarSousan&Farmanesh, 2019). For this matter, firms need to have proper leadership to guide staff towards changes that are inevitable and maintain their level of commitment towards the organization, as turnover can be costly for the company (Qablan&Farmanesh, 2019). Thus, firms tend to regulate their policies in a way that leaders are able to encourage their staff through triggering positive behaviors, such as organizational commitment. Additionally, in the context of competitive markets, tourism and hospitality is among the highly competitive markets, being culturally mixed (Forbes, 2014). This requires leaders who have Cultural Intelligence (CQ) to be able to better understand their employees and guide them through difficulties in their tasks and better manage the work environment. Servant leadership and its characteristics have shown to be in positive relationship with organizational change, having significant effects. In recent years, the scope of interest has faced a shift towards those styles of leadership, in which interests of others are paid attention to, and personal benefits are recognized and regarded (Peterson, Galvin& Lange, 2012; Hunter et al., 2013;). This calls for a system of management-or leadership in this context-, which brings attentiveness to staff and subsequently people who are involved with the organization (Liden, Wayne, Liao &Meuser, 2014b; van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership has been found to have a positive and significant relationship with organizational commitment

(Meyer & Allen, 1991; Lapointe&Vandenberghe, 2018). A servant leader has a tendency towards serving those around rather than merely leading them.

Similarly, it has been stated that servant leadership positively associates with desirable emotions and behavior towards the firm such as, performance and service behaviors (Liden et al., 2014). Many behaviors that are or can be categorized within change aspect of organizations have supported the assumption that there is a positive impact from servant leadership on organizational change and readiness as well as acceptance of change from employees (Harju, Schaufeli&Hakanen, 2018; Jang&Kandampully, 2018). Similarly, Organizational commitment and its components have been shown to have significant relationship with organizational change and a number of leadership styles, including servant (Sweeney, Clarke & Higgs, 2019). Servant leadership, through its characteristics can trigger trust in employees especially in hotel industry (Zargar et al., 2019), which will create an atmosphere for developing organizational commitment. In addition, servant leadership among other leadership and management styles have been examined in several aspects in regard to their relationship with Cultural intelligence (CQ) (*i.e.*Tuleja, 2014; Vlajčić et al., 2019). As change is constant, especially within hotel industry, it is understandable that firms tend to improve their adjustment through culture and awareness surrounding it. CQ can create and establish an atmosphere for staff to embrace changes willingly and with sufficient knowledge and clarity alongside better cooperation with leaders (Moon 2010; Rolling, Persley& Thornton, 2018). In addition, cultural intelligence has been noted to have effects on organizational change (*i.e.*Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne &Annen, 2011; Vlajčić et al., 2019). Accordingly, the current research aims to contribute to the literature of servant leadership by applying its notion in the context of Middle East as well as developing theoretical aspect of examination and analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Servant Leadership and Organizational Change

Change management on its effective terms is an international matter with vast influential effects on employees in almost every organization (Roberts, 2015). In this sense, servant leadership features aspects that are impactful on change as it stems from stewardship and being a servant to staff. It has been noted that these components of servant leadership lead to effective change management on a direct manner (Roberts, 2015; Dhiman& Marques, 2020). Reaching organizational objectives in an efficient manner is regarded as stewardship, which is a key element in servant leadership style that incorporates both moral, and ethical stimuli that lead to proper management of change within the firm. The environment of organization is positively impacted by these characteristics of a servant leader, which allows the staff to be better prepared and/or equipped for adapting to changes within their organization (Dhiman& Marques, 2020). In addition to what was mentioned, being a servant as the core concept of servant leadership enables the leader to motivate and encourage life values of followers and enhance their overall well-being, which further leads to personal and professional development in both long and short-term. As servant leader tends to followers before their own interests, they emphasize on growth and their staff to thrive (Zargar et al., 2019). This leads to a positive feeling towards the leader and the organization, which enables change to be taken by staff on a more optimal level as they have enhanced commitment (Dhiman& Marques, 2020). The effect of servant leadership regarding change has been noted in different disciplines. A study conducted by Peachey & Burton (2017) stated that servant leadership is highly effective for change and having influence on change processes in sports section as it emphasizes on ethical means. Similar findings have been noted in educational sector with regards to effectiveness of servant leadership on change (e.g. Kiersch& Peters, 2017). Therefore, the current research takes servant leadership as an agent

of change within hotel industry to develop the context and contribute to the literature of the subject.

H1 *Servant Leadership is positively influential on organizational change in hotel industry*

Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

Servant Leadership (SL) has been found to have a positive and significant relationship with Organizational Commitment (OC) (van Dierendonck et al., 2014; Miao et al., 2014; Lapointe&Vandenberghe, 2018).SL, being an antecedent of transformational leadership, has a positive influence on a various number of organizational outcomes. As SL as a theory has over 15 versions since its development (Anderson, 2018), it can be said that the impact that servant leadership as a style can have on employees' trust and loyalty is immense. Thus, a servant leader encourages trust through provision of respect, belongingness, and engagement, which in turn can lead the employees to show higher levels of OC (Lapointe&Vandenberghe, 2018). A similar finding from a recent study showed that there is a linkage of significance between trust and servant leadership, which adds to the argument of OC as trust can lead to better responses from employees to their leader and subsequently the organization (Zargar et al., 2019).

For corporates to follow appropriate behaviors in terms of ethics, researchers have emphasized on vitality of leaders (e.g., Lapointe, 2015; Dinh et al., 2014), and for firms to reciprocate to societies that they are located in. Those leaders, who tend to put forth needs and wants of their subordinates as well as their companies before their own, are the center of interest for scholars (e.g., van Dierendonck 2011). This is while a similar sense is amongst the followers regarding those leaders who create a bond and encourage trust, loyalty and push their followers towards further growth (e.g., Lapointe, 2015; Carter &Baghurst, 2014; Nichols & Cottrell 2014). In the light of what was mentioned above, a considerable number of researchers and experts in the field (e.g., Parris & Peachey 2013; van Dierendonck, 2011), have taken a shift towards the proposed SL model of Greenleaf (1977). A servant leader has a tendency towards serving those around rather than merely leading them. This reflects a certain degree of integrity and shows higher degrees of responsibility towards firm, its staff, and subsequently society (Carter &Baghurst, 2014). Additionally, servant leaders foster relationships with their staff in a long-term manner (Liden et al., 2008). Through this, servant leaders are able to create a sense of personification among employees and the firm (van Dierendonck et al., 2014). This is while the linkage between staff and their respective firms is a concept that has been noted as "multifaceted" (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), and has not been thoroughly investigated and calls for further examination for better understanding (Lapointe, 2015).

OC can be referred as a feeling of obligation in a positive way towards the organization from its employees, while varying from individual to another, due to differences of mindsets. Affective Commitment (AC) refers to a sense of belonging to ones' organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Normative Commitment (NC) is referred to as an obligation toward a firm from its employees (Meyer &Herscovitch, 2001), and Continuance Commitment (CC) can be explained as a combination of the two (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Lapointe, 2015), being a perception of leaving the job being costly, or not having attractive alternatives for employment after leaving a certain job. A servant leader tends to encourage staff for further progress (Beck, 2014). Therefore it can be said that servant leadership triggers mainly affective commitment. Through support and creation of learning and adopting new skills, a servant leader helps his/her subordinates towards success and growth, self-development, and engagement in important matters within the company, which gives a feeling of power to staff (Lapointe, 2015). Such traits can create a sense of reward within the workplace. This is due to the fact that from staffs' perception, leaders reflect the firm hence, creating a sense of belonging and attachment towards the firm, as it has been predicted from social exchange theory (See Settoon et al., 1996). Therefore, a servant leader is more likely to trigger AC within his/her employees.

High standards in terms of morality can appeal to individuals and thus, encourage NC (González & Guillén, 2008). Through moral obligation, and its perception from staff, a servant leader can create a sense of obligation towards the firm and therefore, move employees' feelings towards having NC towards their respective firms (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). Additionally, a servant leader can influence CC for employees through creation of personal and strong relationships (Powell & Meyer, 2004). Employees can perceive a higher sense of obligation and attachment (AC & NC) through this bond and therefore, result in positive experiences with their leader as well as their organization. Hence, leading to a sense that yields to costs of leaving a job and/or the next occupation not being as good as the current one (Lapointe, 2015). These values and benefits that reside from such attributes within a company, create worth for employees to retain their jobs and therefore, perceiving that leaving the organization can be costly (financial, personal, or goal related) (Meyer et al., 2002). Related to current study and concept of servant leadership, AC and NC have been more under investigation, while the latter having significantly more evidence within the literature (e.g., van Dierendonck et al., 2014). Miao, et al., (2014); Lapointe (2015) have included all three dimensions of OC in their models. Thus, the current paper consists of all three dimensions of OC.

OC and its components have been shown to have significant relationship with organizational change and a number of leadership styles, including servant (Sweeney, Clarke & Higgs, 2019; Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). However, based on different scales and extents, in which researchers have undertaken this variable, characteristics have shown to act differently due to existence of other variables that can be uncounted for in a study (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The feeling of obligations towards not leaving the company, is organizational commitment. Based on the model presented by Allen & Meyer (1991) there are three distinctive categories for OC that were mentioned in the previous section (AC, NC, & CC).

As SL is a predictor of OC, the mediating effect of this variable on the relationship between SL and organizational change through OC is deemed appropriate. OC can have direct effects on employees' level of acceptance in relation to organizational change (Yousef, 2017). In a study conducted in Eastern settings, Yousef (2017) stated that CC is significantly and negatively is related to cognitions of employees towards organizational change. Similarly, mediating role of OC on the linkage between job satisfaction and organizational change was found to be significant in a study conducted by Gomes (2009). In contrast, others have found no significant moderating effect from OC on job stress and organizational change relationship (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Another study conducted by Kamudin (2006) stated that there is a significant relationship between OC and a number of behaviors towards organizational change through organizational culture. This is while majority of researchers have taken merely one dimension of OC (*i.e.* AC) in regard to SL and their linkage (Gardner, Wright & Moynihan, 2011). More significantly, within the service industry, having employees who are committed to their organizations can increase customer satisfaction and patronage.

H2 Organizational commitment is a mediator for SL and Organizational change.

Mediating Role of Cultural Intelligence

SL received attention for investigation in terms of having linkage with Cultural intelligence (CQ) (*i.e.* Tuleja, 2014; Vlajčić et al., 2019). The existence of this relationship has been stated through the literature. It has been stated that through empowerment and encouraging employees, a servant leader can affect organizational culture and change (Harwiki, 2016). Through higher levels of CQ, a leader can achieve higher levels of effectiveness regarding employee performance (Moon, 2010). This becomes more vivid in cultural environments, such as service industry (Ng, Lee & Soutar, 2007). A study conducted on Vietnamese culture has shown that leadership can be affected by the degree of CQ. It has also been stated that SL and CQ can

affect employees' level of state suspicion (Luu, 2017). This is due to the fact that both cultural intelligence and SL affect employees' OC (Ohana, 2014). A servant leader due to his/her characteristics, creates a personal relationship with staff. This allows the leader to gain a better understanding on his/her staff and therefore have a higher degree of CQ. Interpersonal intelligence leads to intercultural competence in communication, which is also known as CQ. It also can be led from emotional or social intelligence (Goleman&Boyatzis, 2008). Through CQ, the awareness of self and others that was previously mentioned, moves further and expands boundaries. An individual with CQ shows skillfulness and adequate functionality within cross-cultural situations that differ from his/her own culture (Ng et al., 2009a, 2009b). A person with CQ can cope with work environment by being able to smoothly collaborate with others as well as appreciating beliefs, and behaviors (Tuleja, 2014).

A leader with high CQ can influence and direct responses from staff appropriately towards change and the concept of changing decision-making environment (Luu, 2017). This is crucial as modern markets are highly competitive. Particularly to our current study, service industry is a highly competitive industry in terms of rivalry. Nowadays travelers are more aware of sustainability and green behavior (OECD, 2018). This creates another change shift within hotels to further move towards sustainability (Zargar et al., 2019). In times like this, a leader can significantly impact the process of change within the organization. Specifically, servant leaders can increase this process through their personal links with the staff as well as clarifying terms of change.

As change is constant, especially within hotel industry, it is understandable that firms tend to improve their adjustment through culture and awareness surrounding it. This is among the major reasons that scholars pay a considerable amount of attention towards this area (Luu, 2017). Therefore, it can be said that CQ can affect the change within organization as a leader with high CQ can create and establish an atmosphere for staff to embrace changes willingly and with sufficient knowledge and clarity alongside better cooperation with their leaders (Rolling, Persley, & Thornton, 2018). In addition, cultural intelligence has been noted to have effects on organizational change (Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne&Annen, 2011; Vlačić et al., 2019). Additionally, a servant leader with high CQ levels can maintain a balance among employees during the times of change and through personal bonding that has been created due to servant leadership style, employees can better trust and understand the concept of change within their firms and therefore, show a better or higher level of cooperation. As a servant leader tends to deliver proper information regarding each task to employees on an individual level, staff can perceive engagement and thus, without sense of obligations, ask their questions regarding the changes that are to be applied. This in turn will result in a better flow towards change, as well as smoothness due to high cooperation level of the employees.

H₃ Cultural intelligence has a mediating effect on the linkage of SL and Organizational change.

The hypotheses noted above are illustrated in the model below:

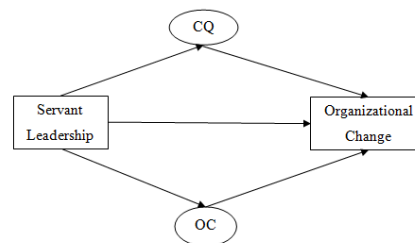


FIGURE 1
CAUSAL MODEL

Data and Analysis

Data

This study used a simple random sample technique for data collection. The total number of five-star hotels was 5 hotels in the city of Erbil. The study population from 5 five-star hotels in the city of Erbil was 580. The study population sample data was collected from 5 five-star hotels in the city of Erbil as 231 respondent. The study used disproportionate simple random sampling as follows: Dedeman hotel 29, ArjanRotana 36, Rotana Erbil 47, Divan hotel 64, and Ramada 55. A structured questionnaire was employed in this study to collect information from the respondents. This made it possible for us to retrieve about 90.9% (210) of the questionnaires distributed for further analysis.

Instrument Development

It is also important to note that in Kurdistan region, most employees working in hotel sector have had their education in Arabic or Kurdish (or both), which implies their competency in these languages. The questionnaire was accumulated in English, then in a two-step process, translated to Arabic, and back to English using two different translators (Hassan et al., 2020). A convenience sampling method was used for data collection due to time limitations of current study. A pilot test took place during a period of 2 days in March, 2019. The data collection process was conducted with managers of hotels being informed (*i.e.* staff manager, department supervisor, section coordinator) and in three weeks in July and August 2019.

The scale used for servant leadership has been derived from the work of Greenleaf (1977). Organizational commitment scale has been merged from the work of Allen & Meyer (1991). Cultural intelligence measurement was selected from the work of Van Dyne's model of CQ (2016). Due to lack of access to the full version, various measures were gathered (Bouckenoghe, Devos & Van den Broeck, 2009; Fagernæs, 2015). The questionnaire consists of an initial demographic sector, which addresses *Age, Gender, Education level* and *Work Experience*. This is followed by variables' questions. Ethical means of the research has been noted and implemented throughout the conduction of this research (Quinlan, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2019).

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

In our analysis, we applied the two-stage Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) procedure [66] to examine whether our proposed hypothesized (green tourism research) model as stated in figure 1 was appropriate. We first conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to evaluate both the reliability and validity of our proposed model. We then estimated the full structural model, which was then used to test whether the hypotheses we set up in Section 3 held

Collected data is analyzed in three stages. Initially, there are a set of analysis conducted to assess the measures regarding validity and reliability. This is followed by the measurement model was evaluated. The model of measurement is expected to show a good fit regarding dimensions within the model. Lastly, hypotheses of the model were analyzed through structural equation modeling perspective to further support the model (theoretical) as well as each hypothesis.

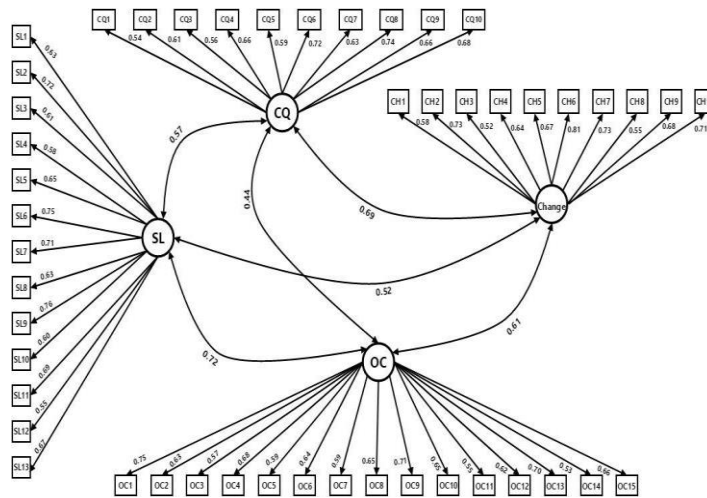


FIGURE 2
CFA REPRESENTATION

The figure above shows that the variables of this study have been confirmed through CFA. This is in accord with the values calculated for factor loadings which shows the correlation coefficient for factors and variables with regards to the extracted variance that is satisfactory based on recommendations of SEM.

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
CQ	10	0.79
Organizational Commitment	15	0.86
Organizational Change	10	0.87
Servant Leadership	13	0.89

The reliability of scales were tested through Cronbach’s Alpha. As it can be seen from table 3, minimum value of Alpha is 0.79 which is within the accepted and satisfactory range of internal consistency recommended by the literature of such research (Hair, Black, Babin& Anderson, 2010). Constructs and their matrix of correlations with AVE are presented as a diagonal matrix. The diagonal function of square root of AVE is expected to be with a higher value when compared to other linkages among all measures (Fornell&Larcker, 1981).

Construct	AVE	Mean(SD)	Composite Reliability	1	2	3	4
CQ	0.63	3.22 (1.26)	0.86	(0.79)			
Org. Commitment	0.58	3.73 (1.23)	0.82	0.43	(0.76)		
Organizational Change	0.59	3.54 (1.43)	0.89	0.28	0.51	(0.77)	
Servant Leadership	0.71	3.52 (1.47)	0.82	0.23	0.36	0.45	(0.84)

Notes: Diagonal figures in parentheses represent square root of AVE. Sub-diagonal entries are the latent construct inter-correlations. All inter-correlation coefficients are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Indices were employed for assessing fitness of the model and its adequacy. These indices were selected for conduction to further assess and evaluate the measurements assigned in our model (Hair et al., 2010). The measurements mentioned are namely: χ^2 , normed χ^2 ratio (χ^2/df), CFI, TLI, GFI, and RMSEA. Our proposed model shows a goodness of fit (GOF), which is on a satisfactory level as the indices are $\chi^2=317.51$, $df=167$, $\chi^2/df=1.89$, $GFI=0.913$, $CFI=0.948$, $TLI=0.942$, $RMSEA=0.061$. Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010), chi-square has to be on degree of insignificance on critical level, $p > 0.05$; normed chi-square is expected to be below 3 or maximum 5. Moreover, CFI, TLI and GFI are expected to be above 0.90, while RMSEA is desired to be less than 0.08. Self-reported measures are conducted to further reflect singular perceptions from employees' perspective that is based on the literature of this topic (Spector, 1994). To observe issues regarding common method variance and whether or not it exists (Spector, 1994) various considerations were taken into account. The common method bias was reduced to a certain level within the processes of survey design and data collection (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, independent and dependent variables were separated within the questionnaire (Podsakoff et al., 2003). CMB and its degree was assessed after conduction of survey with abovementioned considerations. Single-factor test was conducted to measure CMB as the process of data collection for this paper was done within one continuous session. CMB was checked through one-factor CFA that is reported as $\chi^2=1450.7$, $df=178$, $\chi^2/df=8.67$, $GFI=0.742$, $CFI=0.711$, $TLI=0.786$, $RMSEA=0.19$, which proves that CMB is not a problem of our concern in this regard. Loadings from all the items included in the questionnaire were greater than 1.0 in terms of eigenvalues, while one-factor counted for 12% of variance, which is an indicator of low or insignificant CMB.

The results of SEM are $\chi^2=361.614$, $df=169$, $p=0.000$, $\chi^2/df=2.123$, $GFI=0.888$, $CFI=0.921$, $TLI=0.945$ and $RMSEA=0.062$, which shows a good fit. Direct hypotheses are supported through SEM, as SL has a positive and direct influence on organizational change ($\beta=0.173$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, servant leadership shows a positive linkage with organizational commitment ($\beta=0.343$, $p < 0.001$). This subsequently, turns in positive impact on organizational change ($\beta=0.442$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, SL having direct impact on cultural intelligence ($\beta=0.229$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn leads to positive linkage with organizational change ($\beta=0.202$, $p < 0.001$). These findings exhibit direct impact of Servant leadership on organizational change as well as positive linkages with both mediating variables of our study.

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variables	Coefficient estimates	Standard error	t-statistics
Servant Leadership	Organizational Commitment	0.201	0.042	4.288
Servant Leadership	Organizational Change	0.343	0.066	6.731
Servant Leadership	Cultural Intelligence	0.229	0.047	4.743
Organizational Commitment	Organizational Change	0.442	0.051	8.327
Cultural Intelligence	Organizational Change	0.319	0.043	6.432

Note: $p < 0.001$

An initial model, in which full mediation was presumed and excluded direct linkage of the two main variables of the study (servant leadership and organizational change). This model did not show good fit as the results are $\chi^2=378.1$, $df=169$, $p=0.000$, $\chi^2/df=2.233$, $GFI=0.852$, $CFI=0.834$, $TLI=0.801$ and $RMSEA=0.094$. Contradictory to this model, the second model included direct paths between dependent and independent variables, presuming partial mediation, which yielded in a proper GOF (goodness of fit) as ($\chi^2=236.5$, $df=169$, $p=0.000$, $\chi^2/df=1.951$,

GFI=0.912, CFI=0.936, TLI=0.937 and RMSEA=0.053). Through these results it can be said that our hypotheses are supported and our mediation hypothesis is also supported. However, the mediation effect is seemingly partial, the effect cannot be neglected. In other words, the model that was hypothesized with partial mediation showed higher GOF level than the model with full mediation effect. This can be explained in a form of limitation of this model. It is deduced that the full mediation can take place upon inclusion of an additional variable that can be mediator or moderator. Since the effect of both mediators were found partial, there should be another variable that can explain this partiality. This is acknowledged in this section and also highlighted in the limitation section in the next chapter. This is also linked with the aforementioned note regarding correlation that exists between the two mediators. Although this correlation was found to be insignificant, the need for an additional variable to play an enhancing role (moderator) or mediation is felt. A Sobel test was also conducted that showed Z-scores of 5.12 and 3.38 for OC and CQ respectively ($P < 0.001$).

Table 4
MODEL COMPARISONS

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Hypothesized Model with Partial Mediations	225.6	168	1.940	0.915	0.929	0.929	0.052
Alternative Model with Full Mediations	368.2	168	2.223	0.852	0.834	0.801	0.093

DISCUSSION

The result of this study is consistent with the previous literature upon the topic. Servant leadership shows a positive linkage with organizational commitment ($\beta=0.343$, $p < 0.001$). It is noteworthy that recent works on servant leadership have not been wide on the linkage with organizational change (Lapointe&Vandenberghe, 2018). Direct hypotheses are supported through SEM, as SL has a positive and direct influence on organizational change with ($\beta=0.173$, $p < 0.001$). According to the literature of the topic and results of present model, organizational commitment can have direct effects on employees' level of acceptance in relation to organizational change (Yousef, 2017). SL and Cultural intelligence were found significantly linked 4.743, (*i.e.* Vlačić et al., 2019), which has been noted to have effects on organizational change (Vlačić et al., 2019), with t-value of 6.432 and ($\beta=0.319$, $p < 0.001$). A second model included direct paths between dependent and independent variables, presuming partial mediation, which yielded in a proper GOF. Thus, partial mediation was shown through the results of analysis on collected data for the current study. This shows that SL is an influential factor for change, and commitment in organizations of hotel sector. Similar findings have been found in sports, software development, and educational sector, implying the importance of incorporating SL in driving change. Importantly, hotels in Erbil can benefit from these findings as they go through organizational changes for better providing services to their customers both domestic and international. As the industry grows, it is imperative that hotels embed structures and processes that promote change towards higher qualities. Servant leaders can play a significant role in preparing staff as well as providing necessary means for adaptation of change within the firm. Hotel industry of Middle East can progress through servant leaders as they can positively impact staff (Zargar et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from findings that staff of hotels do perceive higher rates of organizational change, which requires readiness, and openness, when servant leadership is present. In addition, the existence of organizational commitment was proved to be a partial mediator in the linkage that exists for servant leadership and organizational change. As servant leadership is a trigger for higher degrees of organizational commitment (Lapointe&Vandenberghe, 2018), it subsequently leads to better responses from staff towards change. This is due to the degree of trust and lack of suspicion towards the leader by staff. This is crucial as hospitality industry is among top industries in terms of competitive rivalry (Hofstede, 2010). Moreover, this industry faces changes almost constantly. These changes can be from technological aspects, service provision, mergers and cooperative methods, and to sustainability movements that are a topic of interest, especially in the recent years (Qablan&Farmanesh, 2019).

Erbil has been noted to have the highest rank of tourism in the region, which is linked to the aforementioned foreign investors and international businesspersons traveling to the city. This is further boosted as the city is considered to be safe (Ali et al., 2020) for international visitors, which is highly important for the context of business-tourism. Notably, this opens a pathway for economic development as the result of such tourist groups is enhanced trades on an international scale. Hence, hotels in Erbil must be flexible to change and restructuring their organizations with regards to changes and trends in the industry, considering both internal and external factors. In this sense, hotels must take factors of supply into consideration as well. However, from the human resources and organizational behavior perspective, hotels need to have a leadership system that enables employees to adopt new mechanisms through individualized care and proper training, and development initiatives. International grade hotels are needed in the city to ensure business travelers are provided with sufficient accommodation facilities. With regards to external factors, political stability/instability is highly important to be noted. Characteristics of a servant leader is close to the mindset of Iraqi culture due to the background and therefore it was expected that employees perceive a level of service provision from their leaders. The core aim of this research was to find whether or not servant leadership has a direct and significant effect on organizational change as other styles of leadership (*i.e.* transformational) was found to be influential in this context. Moreover, to exhibit whether or not organizational commitment and cultural intelligence possess a mediating effect in the aforementioned relationship was another aim of this research. Our findings are in support of the hypothesized model and therefore, it can be said that managers and stakeholders of hotels, can adopt servant leadership (preferably those with higher CQ) to further increase commitment level of their staff and further foster organizational change. This is highly important as hotel industry faces constant changes from technology, production, and sustainability. Servant leader can enhance acceptance and readiness of staff towards change and smoothen implementation of change.

Additionally, managerial level surveys can be of aid in this regard (e.g. supervisor support). Support of government is an important matter for the development of tourism sector. The regional government of Kurdistan and authorities of Erbil have spent a considerable amount of financial resources on marketing, which has shown to be effective in terms of return. While the government has endeavored to increase facilities and further develop the city towards having better services, the main focus has been on marketing and promotions. This has yielded in positive results with acquiring new groups of tourists as well as enhancing existing facilities and retaining business tourists and religious groups.

The new international airport has been regarded as a major element for improving tourism sector of the region as it has opened a path for international tourist arrivals. Therefore, it is important for hotels and accommodation sector in general to be able to meet the expectations and demands of tourists, which are constantly changing. Hence, organizational change is vital for hotels as through being ready and open to change, firms can readjust their structures and

strategies to meet new trends and maintain their extent of competitiveness in the highly competitive market of tourism and hospitality sector. Visitors arriving in the new airport of Erbil get a high quality first impression upon their arrival. Hence, it is important that other factors and impressions are within the same quality standards. Therefore, hotels and their structures and facilities as well as their employees and their behavior and quality of services provided to international tourists is highly vital. It is important to note that an international information desk is required in the airport that can provide maps, and other relevant information to the tourists, who arrive at the airport. Additionally, taxis and public services are required to enhance their language skills to be able to meet and greet international tourists, which can positively enhance the image of the region in terms of a desired destination. Furthermore, language skills of staff at hotels is imperative for tourists as they require communications and interaction with the staff on a daily basis. Hence, training and development of staff in hotels is crucial if the hotel aims to attract international tourists and maintain a high level of service quality.

Servant leaders can be agents of change through conducting their leadership in a holistic manner that incorporates development of professional and personal skills of employees in the organization. Hence, through adequate training programs, a servant leader can establish organizational change towards international services. It is also important to note that such developmental practices (e.g. language skills) is beneficial for the individual as they can use the skill in their lives, which expands their personal development to any other future career. Therefore, employees that are trained in various forms and frameworks to provide a better international service, are more likely to be committed to the organization as they perceive benefits.

Hence, it is crucial for hotels to understand the importance of a servant leader in terms of their effectiveness on organizational change and how influential they can be for bringing employees to a stage, where they can adopt changes faster and have a better understanding on organizational goals. This in turn will enable the staff to perform better as they are committed to their jobs and organizations and have a considerable degree of trust to their leaders. Additionally, leader with high levels of CQ can foster employees' acceptance towards changes that are inevitable. When staff perceive high CQ from their leader they can be better understood and thus, can easier accept changes that leader implies. A servant leader, who possesses high degrees of CQ can encourage staff even further towards accepting changes as well as giving them proper and adequate guidance and training if needed in times of change.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As this study was time-bound due to its submission, process of data collection was conducted in one session. This can be extended to additional sessions in future studies to further gather a more solid data. In addition, questionnaire survey was limited in terms of number of items as time restrictions did not allow for a longer questionnaire. Additionally, the data collection process took place in a limited number of hotels, which future researchers can expand to a higher number for a better degree of freedom in terms of statistics. Moreover, other variables that can be related can be added to the present model for further understanding and comprehending other influential factors. There was an insignificant correlation between the two mediators of this study. It is to be noted that this linkage can be examined in future studies, and can be beneficial for scholars to understand the linkage and its effect on the context of this model. Alternatively, a moderating variable (enhancer) can be included to examine the effect of a moderating variable on the said linkage. Similarly, future studies can conduct conditional analysis to measure and examine effects of other organizational and/or behavioral variables. Mixed methods can be utilized for extensive research on this subject. Future studies can look into this matter from leaders' perspective and results can then be compared to see whether leaders perceive such factors differently.

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