



Proactive Personality as a Moderator Between Servant Leadership and Job Engagement: A Conservation of Resources Perspective

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Received: Sep 10, 2025

Revised: Oct 15, 2025

Accepted: Oct 22, 2025

Published: Oct 31, 2025

Keywords

- Servant leadership
- Job engagement
- Proactive personality
- Conservation of Resources (COR) theory

Abstract: Employee job engagement has been recognized as a crucial determinant of organizational effectiveness and performance, yet the mechanisms and boundary conditions influencing this construct remain insufficiently understood. The primary aim of this study is to examine how servant leadership influences employee job engagement and to determine whether proactive personality moderates this relationship. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the research explores how leadership behaviors and individual personality traits jointly shape engagement levels among academic staff in higher education institutions in Afghanistan. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected through standardized self-report questionnaires administered to 178 faculty members across four public universities in Kabul. The research instrument underwent translation and back-translation procedures to ensure linguistic and cultural validity. Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the study established the construct reliability and validity of the measures. Subsequently, hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesized moderation model. The empirical results demonstrated a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and job engagement. Furthermore, proactive personality was found to moderate this relationship, such that the positive impact of servant leadership on engagement was more substantial among employees with higher levels of proactivity. These findings extend the theoretical understanding of servant leadership by integrating individual personality differences within the COR framework. Practically, the study highlights the importance of fostering servant leadership behaviors and creating work environments that support proactive employees, thereby enhancing faculty engagement and organizational performance in resource-constrained and post-conflict higher education institutions.

To Cite this Article: Muzafary, S. S. (2025). Proactive Personality as a Moderator Between Servant Leadership and Job Engagement: A Conservation of Resources Perspective. *Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 2(4), 25-42.

<https://doi.org/10.62810/jssh.v2i4.177>



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INTRODUCTION

Employee job engagement is widely acknowledged as a vital driver of organizational effectiveness, impacting performance, productivity, and overall success, including in universities (Alshaabani *et al.*, 2021; Clarke & Basilio, 2018; Kaur *et al.*, 2020; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2012). Engaged employees channel physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into their

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Available online at <https://jssh.edu.af/jssh/article/view/177>

work roles, benefiting not only their personal growth but also enhancing organizational outcomes (Khan, 1990; Lururlean *et al.*, 2020). Given its significance, scholars and practitioners have aimed to identify leadership styles that promote higher levels of job engagement. Among these styles, servant leadership has garnered increasing attention as it emphasizes the development, well-being, and empowerment of employees (Ren and Shen, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2020). Servant leaders create a supportive environment characterized by trust, psychological safety, and individualized consideration. According to self-enhancement theory, individuals are more likely to engage in work when their self-worth is affirmed by their social environment (Gelaidan *et al.*, 2024; Yang *et al.*, 2022). Servant leadership promotes meaningfulness, safety, and availability—three psychological conditions that Udin *et al.* (2024) identified as critical to work engagement. When employees feel valued, respected, and supported, they are more likely to channel energy into their roles and sustain high engagement.

Despite the theoretical and empirical support for the positive relationship between servant leadership and job engagement (Shkoler, 2017), not all employees respond equally to servant leaders' behaviors. This suggests the existence of boundary conditions that may strengthen or weaken this relationship. Personality differences have been identified as one of the most important factors influencing engagement (Lin *et al.*, 2024; Li *et al.*, 2015; Dai and Wang, 2023). In particular, proactive personality—defined as a stable disposition toward taking initiative and effecting change—has been consistently linked to higher levels of engagement (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 1995; Christian *et al.*, 2011; Yustinus & Veronika, 2021).

Building on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we argue that employees with proactive personalities are more likely to acquire and invest resources provided by servant leaders. COR theory posits that individuals strive to gain, protect, and accumulate resources, and that resource gains can lead to a “gain spiral” of further investment. Proactive employees are especially resource-seeking; they actively identify, request, and utilize their leaders' support to improve performance, innovate, and persist through challenges (Crant, 1995; Michael, 1991; Trifiletti *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, servant leadership may have a more substantial positive effect on job engagement among proactive employees compared to passive ones.

Although prior studies have established the general positive impact of servant leadership on job engagement (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2022; Endro & Wiroko, 2021; Yustinus & Veronika, 2021), little is known about the moderating role of personality traits—specifically proactive personality—within this relationship. Most servant leadership research has focused on its direct effects, overlooking the individual differences that may influence employees' ability to leverage the resources provided by servant leaders. Furthermore, few studies have explicitly applied COR theory to explain how personality shapes employees' resource investment processes in the context of servant leadership.

This study addresses these gaps by examining proactive personality as a vital moderator of the servant leadership–job engagement relationship from a COR theory perspective in four public universities in Kabul, Afghanistan. Conducting this research in Afghanistan is particularly significant because higher education institutions in the country face unique challenges, including limited resources, faculty shortages, and the need to rebuild academic capacity after years of instability. Understanding how leadership styles and personality traits interact in such a context provides valuable insights for strengthening organizational resilience and fostering a committed academic workforce.

In doing so, we contribute to the literature in three significant ways. First, we enrich servant leadership research by identifying when its positive effects on engagement are most pronounced, particularly in resource-constrained and post-conflict environments such as Afghanistan. Second, we extend COR theory applications in organizational behavior by demonstrating how personality traits influence resource gain and investment, which is critical in settings where psychological and organizational resources are limited. Third, we offer practical insights for university administrators and policymakers by suggesting that aligning servant leadership behaviors with proactive employees can maximize engagement and performance outcomes, helping Afghan universities progress toward academic excellence despite systemic challenges.

Moreover, this research addresses calls for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and boundary conditions underlying the relationship between leadership styles and employee engagement (Liden *et al.*, 2014). By integrating servant leadership, proactive personality, and COR theory, we provide a more nuanced understanding of how employees' personality traits interact with leadership behaviors to influence engagement, with implications that are especially relevant for higher education systems in developing and post-conflict nations like Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Servant Leadership and Job Engagement

Self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals aim to maintain and bolster a positive self-image (Pfeffer & Christina, 2015; Su *et al.*, 2020). The extent to which individuals invest their identity in their work is indicative of their level of engagement (Khan, 1990). To uphold a positive self-perception, individuals dedicate more time and energy to pursuits that affirm their self-worth, while minimizing investment in areas that may undermine it (Luhtanen *et al.*, 2003; Su *et al.*, 2020). This framework elucidates why employees engage in their work and why disengagement may arise. We argue that servant leadership cultivates a work environment that enhances employees' self-worth, thereby increasing the likelihood of work engagement.

Khan (1990) identified three psychological conditions—meaningfulness, safety, and availability—that influence personal engagement and disengagement. Employees assess these conditions to determine whether their environment fosters self-enhancement.

Meaningfulness emerges when employees feel valued, competent, and significant in their roles (Khan, 1990; Victor, 2012). Servant leaders treat each employee as a unique, valued individual and consider their input in decision-making (Evaa *et al.*, 2019; Ehrhart, 2004). This recognition fosters respect and appreciation, reinforcing employees' positive self-concept and promoting engagement.

Safety pertains to a social climate that is trustworthy, supportive, and non-threatening (Khan, 1990). Servant leaders cultivate psychologically safe environments where employees feel trusted and are free to take risks or make mistakes (Ehrhart, 2004). By empowering employees to make decisions and tackle challenges independently (Ehrhart, 2004; Evaa *et al.*, 2019; Ren and Shen, 2024), servant leadership nurtures a climate that safeguards employees' self-image and encourages active participation.

Availability encompasses having sufficient physical, emotional, and psychological resources to engage in one's role (Khan, 1990). Servant leaders promote employees' work and personal growth through individualized communication and tailored developmental opportunities (Greenleaf, 1977). This access to resources and guidance enables employees to meet both work and personal demands, facilitating deeper job engagement.

Overall, self-enhancement theory posits that individuals derive their self-worth from the treatment they receive from others (Bouizegarene & Philippe, 2018; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2006). As representatives of the organization, leaders play a crucial role in shaping this perception. When employees view their leaders as servant leaders, their sense of self-worth is bolstered, which in turn fosters job engagement.

H_1 : Perceptions of servant leadership are positively correlated with employees' job engagement.

The Moderating Role of Proactive Personality

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valuable resources, and that resource gains stimulate further investment in resources (Hobfoll, 1989). In the workplace, leaders serve as a crucial source of social and psychological resources that can enhance employees' motivation and engagement. When employees have access to resources — such as support, information, and autonomy — provided by servant leaders, they are more likely to reinvest these resources in their work roles, resulting in higher job engagement. However, employees' personality traits influence how they perceive and utilize these resources.

Personality differences play a significant role in determining employees' engagement levels (Khan, 1990). Specifically, employees with a proactive personality—those who consistently take initiative and seek opportunities for improvement—are more likely to capitalize on resources offered by servant leaders. A meta-analysis by Christian *et al.* (2011) found that proactive individuals exhibit higher levels of job engagement, as they actively shape and interact with their work environment. COR theory helps explain this process: proactive employees view servant leaders' support as a valuable resource, which they

strategically acquire and invest in to generate additional resource gains, such as performance improvement, innovation, and personal growth.

Proactive employees are more likely to be resource seekers than passive employees (Bateman & Crant, 1993). They not only recognize the unique resources that servant leaders provide but also actively seek guidance, feedback, and opportunities that enhance their work performance. According to COR theory, this proactive investment leads to a “gain spiral” in which resource acquisition from servant leaders further fuels employees’ motivation to engage in challenging tasks, persist in goal-directed behavior, and generate new ideas (Crant, 1995).

From the perspective of servant leadership, leaders engage in individualized consideration by closely attending to each follower’s needs and tailoring resources accordingly (Liden *et al.*, 2008). When working with proactive employees, servant leaders are likely to notice their readiness for growth and respond with timely developmental opportunities, mentoring, and empowerment. In contrast, passive employees may not explicitly express their needs, limiting leaders’ ability to allocate resources effectively. As a result, proactive employees are more likely to achieve the psychological conditions (meaningfulness, safety, and availability) that drive job engagement.

Taken together, the interaction between servant leadership and proactive personality aligns with the person–supervisor fit perspective (Gregg & Walczak, 2007), but COR theory provides a deeper explanation: proactive employees are more effective at resource acquisition and investment, allowing them to benefit disproportionately from servant leaders’ resource-rich behaviors. This synergy strengthens the positive effect of servant leadership on job engagement.

H₄: Proactive personality moderates the relationship between servant leadership and job engagement, such that the relationship is stronger when proactive personality is high compared to when it is low.

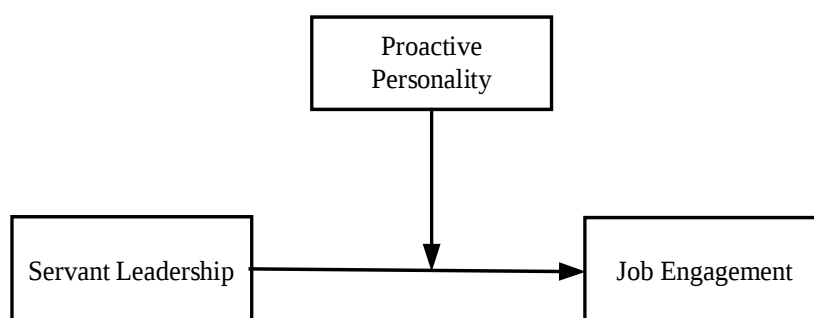


Figure 1. Hypothesized model Elaborated by the author

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and Data Collection

This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive research design to examine the conceptual model investigating the moderating role of proactive personality in the relationship between servant leadership and job engagement. Data were collected through a paper-and-pencil questionnaire administered to faculty members from four public universities in Kabul, Afghanistan. The higher education sector in Afghanistan faces ongoing challenges, including improving the quality of teaching and research, responding to students' and society's expectations, and developing innovative solutions to administrative and academic issues. Therefore, fostering job engagement and supporting proactive behaviors among faculty members is crucial to enhancing institutional performance and addressing these growing demands.

A convenience sampling method was used to collect data between January and April 2020. The research sample comprised 220 faculty members from various academic disciplines whose roles require creativity, initiative, and problem-solving. The questionnaire was initially developed in English and then translated into Dari (Persian – Afghanistan) using Brislin's (1980) back-translation procedure to ensure translation accuracy. To minimize response bias, a cover letter was attached that explained the purpose of the study and provided clear instructions to respondents. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire privately and accurately. They were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that all responses would remain confidential and be analyzed anonymously (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To create psychological separation between study variables, instructions such as “the following items are not related to previous ones” were included in the survey.

Prior to data collection, necessary permissions and coordination were obtained from university authorities and department heads. Data collection took approximately one month. Questionnaires were distributed during official working hours and collected on follow-up visits. Of the 250 distributed questionnaires, 210 were returned, yielding a response rate of 91%. After screening for missing data and outliers (Hair *et al.*, 2014), 178 questionnaires were deemed usable for analysis.

Of the 178 respondents, 70% (123) were male and 30% (55) were female. Participants' ages ranged from 30 to 60 years, with a mean age of 43 years. In terms of education level, the majority of respondents (67%) held postgraduate degrees (Master's or Ph.D.). Their academic experience (tenure) ranged from 1 to 34 years, with an average of 18 years.

All participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and the study's purpose. Written consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. This information was shared with the participants together with the questionnaire.

Measures

All variables in this study were measured using a five-point Likert agreement scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree.” As the original instruments were developed in English and in Western contexts, the questionnaire was translated into Dari (Persian–Afghanistan) and back-translated following the recommended cross-cultural translation procedure to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence.

Servant Leadership. Servant leadership was measured using (Ehrhart's (2004) 14-item scale, which captures employees' perceptions of their leaders' servant-oriented behaviors. A sample item is: “My supervisor spends time building quality relationships with department employees.” The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Proactive Personality. Proactive personality was assessed with a four-item adapted scale developed by (2007), based on the original 17-item instrument by Bateman & Crant (1993). A sample item includes: “I am excellent at identifying opportunities.” The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.88, which demonstrates acceptable reliability.

Job Engagement. Job engagement was measured using the 18-item scale developed by Rich *et al.* (2010), which assesses physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement at work. A sample item is: “At work, my mind is focused on my job.” This scale showed excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Control Variables. Prior research on employee outcomes suggests that demographic characteristics may influence the relationships examined in this study (Lin et al., 2024; Zhang, 2017). To account for their potential effects, several demographic variables were included as control variables: age (measured in years), gender (coded as 0 = female, 1 = male), organizational tenure (measured in years), and education level (coded as 1 = master's degree, and 2 = doctorate). Controlling for these variables helped to ensure that the observed effects of servant leadership, proactive personality, and job engagement were not confounded by participants' demographic characteristics.

Data Analysis

To examine the proposed research model, a series of statistical analyses was conducted using SPSS version 28 and AMOS version 24. The data analysis procedure followed a multi-stage approach to ensure the accuracy, validity, and reliability of the findings (Hair et al., 2014).

In the first stage, descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the means, standard deviations, and distribution patterns of all study variables. Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine preliminary relationships among the constructs and to identify any potential multicollinearity issues (Field, 2018).

The second stage focused on assessing the measurement model using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). The goodness-of-fit of the model was evaluated using several fit indices, including the Chi-square statistic (χ^2),

Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Acceptable thresholds for model fit followed the recommendations of Hair et al. (2014) and Kline (2016), indicating CFI and TLI values above 0.90, RMSEA values below 0.08, and SRMR values below 0.08.

In the final stage, multiple regression analyses were employed to test the hypothesized relationships among variables. Demographic variables—age, gender, organizational tenure, and education level — were entered as control variables to account for their potential effects on job engagement (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. This multi-step analytical approach ensured methodological rigor and robustly validated both the measurement and structural components of the proposed research framework.

FINDINGS

Measurement Model Analysis

Before testing the study hypotheses, the measurement model comprising servant leadership, job engagement, and proactive personality was rigorously evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). All factor loadings were statistically significant at the 0.001 level, providing strong evidence of convergent validity (see Table 1). The measurement model showed satisfactory fit indices: $\chi^2 (112) = 482.415$, $p = 0.000$, GFI = 0.951, CFI = 0.942, IFI = 0.950, RMSEA = 0.054 (Table 2), indicating that the hypothesized model appropriately represents the underlying constructs.

Table 1. Overall construct reliability and factor loadings of indicators

Constructs	Indicators	Factor Loadings	α (Cronbach's Alpha)	KMO	AVE	CR
Servant Leadership (SL)	SL1	0.806	0.90	0.70	0.50	0.87
	SL2	0.810				
	SL3	0.808				
	SL4	0.826				
	SL5	0.794				
	SL6	0.812				
	SL7	0.785				
	SL8	0.802				
	SL9	0.814				
	SL10	0.819				
	SL11	0.806				
	SL12	0.799				
	SL13	0.828				
	SL14	0.810				
Proactive Personality (PP)	PP1	0.898				

Constructs	Indicators	Factor Loadings	α (Cronbach's Alpha)	KMO	AVE	CR
Job Engagement (JE)	PP2	0.894	0.88	0.86	0.52	0.97
	PP3	0.853				
	PP4	0.899				
	JE1	0.769	0.90	0.885	0.51	0.91
	JE2	0.819				
	JE3	0.808				
	JE9	0.836				
	JE10	0.803				
	JE11	0.838				
	JE12	0.805				
	JE13	0.824				
	JE14	0.801				
	JE15	0.793				
	JE16	0.744				
	JE17	0.853				
	JE18	0.845				

Note: "AVE stands for 'Average Variance Extracted'; KMO for 'Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin'; and CR stands for 'Construct/Composite Reliability'. The results are significant at the 0.001 level—source: Elaborated by the author.

Table 2. Comparison of measurement models

Change from Hypothesized Model	Models	χ^2	d.f.	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
1	Baseline three-factor model (Servant Leadership, Job Engagement, Proactive Personality)	482.415	112	0.95	0.94	0.95	0.05		
2	Two-factor model: Servant Leadership & Proactive Personality combined	1608.931	114	0.81	0.77	0.81	0.11	1126.516***	2
3	One-factor model: Servant Leadership, Job Engagement, and Proactive Personality combined into one factor	3627.774	115	0.71	0.68	0.71	0.13	2018.843***	1

*** $p \leq 0.001$. Source: Elaborated by the author.

Discriminant validity was assessed using standard procedures, confirming that the constructs were distinct. Additionally, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to examine common method bias, revealing that the first factor accounted for only 45.78% of the

variance, suggesting that common method bias was not a serious concern. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
1. Gender	1.53	0.49	–						
2. Age	1.74	0.83	.138**	–					
3. Educational Level	4.65	0.73	.097*	.058	–				
4. Organizational Tenure	2.27	1.14	-.053	.025	-.041	–			
5. Servant Leadership (SL)	3.82	0.76	.019	-.051	.161**	-.039	–		
6. Proactive Personality (PP)	3.67	0.81	.034	-.112*	.071	.046	.392**	–	
7. Job Engagement (JE)	4.11	0.69	-.018	.062	.123**	-.029	.368**	.415**	–

N = 178. Source: Elaborated by the author.

Hypothesis Testing

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses (see Table 4).

Table 4. Result of hierarchical regression analyses

<i>Independent</i>	<i>Dependent</i>			
	<i>Job Engagement</i>			
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Control Variables				
Gender	-0.022	-0.037	-0.038	-0.034
Age Group	0.041	0.036	0.037	0.038
Educational Level	-0.105	-0.078	-0.077	-0.070
Organizational Tenure	0.028	0.032	0.036	0.036
Main Effects				
Servant Leadership (SL)		0.388***	0.494***	0.392***
Moderator Effects				
Proactive Personality (PP)			0.320***	0.336***
Interaction Effects				
SL * PP				0.271 ***
Overall F	3.210***	7.890***	11.020***	12.150***
R²	0.014	0.046	0.073	0.084
Adjusted R²	0.010	0.041	0.067	0.078
ΔR²	0.014	0.032	0.027	0.011

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Source: Elaborated by the author.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that servant leadership (SL) is positively associated with job engagement. Results confirmed that SL was positively and significantly related to job engagement ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$, Step 2), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that core self-evaluation and proactive personality (PP) interactively moderate the relationship between SL and job engagement. To test this, an

interaction term was entered at Step 4. The results demonstrated a significant moderating effect of PP on the SL–job engagement relationship ($\beta = 0.27, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Figure 2 illustrates this interaction by plotting values one standard deviation above and below the mean of PP to represent high versus low PP. A simple slope analysis (Preacher *et al.*, 2007) revealed that when PP is low, SL has a weaker effect on job engagement, whereas when PP is high, the relationship becomes stronger.

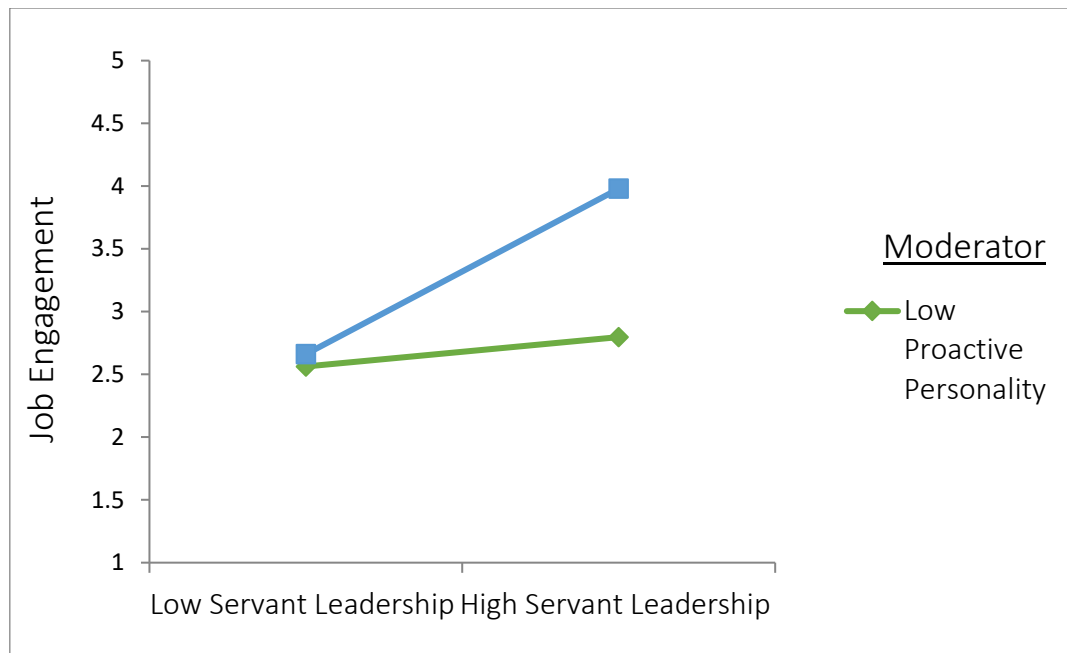


Figure 2. Interaction effect
Source: Elaborated by the author.

DISCUSSION

Given the resource-constrained and post-conflict context of Kabul universities, this study provides valuable insights into how leadership and personality factors jointly enhance faculty engagement. Employee engagement is widely acknowledged as a key driver of organizational effectiveness, especially in higher education, where faculty performance directly affects teaching quality, research productivity, and administrative efficiency. In Kabul's universities, where human capital is a crucial resource, understanding the factors that strengthen engagement is vital for institutional growth and resilience.

The findings confirm that servant leadership significantly and positively influences employee engagement, supporting Khan's (1990) model of psychological conditions for engagement and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory's "gain spiral." Servant leaders—by empowering employees, showing genuine care, and fostering growth—create trust, loyalty, and psychological safety, motivating staff to invest more energy and emotional commitment in their work. These results align with previous research (Greenleaf, 1977; Ehrhart, 2004; Evaa *et al.*, 2019; Ren & Shen, 2024; Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020; Aboramadan *et al.*, 2021), confirming that servant leadership behaviors increase commitment and engagement.

Moreover, this study highlights the moderating role of proactive personality, addressing a gap in prior servant leadership research: the often-ignored role of individual differences. Employees with higher proactivity—those who take initiative, seek feedback, and strive for positive change—displayed stronger engagement under servant leadership. This supports COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), indicating that proactive employees better utilize the psychological and social resources provided by servant leaders, thereby enhancing performance. Similar findings were reported by Jiang et al. (2020) and Yousafzai et al. (2022). However, contrasting results (Abbas and Raja, 2019) suggest that contextual and cultural factors may shape the strength of this interaction. Hence, future studies should further examine how organizational culture, national context, and job characteristics influence the relationship between leadership and personality traits.

Theoretically, this research extends servant leadership and engagement literature by integrating personality factors into the model, offering a more nuanced understanding of engagement mechanisms. It reinforces the COR theory by demonstrating how personal resources (e.g., proactive personality) interact with organizational resources (e.g., servant-leadership support) to sustain engagement. This interaction is particularly relevant in resource-limited environments, where proactive behavior and resource-seeking are essential for institutional survival and development. Furthermore, it emphasizes that alignment between leadership style and employee traits is necessary for maximizing engagement—servant leadership is most effective when employees possess initiative-oriented personalities.

Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for higher education institutions in Kabul and similar contexts. Recruitment and selection systems should include proactive personality assessments, such as structured interviews and validated psychometric tools, to identify candidates predisposed to initiative and change. Leadership development programs should focus on cultivating servant-leadership competencies, such as empowerment, emotional support, recognition, and growth opportunities. Additionally, job design strategies should enhance autonomy, skill variety, feedback, and interdisciplinary collaboration to strengthen intrinsic motivation. Mentorship and peer-coaching programs can further encourage proactive behaviors and foster a culture of continuous learning. Finally, ensuring sufficient institutional resources—such as research funding, professional development opportunities, and technological infrastructure—is essential to enabling proactive employees to leverage servant leadership support and fully contribute to institutional excellence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides robust evidence that servant leadership is a critical driver of employee engagement and that proactive personality serves as a key moderating mechanism that strengthens this relationship. By empirically demonstrating that proactive employees are better able to leverage the psychological and social resources created by servant leaders, the study advances existing theoretical models of engagement—particularly

Kahn's psychological conditions and Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory—by integrating the role of personal resources into the engagement process.

For higher education institutions in Kabul, the findings emphasize the need for a multifaceted approach that combines leadership development, personality-informed recruitment and selection practices, and the design of intrinsically motivating work environments. Additionally, fostering a recognition-oriented organizational culture and providing adequate institutional resources are essential to capitalize on the benefits of servant leadership fully. When implemented systematically, these strategies have the potential to build a resilient, highly engaged academic workforce, enhance institutional effectiveness, and ultimately contribute to the long-term advancement of Afghanistan's higher education system.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study provides important insights into the moderating role of proactive personality in the relationship between servant leadership and job engagement, it also has several limitations that offer opportunities for future research.

First, this study employed a cross-sectional research design. While this design allowed for examination of relationships between variables at a single point in time, it does not establish causality. Future research could use longitudinal or experimental designs to understand better the causal nature of the relationships among servant leadership, proactive personality, and job engagement.

Second, the measurement of variables relied primarily on self-report questionnaires. Although self-reports provide valuable insights, they are subject to biases such as social desirability and standard method variance. Future studies could complement self-reports with alternative measures, such as supervisor evaluations, peer assessments, or behavioral observations, to enhance the validity and objectivity of the findings.

Third, the sample of this study was limited to university employees in Kabul. Therefore, the generalizability of the results to other contexts, such as universities in different provinces of Afghanistan or other countries, may be restricted. Future research could expand the sample to include diverse cultural and organizational settings to examine whether the observed relationships hold in other contexts.

Fourth, proactive personality was treated as a single-factor construct in this study. However, recent research suggests that proactive personality may be multi-dimensional, including aspects such as initiative, perseverance, and change orientation (Belwalkar and Tobacyk, 2018). Future studies could explore the effects of different dimensions of proactive personality on job engagement and the interaction with servant leadership.

Finally, this study focused on proactive personality as a moderator and did not examine other potential personal or organizational factors that might influence job engagement. Variables such as other personality traits, emotional intelligence, organizational climate, or

alternative leadership styles could further enhance or reduce engagement. Future research could explore the mediating and moderating roles of these factors, including culture-specific variables, such as authority dynamics and collectivist tendencies, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee engagement dynamics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges Kabul University for providing the academic environment and institutional support essential for the successful completion of this research. The author also extends appreciation to the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences for facilitating access to relevant resources. Sincere thanks are extended to all respondents for their time and valuable contributions.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This study did not receive any specific funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the conduct, outcomes, or publication of this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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