Servant Leadership and Work Engagement: The Mediating Role of Work-Life Balance

Jarrod Haar*, Department of Management, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, *jarrod.haar@aut.ac.nz*

David Brougham, School of Management, Massey University, New Zealand, *d.brougham@massey.ac.nz*

Maree Roche, Department of Psychology, Waikato University, New Zealand, *mroche@waikato.ac.nz*

Andrew Barney, School of Management, Massey University, New Zealand, *a.r.barney@massey.ac.nz*

*corresponding author

Abstract: While the effect of leadership is established, the influence and process towards work engagement is under researched. This is particularly true of servant leadership, despite the links suggesting followers of such leaders are likely to be more engaged. The present study tests servant leadership towards the three dimensions of work engagement: (1) vigour, (2) dedication and (3) absorption. In addition, we test the role of work-life balance as a potential mediator, to test whether servant leadership builds work-life balance, which ultimately leads to higher work engagement. The present study is based on a sample of 123 New Zealand employees from a wide range of professions. Using structural equation modelling we test a number of path models to determine the best fit to the data, with the best fitting model being a full mediation model. Overall, we find strong support for servant leadership predicting work-life balance and the three work engagement dimensions. However, the influence of servant leadership is fully mediated by work-life balance. Ultimately work-life balance is positively related to all three work engagement dimensions and fully mediates the effect of servant leadership, highlighting the important role that work-life balance may play in achieving higher work engagement. The implications for human resource management (HRM) are discussed.

Keywords: servant leadership, work-life balance, work engagement, SEM, mediation

Recently leadership studies have moved away from a singular focus on the role of heroic leaders, such as transformational leaders, towards garnering an understanding of the importance of strong, shared and relational interactions between leader and followers (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). This interaction is, to a large extent, the rationale of servant leadership, where the leaders' role is to build relationships to ensure followers are able to be the best they can be (Van Dierendonck, 2011). One definition of servant leadership is that it requires the willingness by the leader to "serve

others" (Parris & Peachey, 2013, p.380), based on Greenleaf (1977), who originally suggested servant leaders are characterised by "going beyond one's self-interest" (p.7).

In this context, leadership thus becomes the possibility to serve others and as such, serving and leading become almost interchangeable. Furthermore, the servant leader approach is governed by creating within the organisation opportunities to help followers grow (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Importantly, a servant leader is genuinely concerned with serving followers (Greenleaf, 1977; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). This person oriented attitude makes way for safe and strong relationships within the organisation, and it leads to a commitment by the servant leader to the growth of individual followers, and even the personal growth of followers, and a responsibility to the community and organisation (Reinke, 2004). While there are positive links found between servant leadership and employee outcomes (see Parris & Peachey, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011), there is a lack of attention on work engagement and work-life balance, which is the focus of the present study.

Overall, the present study makes three contributions. First, it explores the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Second, it explores the role that servant leadership has on employee work-life balance, to determine the potential of new benefits from such a positive leadership style. Finally, we utilise work-life balance as a potential mediator of the influence of servant leadership, in an endeavour to enhance understanding of the process of which leadership might influence engagement. Overall, we make a number of contributions towards understanding the way servant leadership enhances employee outcomes. We discuss the implications for researchers and HRM given the strong interest in work engagement in New Zealand.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership has been defined by Greenleaf (1977) as a leadership style that "focuses on developing employees to their fullest potential in the areas of task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership capabilities" (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008, p.162). Liden, Wayne, Liao, and Meuser (2014) stated that "servant leadership is based on the premise that leaders who are best able to motivate followers are those who focus least on satisfying their own personal needs and most on prioritising the fulfillment of followers' needs" (p.1434). Servant leadership is related to the transforming leadership style (Burns, 1978) and other ethical perspectives on leadership (Northouse, 2001), having come out of the applied management literature (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1998).

Bierly, Kessler, and Christensen (2000) describe servant leaders as being wise, with decision practices built on a mixture of applied knowledge and experience, with these practices shaped to enhance wisdom in their organisations. Thus, servant leaders may be capable of managing any number of paradoxes that emerge during the decision making process (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1998). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) suggested at the core of servant leadership is a service-oriented philosophy with a leadership approach focused on organisational wisdom. Bierly et al. (2000) note that this wisdom focus is a balance of making optimal and altruistic selections. While clearly there is a wisdom focus to servant leadership, there is more.

According to Greenleaf (1977) servant leadership is predicated on the notion that the servant-leader recognises they have a moral responsibility, not only towards organisational success, but across all stakeholders including employees, customers, and other organisational stakeholders. Liden et al. (2014) suggests that the focus on enhancing employees – using servant leadership behaviours as a

way to enhance "followers to realize their full potential" (p.1434) –means that servant leadership represents a form of positive organisational behaviour (Luthans, 2002).

Researchers have highlighted some issues with servant leadership. For example, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) have noted that while servant leadership enjoys both practitioner and scholarly attention, "this concept is elusive" (p.300). In a review of the servant leadership literature, Van Dierendonck (2011) highlighted "there is still no consensus about a definition and theoretical framework of servant leadership" (p.1229). Van Dierendonck (2011) goes on to add that a major issue is that the originator of the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977) did not provide a workable definition. That author argues that as a consequence, researchers and practitioners have generated a number of models, definitions, operationalisations, and processes, leading to "many interpretations of servant leadership, exemplifying a wide range of behaviors" (p.1229). Of important note to the focus of the present study, Van Dierendonck (2011) criticises the focus of the servant leadership literature on a prescriptive approach – how it should look – rather than informing by providing insights into servant leadership in practice.

Liden et al. (2014) note that servant leader's focus on providing support to their followers - support that is both tangible and emotional - and consequently, this allows followers to achieve their maximum potential. One of the keys to servant leaders is that followers see their leader as engaging in appropriate behaviours because the leader wants too. As such, the servant leader becomes a role model for their follower to emulate (Liden et al., 2014). Panaccio, Henderson, Liden, Wayne, and Cao (2015) assert that the philosophical approach behind servant leadership contends that a leaders behaviours focused on the interests of others over the self, leads to followers' experiencing growth and ultimately becoming servant like themselves. Beck (2014) suggested that altruism is linked to servant leadership due to the desire to serve some other benefactor.

Consequences of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership has been linked to higher employee trust and fairness perceptions, as well as employee loyalty (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Thus, it is suggested that the influence of servant leadership on more core employee outcomes like job satisfaction and engagement, might work through a mediated mechanism. Empirical evidence has shown that a leaders' servant leadership style is positively related to firm performance, employee performance, employee creativity and customer service behaviours, and negatively to turnover intentions (Liden et al., 2014). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) found servant leadership was positively related to extra effort, effectiveness and satisfaction.

In a multi-level study, Liden et al. (2008) found servant leadership was positively related to organisational commitment, in-role performance, and citizenship behaviours towards the community. In their multi-level modelling, these effects were over and above those of transformational leadership and leader-member exchange, highlighting the unique contribution servant leadership made to these outcomes. Ehrhart (2004) found positive links between servant leadership and two types of organisational citizenship behaviours – including both self-rated by employees and their supervisors. Finally, Panaccio et al. (2015) found servant leadership was positively related to psychological contract fulfilment, interpersonal helping, initiative, and innovative behaviours. Consequently, there is a significant body of work associating servant leadership with positive employee outcomes. The next section explores two outcomes and hypothesises the relationships.

Work Engagement

The concept of work engagement has undergone strong scrutiny within the literature over the past decade (e.g., Maden, 2015; Saks, 2006; & Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). The main approach to work engagement, sees it characterised by the individual's work-related vigour, dedication and absorption, and reflects an employee's affective-motivational work-related state of fulfilment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In this conceptualisation of work engagement, it is distinct from other forms of employee engagement, which has a predominant practitioner focus (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Indeed, research has established that work engagement is distinct from other constructs such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, flow and involvement (see Albrecht, 2010; Bakker & Leiter, 2010; & Bakker et al., 2011).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) define work engagement "as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind", noting that it is "a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior" (p.74). It is also worth acknowledging that the work engagement field – an academic focused approach compared to the practitioner focused employee engagement – has a strong theoretical under-pinning (Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013). For example, studies have particularly linked the job-demand resource model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), as well as crossover theory (ten Brummelhuis, Haar & Roche, 2014), and self-determination theory (Meyer & Gagne, 2008). It has also undergone extensive validation checks (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006).

The three dimensions of work engagement are defined as vigour, which relates to someone with "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, [and] the willingness to invest effort in one's work" (Schaufeli et al., 2008, p.176). Dedication is defined as a person with a "sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" to their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.465), while absorption reflects an individual who is "fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work" (Schaufeli et al., 2008, p.176).

There are numerous benefits associated with engagement. These include higher organisational commitment (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008) and lower turnover intentions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), as well as increased customer satisfaction (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005), and a more positive and supportive organisational climate (ten Brummelhuis et al., 2014). Saks (2006) found engagement was positively related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviours, and negatively related to turnover intentions. Maden (2015) tested the three dimensions of work engagement and found they were all significantly correlated with learning goal orientation, individual innovation, and feedback inquiry. Finally, Giallonardo, Wong, and Iwasiw (2010), in a sample of new graduate nurses', found work engagement was positively related to job satisfaction. Overall, the positive effects of work engagement make it an important outcome for human resource managers to consider, thus creating the potential to leverage key opportunities (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013), such as understanding the role of leadership on engagement.

Hypotheses

Servant Leadership and Work Engagement

Liden et al. (2014) noted that because servant leaders are humble and focused on followers rather than themselves, this allows this particular leadership style to stimulate positive relationships with followers. This humility approach supports the findings of Owens and Hekman (2012), who

suggested humble leaders can positively influence the engagement of subordinates, stating "employees walk away with more sense of responsibility and accountability. In some ways, his humility actually increased pressure to perform" (p.795). Empirical findings on the relationship between leadership and work engagement have provided some insights. For example, Zhu, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2009) found transformational leadership was positively related to follower work engagement, but they noted that "other unmeasured variables that could directly or indirectly influence feelings of work engagement" (p.612).

This point is useful because Liden et al. (2008) found servant leadership predicted a number of employee outcomes over the effects of transformational leadership, suggesting servant leadership might be a worthwhile construct to explore. Similarly, Giallonardo et al. (2010) found authentic leadership was positively related to work engagement, highlighting the potential links between leadership and engagement. It has been suggested that a servant leader is able to inspire their followers: first by serving them, and then by guiding them (Chen, Chen, & Li, 2013; Greenleaf, 1977). Chen et al. (2013) argued that servant leadership promotes employees' spiritual development, wellbeing, and work outcomes, such that they start to become more engaged, open-minded, patient and considerate in the workplace. This promotes a strong conduit for enhancing work engagement. As such, we hypothesise that employees rating their leaders as higher on servant leadership will be positively enhanced by that style leading to higher work engagement. Thus, we posit.

> *Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership will be positively related to vigour.*

> *Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership will be positively related to dedication.*

> *Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership will be positively related to absorption.*

Mediating Effect of Work-Life Balance

We explore the theoretical model offered by Van Dierendonck (2011), particularly around the potential mediation process regarding the influence of servant leadership on work engagement. Haar (2013) defined work-life balance as "the extent to which an individual is able to adequately manage the multiple roles in their life, including work, family and other major responsibilities" (p.3308). Aligned with the focus of the present study, Haar (2013) found work-life balance acted as a mediator between work and family factors (conflict and enrichment) towards work and wellbeing outcomes. The work of Haar (2013) critiqued an earlier focus on work and family only and thus broadened the focus to explore work roles and all other roles – including family, but not limited to only family.

The importance of work-life balance as a predictor of job and wellbeing outcomes has been replicated across seven samples in six countries (Haar, Russo, Sune, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014), leading those authors to suggest the universal benefit of work-life balance across cultures. More recently, Haar, Roche and ten Brummelhuis (2017) explored a daily diary process model, and found significant positive correlation between trait work engagement and daily work-life balance scores. In a study on antecedents of work-life balance, Russo, Shteigman, and Carmeli (2016) found workplace factors were important towards work-life balance. Furthermore, that study specifically explored workplace support, which does align somewhat with the focus of servant leadership around nurturing and growing followers. Furthermore, that study – along with other work-life balance studies (Haar, 2013; Haar et al., 2014) support the potential mediating role of work-life balance. Thus, in the context of the present study, we expect work-life balance will mediate the influence of servant leadership to

work engagement. In this regard, perceiving support from one's leader around a servant leadership style enhances the employee's perceptions of support in the workplace, which builds work-life balance resources (Russo et al., 2016). In turn, greater work-life balance provides the employee with more time and focus to enhance an employee's affective-motivational work-related state of fulfilment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This leads to our final set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: Work-life balance will be positively related to vigour.

Hypothesis 5: Work-life balance will be positively related to dedication.

Hypothesis 6: Work-life balance will be positively related to absorption.

Hypothesis 7: Work-life balance will mediate the influence of servant leadership on work engagement.

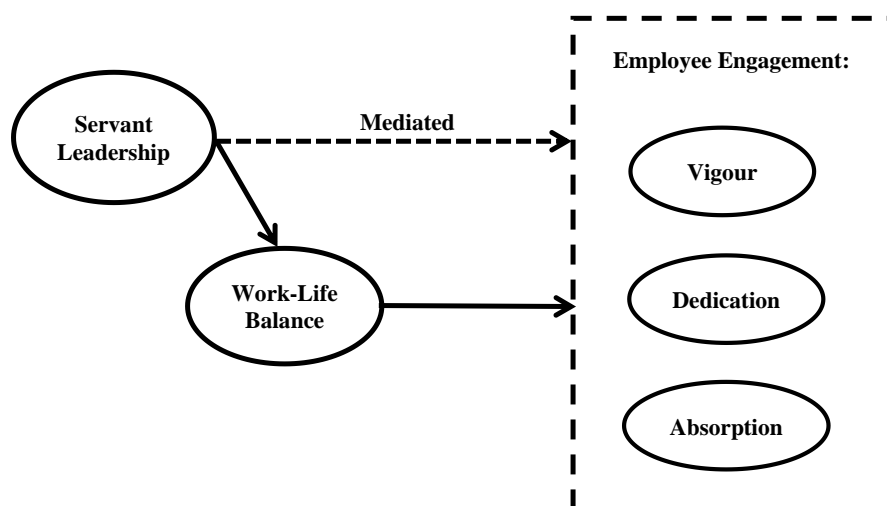Our hypothesised study model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Study Model

METHOD

Sample and Participants

Data were collected from a professional network in New Zealand, which was an Alumni student list from a University. An invitation to do an online survey was emailed to over 1000 potential respondents who were informed that this was a two-stage study. Survey one focused on the leadership style of the respondent's immediate manager and their own work-life balance. Four weeks after completing that survey, respondents were sent a follow-up link to another online survey. This one focused on the work engagement of the respondent. Overall, 123 completed responses to survey 1 and survey 2 were received for a response rate around 12%. This equates well with other large scale studies of employees (e.g., Thompson, 2005). The time delay between studies is an established practice (e.g. Haar & Spell, 2004) that can mitigate some concerns around common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). A t-test revealed there were no significant differences in respondents between the servant leadership scores between respondents from survey 1 and survey 2.

On average, respondents were aged between 22 and 68 years, with an average age of 43 (SD = 11.9 years). The majority were married (71%), female (69%), with organisation tenure of 8.9 years (SD = 10 years), and worked an average of 40.5 hours per week (SD = 9.4 hours). Overall, 30% of respondents were union members. By education, 56% had a university degree, and the majority of respondents came from the public sector (54%), followed by the private sector (31%) and then the not-for-profit sector (15%).

Measures

Servant Leadership was measured using items from Ehrhart (2004), coded 1=to a very small extent and 5=to a very large extent. While the original measure has 16 items and is well validated (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009a; 2009b), we used a short-form with six items that best suited our purposes. Our rationale stems from the issue that a 16-item construct is long and likely to have a number of items that cross-load in more sophisticated statistical analyses, such as structural equation model (SEM). Keeping all 16-items would then require additional statistical approaches for SEM including parcelling of items, which is problematic (Marsh, Lüdtke, Nagengast, Morin & Von Davier, 2013) and thus to be avoided. Hence, we suggest a shorter construct, validated in SEM, would be especially useful for researchers focusing upon more brief research constructs and also wanting to explore higher statistical methods. We conducted a factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) to establish the measure. The data loaded onto a single factor, with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for a robust amount of variance, and having strong reliability (α = .91), with all items had a factor loading of over 0.6. Table 1 provides details of the analysis including items used.

Table 1. *Results of CFA for Servant Leadership-Short Scale*

Items:	Factor Loadings
My immediate supervisor/manager...	
1. Spends the time to form quality relationships with his/her employees	**.794**
2. Tries to reach consensus among his/her employees on important decisions	**.831**
3. Makes the personal development of his/her employees a priority	**.796**
4. Does what she or he promises to do	**.846**
5. Balances concern for day-to-day details with projections for the future	**.878**
6. Displays wide-ranging knowledge and interests in finding solutions to work problems	**.887**
Eigenvalues	4.227
Percentage variance	70.4%
Number of items in measures	6-items
Cronbach's Alpha	.91

Work-Life Balance was measured using Haar's (2013) 3-item measure. A sample item is "Nowadays, I seem to enjoy every part of my life equally well". This measure had strong reliability (α = .90). This measure has been well validated in New Zealand (Haar, 2013; Haar et al., 2017) and cross-culturally too (Haar et al., 2014). Overall, the work-life balance construct has been shown to have strong and consistent psychometric properties across professions and nationalities.

Work Engagement was measured using Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) measure, coded 1=never, 5=always. We used the 9-item short form (3-items per dimension) which has recently been found to have good psychometric properties (Seppälä, Mauno, Feldt, Hakanen, Kinnunen, Tolvanen & Schaufeli, 2009). A sample item and reliability for each dimension is "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (Vigor, $\alpha = .92$), "I am enthusiastic about my job" (Dedication, $\alpha = .87$), and "I get carried away when I'm working" (Absorption, $\alpha = .82$).

Control variables: Williams, Vandenberg, and Edwards (2009) note that only a limited number of control variables should be used in SEM. Thus, we control for three variables: *Union Status* (1=union member, 0=non-union member), *Marital Status* (1=married/de facto, 0=single) and *Job Tenure* (in years). We control for these effects because these have been controlled for in the work-life balance and engagement literatures (Chen & Kao, 2012; Haar, 2013; & Hoxsey, 2010). For example, we expect respondents with higher tenure to be more engaged.

Measurement Models

To confirm the distinct nature of the various constructs in our study using confirmatory factor analysis in SEM with AMOS 24. SEM studies offer a number of goodness-of-fit indexes, although Williams et al. (2009) suggest many are not meaningful. They offer three goodness-of-fit indexes and their thresholds as a superior way to assess model fit. These are: (1) the comparative fit index (CFI >.95), (2) the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA <.08), and (3) the standardised root mean residual (SRMR <.10). The hypothesised measurement model and an alternative model are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Model	Model Fit Indices					Model Differences			
	c^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	c^2	Ddf	p	Details
Model 1	177.7	125	.97	.06	.06				
Model 2	406.2	129	.83	.13	.13	228.5	4	.001	Model 1 to 2
Model 3	291.5	132	.90	.10	.07	113.8	7	.001	Model 1 to 3

Model 1=Hypothesised 5-factor model: servant leadership, work-life balance, vigour, dedication and absorption.

Model 2=Alternative 4-factor model: servant leadership and work-life balance combined, vigour, dedication and absorption.

Model 3=Alternative 3-factor model: servant leadership, work-life balance, and vigour, dedication and absorption combined.

Overall, the hypothesised measurement model was the best fit for the data. Models 2 and 3 tested alternative measurement constructs and these resulted in a poorer fit (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Thus, we confirm the distinct nature of our study constructs.

Analysis

Hypotheses 1 to 7 were tested using SEM in AMOS.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	7
1. Job Tenure	6.1	8.2	--					
2. Servant Leadership	3.4	.90	-.10	--				
3. Work-Life Balance	3.5	.96	-.14	.33**	--			
4. Vigour	3.9	.87	.15	.24**	.43**	--		
5. Dedication	4.1	.80	.18	.18*	.36**	.81**	--	
6. Absorption	3.9	.79	.13	.20*	.21*	.56**	.54**	--

N=123, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Table 3 shows that servant leadership is significantly correlated with work-life balance ($r = .33$, $p < .01$), vigour ($r = .24$, $p < .01$), dedication ($r = .18$, $p < .05$) and absorption ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). Work-life balance is also significantly correlated with vigour ($r = .43$, $p < .01$), dedication ($r = .36$, $p < .01$) and absorption ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). Finally, the three dimensions of work engagement are all significantly correlated with each other (all $p < .01$).

Structural Models

A number of alternative structural models were tested, to determine the most optimal model based on the data, and results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Model Comparisons for Structural Models*

Model	Model Fit Indices					Model Differences				
	c^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	c^2	Ddf	p	Details	CAIC
Model 1	234.2	167	.96	.06	.10					606.2
Model 2	212.8	164	.97	.05	.05	21.4	3	.001	Model 2 to 1	602.2
Model 3	215.4	167	.97	.05	.06	18.8	0	n.a.	Model 3 to 1	587.4
						2.6	3	n.a.	Model 3 to 2	

All models include control variables: Union Status, Marital Status and Job Tenure. All models have the three work engagement dimensions co-vary with each other.

Model 1 = (1) A direct effects model where servant leadership predicts work-life balance, vigour, dedication and absorption.

Model 2 = (2) A partial mediation model where servant leadership predicts work-life balance, vigour, dedication and absorption. In turn, work-life balance predicts vigour, dedication and absorption.

Model 3 = (3) A full mediation model where servant leadership predicts work-life balance and in turn, work-life balance predicts vigour, dedication and absorption.

Overall, the direct effects model (model 1) appears to be a significantly worse fit to the data (Hair et al., 2010). However, the differences between model 2 (partial mediation) and model 3 (full mediation) are non-significant. In situations like this, Byrne (2010) recommends examining the consistent AIC values (CAIC), with the lowest number indicating the better fitting model. Table 4 shows that it is model 3 (full mediation) that is the best fit for the data. We also confirm that servant leadership is not significantly related to any of the work engagement dimensions when work-life balance is included in the model, confirming the full mediating effects. Overall, with the control variables included, the structural model is still robust and meets the minimum goodness-of-fit indexes noted above (Williams et al., 2009): $\chi^2(df) = 215.4$ (167), CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05, and SRMR =.06.

Aligned with the recommendations of Grace and Bollen (2005), unstandardised regression coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Final Structural Model Path Results*

	Unstandardised path coefficient	
Variables	Direct Effects Only (Model 1)	Full Mediation (Model 3)
Controls:		
Tenure → Dedication	.02*	.02**
Tenure → Absorption		.02*
Model 1		
Servant Leadership → WLB	.42***	.42***
Servant Leadership → Vigor	.21**	.07[a]
Servant Leadership → Dedication	.22*	.06[a]
Servant Leadership → Absorption	.22**	.06[a]
Model 2		
WLB → Vigor		.33***
WLB → Dedication		.37***
WLB → Absorption		.21**
r^2 Values:		
WLB		.12
Vigor		.24
Dedication		.23
Absorption		.12

*p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001.

a = figures gathered from Model 2 (partial mediation). Shown to indicate the full mediation effect of work-life balance on the influence of servant leadership to work engagement dimensions.

Table 5 shows that in model 1 (direct effects model), there are consistent effects from servant leadership, being significantly related to work-life balance (path coefficient = .42, $p < .001$), vigour (path coefficient = .21, $p < .01$), dedication (path coefficient = .22, $p < .05$), and absorption (path coefficient = .22, $p < .01$). This supports Hypotheses 1-3. Model 3 was found to be the best fitting model and this confirmed that when work-life balance is included as a mediator, it fully mediates the effects of servant leadership on work engagement dimensions, with them all becoming non-significant. Overall, work-life balance was found to be significantly related to vigour (path coefficient = .33, $p < .001$), dedication (path coefficient = .37, $p < .001$), and absorption (path coefficient = .21, $p < .01$). This supports Hypotheses 4-6, and the mediation effect supports Hypothesis 7.

Overall, the models account for small amounts of variance towards work-life balance ($r^2 = .12$) and absorption ($r^2 = .12$) but more modest amounts for vigour ($r^2 = .24$) and dedication ($r^2 = .23$).

DISCUSSION

The present study contributes to the literature in several ways. It adds strength to the importance of servant leadership, providing a useful new short measure, and finding it is a strong predictor of work engagement dimensions and work-life balance. In addition, by including work-life balance as a

mediator, and finding full mediation effects towards engagement, we better understand the process of servant leadership. In the present study, this suggests a leader genuinely concerned with serving their followers (Greenleaf, 1977; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004) and helping them grow (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), provides their followers with greater opportunities to balance their work and life roles, which in turn provides them with more personal resources to achieve stronger engagement, via an affective-motivational work-related state of fulfilment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Our analysis also showed there is a better fit for exploring work engagement as three related but distinct constructs. This is further evidenced by the strength of model predictions, with the amount of variance accounted for being twice the strength for vigour and dedication when compared to absorption.

The finding of mediation effects from work-life balance provides us with greater knowledge and insight around the process by which employees may become engaged. It also extends the outcomes linked to greater work-life balance beyond job satisfaction and wellbeing outcomes (Haar, 2013; Haar et al., 2014). Furthermore, it builds our understanding of antecedents of work-life balance, building beyond work support (Russo et al., 2016) and extending this to leadership styles. Of course, the present study focused only upon servant leadership and the present study provides encouragement for work-life balance researchers to extend this focus to explore other leadership styles, such as transformational leadership and authentic leadership. Finally, the findings of a strong and consistent link between work-life balance and all three work engagement dimensions add to the antecedents within that literature. Thus, the present study makes a number of contributions regarding the importance of servant leadership and the process through which it influences work engagement.

HRM Implications

Work engagement is a fundamental area of focus for a number of researchers and practitioners (Bakker & Leiter, 2010) and this includes New Zealand companies. The present study highlights the importance of a servant leadership style in benefiting followers through enhancing their work engagement, which then ultimately will benefit the organisation (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). As such, servant leadership with its focus on growing followers and not the typical leadership focus of self-interest appears to be a key determinant in building work engagement of employees. Thus, HRM might look at recruiting potential leaders with such skills as well as providing training and development around building this style in existing leaders. A reward structure that encourages a greater focus on development of subordinates might be one way organisations, through their HRM department or officers, can seek to improve the level of servant leadership. While senior leadership (CEO, top management team) support is usually required, HRM professionals working in organisations with strong servant leadership may find rolling out a leadership training programme in this style a lot easier to manage. By its very nature, servant leadership is about focusing on others, so genuine servant leaders at the top levels of organisations are likely to be supportive of such changes.

The other factor for HRM to consider is the importance of work-life balance. A number of studies and media outputs still report strong employee interest in work-life balance. For example, an international study of almost 10,000 employees noted that managing work-life balance has gotten harder (Ernst & Young, 2015). As such, HRM professionals need to understand the links between work engagement, which is a vital and important organisational focus (to have fully engaged workers), and the need for employees to achieve greater work-life balance. The present study suggests that servant leadership would be a useful place to start as this is likely to build work-life balance in followers and subsequently their work engagement.

Other antecedents have been found including work support (Russo et al., 2016) and the detrimental issues with work interfering with home (Haar, 2013). Therefore, considering policies and practices

that might enhance work-life balance – such as flexitime and working from home options (Haar et al., 2014). Importantly, the present study found no effect from marital status, which mirrors Haar's (2013) study of work-life balance in parents and non-parents, where he found that work-life balance might be a universal factor for all employees. As such, New Zealand organisations seeking to enhance work-life balance need to move away from practices targeting just employees with families – because these can potentially lead to a backlash from single, non-parent workers (Haar & Spell, 2003). Consequently, HRM policies that are available to all employees irrespective of family or marital status are likely to best achieve benefits for workers' work-life balance. Haar et al. (2014) noted the importance of addressing the workplace culture – and this might be particularly prevalent if an organisation has one predicated on long exhaustive work hours. In such organisations, small policy changes are not likely to make much difference. Thus, having HRM explore the role of workloads, work demands, and similar factors might also provide useful ways to enhance work-life balance.

Future Research

Future studies might want to explore additional mediators. For example, within the servant leadership literature, there are strong links with team-level constructs of trust and justice perceptions (Ehrhart, 2004), and consequently these might provide a useful avenue for understanding the process of servant leadership on work-life balance. For example, servant leadership style might build a climate of trust, and this subsequently provides freedom and positive aspects for employees leading to greater role balance (Haar, 2013) and thus work-life balance. Such an approach requires multi-level data which the present study did not have, but it does suggest there are more climate orientated factors that might be included (e.g., fairness) towards understanding how servant leadership influences work-life balance of employees. As noted above, future studies might also seek to explore other leadership styles to predict both work-life balance and work engagement.

Limitations

Like most studies the present study does have some limitations. The methodology of collecting predictors and antecedents at distinct times has been encouraged (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and thus provides some confidence towards these findings not being due to common method variance. However, some methodology experts have suggested all variables – predictors, mediators, and outcomes – should be collected at distinct times. Thus, our approach is not perfect but quite distinct from the majority of studies that are cross-sectional at one point in time. The biggest limitation is the small sample size (n=123) although this is comparable to other similar studies in New Zealand (e.g., Haar & Spell, 2001). Furthermore, the sample does have a good spread of participant demographics including industry, gender and education, making the sample more generalisable to the New Zealand setting.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study sought to explore the role of servant leadership in influencing the work engagement of New Zealand employees. While strong support was found for such an influence, subsequent analysis showed that work-life balance appears to play a key mediating role, with it fully mediating the influence of servant leadership and subsequently having a strong and consistent effect on work engagement dimensions. The implications for HRM are that if organisations want to focus on building the work engagement of their workforce, one way this might be achieved is through having leaders be more focused on growing their followers (servant leadership style) and focusing on the work-life balance of employees.

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