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## Transformational Leadership and Employees' Job Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Public Service Motivation and the Moderating Effect of Power Distance Orientation

Maria F. Costa<sup>1</sup>, Joao P. Ribeiro<sup>1\*</sup>, Helena S. Teixeira<sup>1</sup>

1. Department of Management, School of Economics and Management, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal.

### Abstract

This research explores how transformational leadership affects job-related outcomes among public employees by focusing on the intervening role of public service motivation and the contingent influence of power distance orientation. Survey data were gathered from 605 civil servants employed in Vietnamese local government institutions, and the proposed model was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 3.0. The empirical results demonstrate that transformational leadership contributes positively to employee outcomes, both directly and indirectly through enhanced public service motivation. However, this indirect effect is not uniform across individuals. Power distance orientation was found to significantly shape the strength of the relationships between public service motivation and transformational leadership job satisfaction, and job performance. Employees with stronger power distance orientations were less responsive to transformational leadership behaviors, resulting in lower levels of public service motivation and, consequently, diminished job satisfaction and performance. The findings suggest that the application of transformational leadership practices in Vietnamese local governments can improve employee outcomes, but their effectiveness depends on employees' cultural value orientations. By integrating leadership style, motivational mechanisms, and cultural values into a single framework, this study extends the literature on transformational leadership in the public sector and underscores the limiting role of high power distance orientation in realizing leadership benefits.

**Keywords:** Public service motivation, Transformational leadership, Power distance orientation, Employees' job-related outcomes, Civil servants

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**Corresponding author:** Joao P. Ribeiro

**E-mail** ✉ [joao.ribeiro@outlook.com](mailto:joao.ribeiro@outlook.com)

### Introduction

Scholars across disciplines have long been interested in understanding how to cultivate a motivated workforce, regardless of organizational context or sector [1]. Despite this broad interest, research on employee motivation has been disproportionately concentrated in the private sector [2]. Within public administration, motivation has been identified as one of the three central challenges of public management, together with issues of micromanagement and performance measurement [3]. Motivation in public organizations is widely regarded as a critical driver of positive outcomes at both the individual and organizational levels [4].

Over recent decades, the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm has been promoted as a means of revitalizing bureaucratic systems perceived as inefficient or disengaged. Rooted in principal-agent theory and assumptions of self-interested behavior, NPM emphasizes control mechanisms and performance incentives [5]. In contrast to these assumptions, public service motivation (PSM) has emerged as an alternative framework for understanding behavior in public organizations. PSM has



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attracted growing scholarly attention as it highlights motives unique to public service, defined as a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes that transcend personal and organizational self-interest in favor of serving the broader public good [6]. By emphasizing altruism, civic engagement, and concern for others, PSM directly challenges the logic underpinning NPM. Moreover, recurring shortcomings in private-sector responses to global economic crises have raised questions about the universal applicability of business-oriented management practices in the public sector. Against this backdrop, PSM has been increasingly viewed as a viable foundation for human resource management practices, including recruitment, retention, training, and performance enhancement, and has thus become a prominent alternative paradigm to NPM.

Research on PSM has expanded rapidly over the past decade, evolving into a field that is international in scope, interdisciplinary in nature, and applicable across sectors [7]. One of the most influential frameworks for understanding the formation of PSM was developed by Perry [8], who proposed three contextual domains shaping PSM: socio-historical influences arising from early socialization, organizational and motivational contexts such as job design and work environment, and individual-level characteristics. Despite the prominence of this framework, empirical and theoretical investigations into the antecedents of PSM remain relatively limited [7]. In particular, leadership-related factors—especially transformational leadership—have rarely been integrated into models examining the development of PSM, despite their relevance for the future effectiveness of public organizations [9].

Public organizations, especially local governments, are increasingly required to maintain service quality and productivity under conditions of constrained budgets and limited human resources. Public managers therefore face the ongoing challenge of sustaining employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance amid fiscal pressures. Transformational leadership has been suggested as a promising approach to addressing these challenges. This leadership style emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to exceed standard expectations while aligning individual goals with organizational objectives [10]. Transformational leaders actively support employee development, encourage participation in problem-solving, and foster a shared sense of purpose. Nevertheless, the processes through which transformational leadership influences public service motivation and subsequent job-related outcomes remain insufficiently explored [11, 12], prompting increasing scholarly interest in this area.

Although transformational leadership has been consistently linked to favorable employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and performance in public organizations, the role of PSM in explaining these relationships remains unclear. A review of the PSM literature suggests three broad conclusions. First, empirical evidence generally confirms the presence and relevance of PSM among public sector employees. Second, transformational leadership and job satisfaction are frequently associated with improved employee performance. Third, the relationships among transformational leadership, PSM, job satisfaction, and engagement are inconsistent across studies, with variations in strength, direction, and significance [7]. Given the central role of PSM in public sector effectiveness, there is a clear need for more systematic and integrative research. While numerous studies have examined the antecedents and outcomes of PSM (e.g., Miao *et al.* [13]; Riccucci [14]), most have focused on developed-country contexts, limiting their generalizability.

To address this gap, the present study examines transformational leadership as an antecedent of PSM and investigates key employee outcomes—including job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance—in a developing-country setting. Vietnam provides a particularly relevant context, as its civil service system is undergoing significant transformation following a long-standing centralist and statist tradition. Ongoing administrative reforms and political discourse increasingly advocate for more market-oriented and performance-driven management approaches within the public sector. Studying PSM in this environment offers an opportunity to deepen understanding of how public employees respond to leadership and motivational mechanisms amid rapid economic and institutional change. Introducing the PSM framework into the Vietnamese context therefore contributes valuable insights to the international public administration literature.

In addition to examining leadership and motivation, this study incorporates cultural value orientation—specifically power distance orientation—into the analysis of employee outcomes. Power distance, defined as the extent to which individuals accept unequal distributions of authority within organizations and institutions [15], reflects deeply held beliefs about hierarchy, authority, and status. At the individual level, power distance orientation captures employees' personal views regarding leadership legitimacy and organizational hierarchy [16]. Differences in power distance orientation between leaders and followers may influence communication patterns and undermine trust if expectations regarding authority and participation diverge [17]. Prior research has applied power distance orientation to examine variations in leadership effectiveness, employee attitudes, and organizational performance (e.g., Xenikou [18]), with evidence suggesting that such orientations vary across cultural contexts [19]. Moreover, the interaction between leadership behaviors and followers' power distance orientation has been shown to shape employees' perceptions and behaviors [20]. Despite this, little is known about how power distance orientation conditions the effects of transformational leadership in public organizations. Accordingly, this study positions power distance orientation as a key moderating variable, aiming to clarify how cultural values influence the relationship between transformational leadership and employee outcomes—particularly public service motivation, job satisfaction, engagement, and performance—within the Vietnamese and broader Asian context.

### *Theoretical background*

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasizes the role of cognitive processes and observational learning in shaping human behavior [21]. According to this perspective, individuals acquire knowledge and behavioral patterns not only through direct experience but also by observing others. Learning can therefore occur vicariously, without the need for immediate imitation, as individuals internalize observed behaviors and outcomes and later apply them in relevant contexts.

In contrast, Social Exchange Theory (SET) focuses on the reciprocal nature of social relationships and explains behavior as a function of perceived costs and benefits arising from social interactions [22]. From this perspective, employees are motivated to engage in behaviors that maximize positive outcomes while minimizing negative ones. SET is particularly relevant in organizational settings, where leader–follower relationships are based on mutual exchange. Supportive leadership behaviors are often reciprocated by employees through enhanced commitment, motivation, and performance, illustrating the interdependent nature of workplace interactions.

### *Hypotheses development*

#### *Transformational leadership*

Transformational leadership has been described as a leadership approach that promotes personal development, collaboration, and shared motivation to achieve collective outcomes [23]. Rather than relying solely on transactional or contractual exchanges, transformational leaders inspire followers to pursue common goals by fostering strong interpersonal relationships and shared values [24]. According to Avolio and Bass [24], transformational leadership consists of four core components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence reflects a leader's role-modeling behavior that earns followers' respect and trust. Inspirational motivation refers to a leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision that energizes and inspires employees. Intellectual stimulation involves encouraging innovation and critical thinking by challenging existing assumptions. Individualized consideration emphasizes attending to followers' individual needs and supporting their personal and professional development.

#### *Job performance*

In today's highly competitive and performance-oriented environment, organizations increasingly define job performance using formal standards that capture both task outcomes and employee behaviors contributing to organizational success. Employee job performance is widely recognized as a central determinant of organizational effectiveness [25]. Job performance has been conceptualized as the cumulative value of employees' work-related behaviors over a specified period [26] and includes actions that directly support organizational goals [27].

When individual objectives are aligned with organizational goals, improvements in employee performance contribute directly to overall organizational success. Transformational leaders foster such alignment by cultivating trust, respect, and admiration among their followers, which in turn motivates employees to accept challenges and strive for higher levels of achievement. By articulating a clear vision and emphasizing the importance of collective goals, transformational leaders encourage employees to exceed standard performance expectations. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, employees learn appropriate behaviors by observing their leaders as role models [21]. Transformational leaders, through their idealized influence and inspirational motivation, serve as visible and credible role models, shaping followers' attitudes and behaviors. Observing such leadership behaviors enhances employees' confidence in their own capabilities, thereby increasing their motivation to accomplish work goals. Prior research supports this view, indicating a positive relationship between transformational leadership and job performance [28]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** Transformational leadership positively influences civil servants' job performance.

#### *Public service motivation*

Public service motivation (PSM) has been conceptualized as an individual's inherent tendency to respond to motives that are primarily associated with public institutions and collective interests [6]. It encompasses a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes that transcend personal or organizational self-interest and instead prioritize the welfare of society and the broader political community [29]. Beyond a commitment to public interest, PSM also reflects elements of compassion and self-sacrifice, which encourage civil servants to engage meaningfully with others beyond formal job requirements.

Within leadership research, transformational leadership has attracted sustained attention due to its emphasis on enhancing followers' cognitive capacities, aligning individual aspirations with organizational missions, and addressing employees' personal needs in pursuit of shared objectives. Transformational leaders actively articulate and reinforce visions centered on public values, thereby fostering higher levels of PSM among employees [10]. By encouraging employees to elevate their interests, internalize collective goals, and act in service of the common good, transformational leaders promote motivations that extend beyond narrow self-interest [30]. Similarly, Hameduddin and Engbers [7] argued that transformational leadership enables civil servants to connect inspirational organizational visions with their deeply held values, motivating them to transcend immediate personal concerns. Empirical evidence has consistently supported a positive association between

transformational leadership and PSM (e.g., Jensen & Bro [31]; Wright *et al.*, [10]). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** Transformational leadership positively affects civil servants' public service motivation.

Scholars have also suggested that individuals with higher levels of PSM are more likely to seek employment in public organizations and demonstrate superior work performance. When public organizations attract employees with strong PSM, reliance on extrinsic or material incentives to regulate performance may be reduced [32]. Civil servants with high PSM tend to exert greater effort, attach greater significance to their tasks, and derive meaning from fulfilling public responsibilities. Engaging in meaningful work that aligns with personal values reinforces motivation and enhances individual performance outcomes [13]. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is advanced:

**H3:** Public service motivation positively influences civil servants' job performance.

### *Job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction refers to employees' overall affective evaluation of their work and various aspects of their job roles, with higher satisfaction reflecting more positive emotional responses toward work experiences [33]. Employees tend to experience job satisfaction when they find their work meaningful, enjoyable, or rewarding, or when positive emotions emerge from favorable assessments of their performance.

Leadership behavior has been widely recognized as a critical antecedent of job satisfaction [34-36]. Transformational leadership, in particular, fosters satisfaction by cultivating trust, supporting employee development, and strengthening leader–follower relationships [37]. As followers work with transformational leaders over time, mutual trust deepens, which contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction [38]. Additionally, through emotional contagion processes, leaders' positive affective states can be transmitted to followers, enhancing their work-related attitudes. By emphasizing individualized consideration and employee growth, transformational leaders create conditions conducive to increased job satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4:** Transformational leadership positively influences civil servants' job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction has also been identified as a key determinant of both individual and organizational performance. Research suggests that satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate higher productivity and contribute to organizational competitiveness [33, 39, 40]. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, employees who experience satisfaction at work may feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate favorable treatment received from their organization [22]. This reciprocity often manifests as enhanced job performance, completing a satisfaction–performance exchange cycle. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is advanced:

**H5:** Job satisfaction positively affects civil servants' job performance.

Previous studies have also linked PSM to job satisfaction, suggesting that public service–oriented values foster positive work attitudes. Camilleri [41] highlighted that dimensions of PSM are associated with increased satisfaction among public employees. Perry *et al.* [42] further argued that individuals with strong PSM integrate rational, normative, and emotional motives into their value systems, which aligns closely with the mission of public organizations. When public institutions provide opportunities for civil servants to serve societal interests and contribute to public goods, employees with high PSM are more likely to experience fulfillment and satisfaction at work. Empirical findings support this relationship, demonstrating a positive effect of PSM on job satisfaction [2]. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H6:** Public service motivation positively influences civil servants' job satisfaction.

### *Employee engagement*

Employee engagement has been defined as the extent to which individuals invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their work roles [43]. Engaged employees exhibit a positive, work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, civil servants are more likely to become engaged when they perceive that their leaders value their contributions and care about their development. Transformational leaders demonstrate such concern by recognizing employees' needs, responding to their requests, and supporting their growth and achievement. These behaviors foster high-quality leader–follower relationships and strengthen employees' sense of belonging within the organization. In response, employees may reciprocate by becoming more deeply involved in their work activities. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H7:** Transformational leadership positively influences civil servants' employee engagement.

Public service motivation has also been conceptualized as a personal resource that encourages altruistic behavior and commitment to serving the public interest [44]. When civil servants perceive alignment between their personal values and those of their organization, they are more likely to feel appreciated and useful, which enhances engagement. Employees with strong PSM tend to prioritize social and intrinsic values, demonstrate dedication to public welfare, and display a willingness

to invest effort in their roles. Empirical evidence indicates that higher levels of PSM are associated with greater employee engagement among civil servants [45]. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H8:** Public service motivation positively influences civil servants' employee engagement.

Social Exchange Theory further suggests that when organizations provide valued resources—such as supportive leadership and meaningful work—employees acquire skills and experiences that enrich their roles [22]. Job satisfaction represents one such valued outcome, and satisfied employees are more likely to reciprocate by increasing their level of engagement. In this sense, satisfaction fosters deeper involvement in work tasks as employees strive to contribute to organizational goals. Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

**H9:** Job satisfaction positively influences civil servants' employee engagement.

Engagement has been described as a motivational mechanism that translates positive attitudes into performance outcomes [46]. Engaged employees demonstrate high levels of energy, persistence, and enthusiasm, enabling them to perform their tasks more effectively. Similarly, Avery *et al.* [47] argued that highly engaged civil servants develop a strong emotional attachment to organizational success, which ultimately enhances productivity. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H10:** Employee engagement positively influences civil servants' job performance.

### *The mediating role of public service motivation*

Transformational leadership has been consistently linked to favorable job-related outcomes, including job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance [48]. Leadership research suggests that leadership practices play a critical role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors, although their effectiveness may vary depending on contextual and individual factors. Prior studies have established relationships between transformational leadership and job performance (Sürücü *et al.*, [28]), transformational leadership and PSM (e.g., Jensen & Bro [31]), and PSM and job-related outcomes (e.g., Miao *et al.*, [13]). Taken together, these findings indicate that transformational leadership enhances PSM, which in turn contributes to improved employee outcomes.

Integrating these relationships, this study proposes that PSM serves as an underlying mechanism through which transformational leadership influences job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance. Accordingly, the following mediating hypotheses are formulated:

**H11a:** Public service motivation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and civil servants' job performance.

**H11b:** Public service motivation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and civil servants' job satisfaction.

**H11c:** Public service motivation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and civil servants' employee engagement.

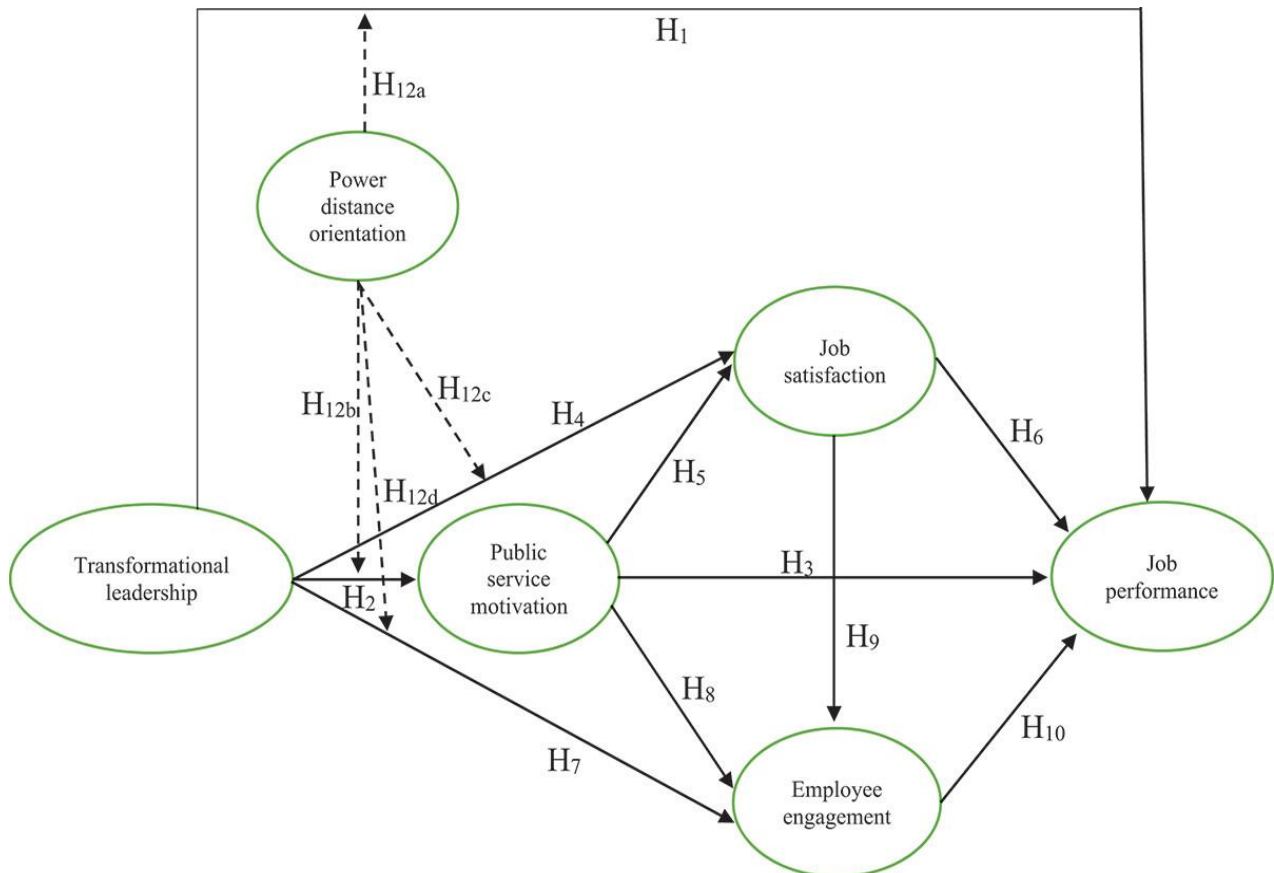
### *Power distance orientation*

Power distance refers to the degree to which individuals with less authority within a society accept and anticipate unequal distributions of power [15]. Scholars have emphasized the importance of distinguishing between power distance as a national cultural characteristic and power distance as an individual-level value [20]. At the individual level, this concept is captured by power distance orientation (PDO), which reflects personal beliefs regarding hierarchy, authority, and power relations in organizations. Compared with other cultural value dimensions—such as individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, or masculinity–femininity—PDO has been argued to have a more direct and immediate influence on individuals' reactions to leadership behaviors [20].

Individuals with a high power distance orientation are generally more accepting of hierarchical authority and more comfortable with top-down leadership and centralized decision-making. Such employees tend to view unequal power distribution as legitimate and expect leaders to exercise substantial control over subordinates [15]. In contrast, individuals with low PDO prefer more egalitarian relationships, seek closer interpersonal interactions with their supervisors, and favor shared authority, resulting in less clearly defined hierarchical boundaries.

Bass and Riggio [49] suggested that leadership effectiveness is shaped not only by leadership style but also by contextual factors such as organizational environment, task characteristics, and the balance of power between leaders and followers. Transformational leadership, in particular, relies on reciprocal interactions, intellectual stimulation, and shared influence between leaders and subordinates. However, employees with high PDO may respond less favorably to this leadership style. Such individuals typically expect explicit instructions and clear directives from supervisors, whereas transformational leaders encourage critical thinking, challenge existing assumptions, and promote autonomy. This mismatch may create discomfort or skepticism among high-PDO employees, potentially reducing their intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, engagement, and effectiveness.

Conversely, employees with low power distance orientation are more likely to respond positively to transformational leadership behaviors. Because they are less inclined to accept strict hierarchical control, they may feel more motivated, satisfied, and engaged when leaders invite them to question assumptions, participate in decision-making, and explore innovative ways of performing their work. As a result, low-PDO civil servants are more likely to experience enhanced behavioral outcomes—including public service motivation, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance—when working under transformational leaders [50]. Based on these arguments, this study proposes a set of moderating hypotheses, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

**H11a:** Power distance orientation functions as a moderating variable in the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance, such that the positive influence of transformational leadership is attenuated among civil servants exhibiting high levels of power distance orientation.

**H11b:** Power distance orientation moderates the linkage between transformational leadership and public service motivation, weakening the positive effect of transformational leadership for employees with stronger power distance orientation.

**H11c:** Power distance orientation conditions the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, resulting in a reduced positive association for civil servants who strongly endorse hierarchical power structures.

**H11d:** Power distance orientation moderates the association between transformational leadership and employee engagement, such that the beneficial effect of transformational leadership is less pronounced for individuals with high power distance orientation.

### Research design

#### Measurement instruments

The constructs included in the research framework were operationalized using validated multi-item scales adopted from prior empirical studies. Participants responded to survey items using a five-point agreement scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Transformational leadership was assessed using a five-item instrument adapted from Wright *et al.* [10]. Public service motivation was measured using the five-item Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) scale developed by Wright *et al.* [51]. Job performance was evaluated with four items drawn from Dizgah *et al.* [52], while job satisfaction was captured using four items adapted from Giau *et al.* [33]. Employee engagement was measured through a six-item scale developed by Schaufeli *et al.* [53]. Power distance orientation was assessed using five items based on the scale proposed by Kirkman *et al.* [20].

*Data collection process and pilot study*

A mixed-method research strategy was adopted, integrating qualitative refinement with quantitative validation. Initially, measurement items were compiled based on an extensive review of relevant literature and prior studies. These items were translated into Vietnamese to produce a preliminary questionnaire suitable for local respondents. To ensure conceptual and linguistic accuracy, a back-translation procedure was conducted with the assistance of bilingual language specialists.

Subsequently, a focus group consisting of ten civil servants—equally divided between managerial and non-managerial roles—was convened to evaluate the clarity and contextual appropriateness of the survey items. Given variations in cultural norms, organizational environments, and occupational roles, modifications to the original scales were necessary to enhance their suitability for the Vietnamese public-sector context. Following these revisions, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a separate sample of 50 civil servants employed in local government agencies in Ho Chi Minh City. Reliability analysis of the measurement scales was conducted using SPSS software (version 23), and the results of the pilot assessment are reported in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** The result of the pilot test

Construct	Number of Items	Minimum Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Transformational leadership	5	0.679	0.896
Public service motivation	5	0.725	0.930
Job satisfaction	4	0.631	0.865
Employee engagement	6	0.596	0.914
Job performance	4	0.520	0.847
Power distance orientation	5	0.456	0.796

Scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. According to Hair *et al.* [54], reliability is considered satisfactory when the Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.70. In addition, Vuong and Giao [55] suggested that corrected item-total correlation values should be greater than 0.30 to demonstrate adequate internal consistency. As reported in **Table 1**, all measurement scales met these criteria, with the lowest Cronbach's Alpha recorded at 0.796 and the smallest corrected item-total correlation at 0.456. Since both indicators surpassed the recommended thresholds, the measurement instruments were deemed reliable and suitable for use in the main data collection phase.

Data for the quantitative analysis were obtained using both online and in-person survey methods. The online questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, while paper-based surveys were administered directly to respondents. A convenience sampling approach was employed, targeting civil servants working in local government agencies across Vietnam. In total, 271 completed questionnaires were collected through face-to-face administration, and 386 responses were obtained via the online survey. After screening the data, 52 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses or uniform answers across all items. Consequently, a final sample of 605 valid responses was retained for subsequent analysis of demographic characteristics, as summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics

Respondent Characteristic	Response Option	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	378	62.5
	Male	227	37.5
Marital Status	Single	215	35.5
	Married	390	64.5
Age Category	18–25 years	123	20.3
	26–35 years	271	44.8
	36–45 years	171	28.3
	Over 45 years	40	6.6
Education Level	Undergraduate (College/University)	486	80.3
	Graduate (Postgraduate)	119	19.7

*Partial least squares analysis*

To empirically evaluate the proposed hypotheses, this study applied partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS version 3.0. According to Hair *et al.* [54], PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for causal modeling in

behavioral research, as it allows researchers to examine complex relationships involving latent constructs. This technique is especially advantageous for prediction-oriented studies and is appropriate when models are intricate, sample sizes are relatively limited, and strict assumptions regarding data normality and measurement scales cannot be guaranteed.

Moreover, PLS-SEM enables simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships, including mediation and moderation effects—both of which are central to the current research framework. Unlike covariance-based SEM approaches, PLS-SEM does not require global goodness-of-fit indices, making it a flexible and efficient method for analyzing models with numerous constructs and interaction terms.

## Results and Discussion

Following the recommendations of Hair *et al.* [54], the reliability of the latent variables was examined using both Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) indicators. Constructs are generally considered reliable when these values meet or exceed the threshold of 0.70. The results indicate that all latent variables satisfied this criterion. Specifically, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.787 to 0.881 across the constructs, including job performance and public service motivation. In addition, all Composite Reliability values exceeded the minimum acceptable level of 0.70, as presented in **Table 3**. These findings confirm that the measurement scales demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency and reliability for subsequent structural analysis.

**Table 3.** Construct validity and reliability

Variable	Reliability (Internal Consistency)	Validity (Convergent)	Discriminant Validity	Fornell-Larcker Test	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	Square Root of AVE	Average Variance Extracted	Explained Variance (R <sup>2</sup> )	Age	Employee Engagement	Education	Gender	Job Performance	Job Satisfaction	Marital Status	Power Distance	Public Service Motivation	Transformational Leadership
Age	-	-	-	-	-	-	(1.000)	-0.015	0.054	0.211	0.030	0.098	0.084	0.110	0.036	0.064			
Employee Engagement (EE)	0.881	0.911	0.640	0.632	0.569	(0.795)	-0.056	0.015	0.509	0.567	-0.040	0.468	0.704	0.457					
Education (Edu)	-	-	-	-	-	-	(1.000)	0.029	0.011	-0.013	0.055	-0.145	-0.035	-0.006					
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	(1.000)	0.064	0.088	-0.067	0.043	0.059	0.071						
Job Performance (JP)	0.787	0.863	0.543	0.619	0.385				(0.787)	0.473	0.039	0.423	0.501	0.485					
Job Satisfaction (JS)	0.838	0.893	0.723	0.677	0.363				(0.823)	-0.031	0.399	0.532	0.472						
Marital Status (M-status)	-	-	-	-	-					(1.000)	-0.059	0.010	0.033						

Power Distance (PDO)	0.796	0.861	0.539	0.559	.	(0.748)	0.419	0.735
Public Service Motivation (PSM)	0.881	0.914	0.648	0.683	0.194		(0.826)	0.400
Transformational Leadership (TL)	0.845	0.887	0.693	0.612	.			(0.782)

**Notes:** The square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent construct are reported in parentheses. CR = Composite reliability; CA = Cronbach's Alpha; Edu = Educational level; MVOL = the minimum value of outer loadings; M-status = Marital status.

Reliability reflects the internal consistency of measurement items, whereas validity relates to how accurately those items capture the intended constructs. Following the guidelines of Hair *et al.* [54], convergent validity is considered satisfactory when indicator loadings exceed 0.50. The analysis showed that all constructs met this requirement, with the lowest observed loading being 0.539 (e.g., item PDO5).

In addition, Vuong and Giao (2020) emphasized that average variance extracted (AVE) values should be greater than 0.50 to establish convergent validity. As presented in **Table 3**, the AVE values for all latent variables surpassed this threshold, indicating that each construct adequately explains the variance of its indicators.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion [56], which requires the square root of a construct's AVE to be larger than its correlations with other constructs. The results in **Table 3** demonstrate that this condition was fulfilled. For instance, the AVE value for job satisfaction was 0.677, yielding a square root of 0.823. This value exceeded all corresponding correlation coefficients in both its row and column, thereby confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Lastly, potential common method bias was assessed using the full collinearity diagnostic approach. According to prior research [54, 57], variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 5 indicate the absence of common method bias. As shown in **Table 4**, all VIF statistics fell well within the acceptable range. Specifically, the highest outer VIF was 4.046, and the largest inner VIF was 2.481, both below the recommended cutoff. These findings suggest that the model is not affected by multicollinearity or common method bias.

**Table 4.** Collinearity assessment

Latent variable	Highest outer VIF	Inner VIF (EE)	Inner VIF (JP)	Inner VIF (JS)	Inner VIF (PSM)
Transformational leadership	2.375	2.374	2.481	2.226	2.176
Public service motivation	2.852	1.502	2.129	1.240	
Job satisfaction	4.046	1.569	1.705		
Employee engagement	3.448		2.361		
Job performance	2.518				
Power distance orientation	2.321	2.267	2.473	2.267	2.176
Gender	1.000		1.067		
Marital status	1.000		1.042		
Age	1.000		1.094		
Educational attainment	1.000		1.052		

The outcomes of the PLS-SEM analysis are illustrated in **Figure 2**, while **Table 5** presents the standardized path coefficients along with their corresponding p-values. The key findings are summarized below:

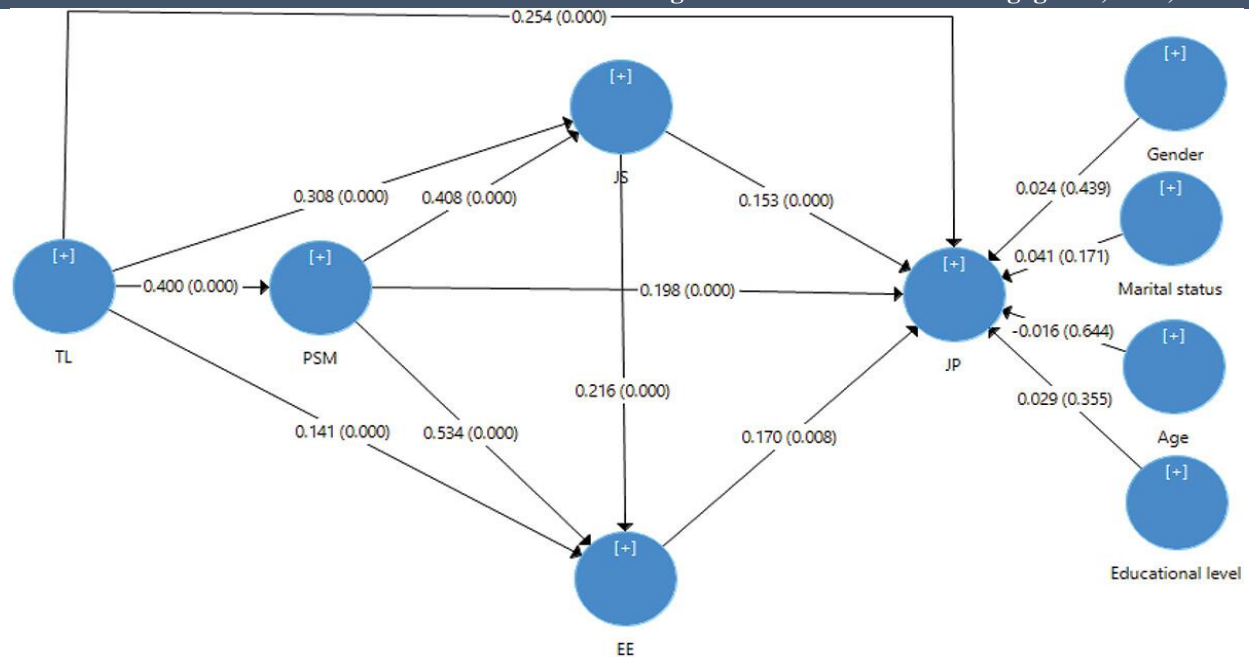


Figure 2. PSL-SEM model

Table 5. Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Path relationship	Path coefficient	Std. error	t-value	Significance (p)	Conclusion
H1	Transformational leadership → Job performance	0.254	0.042	6.000	0.000	Accepted
H2	Transformational leadership → Public service motivation	0.400	0.033	12.061	0.000	Accepted
H3	Public service motivation → Job performance	0.198	0.051	3.916	0.000	Accepted
H4	Transformational leadership → Job satisfaction	0.308	0.032	9.495	0.000	Accepted
H5	Public service motivation → Job satisfaction	0.408	0.034	11.936	0.000	Accepted
H6	Job satisfaction → Job performance	0.153	0.040	3.850	0.000	Accepted
H7	Transformational leadership → Employee engagement	0.141	0.029	4.947	0.000	Accepted
H8	Public service motivation → Employee engagement	0.534	0.034	15.934	0.000	Accepted
H9	Job satisfaction → Employee engagement	0.216	0.037	5.826	0.000	Accepted
H10	Employee engagement → Job performance	0.170	0.064	2.650	0.008	Accepted
<b>Control variables</b>						
H12a	Gender → Job performance	0.024	0.031	0.774	0.439	Rejected
H12b	Marital status → Job performance	0.041	0.030	1.370	0.171	Rejected
H12c	Age → Job performance	-0.016	0.035	0.463	0.644	Rejected
H12d	Educational level → Job performance	0.029	0.031	0.926	0.355	Rejected

### Hypothesis 1

The analysis demonstrated that transformational leadership (TL) exerted a significant and positive influence on civil servants' job performance (JP), with a path coefficient of 0.254 and a p-value of 0.000. This finding suggests that higher levels of transformational leadership behaviors are associated with improved employee performance outcomes. The result aligns with earlier empirical evidence reported by Sürücü *et al.* [28]. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

### Hypothesis 2

The results further revealed a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and public service motivation (PSM). Specifically, TL showed a standardized coefficient of 0.400 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that effective transformational leadership significantly enhances civil servants' motivation to serve the public. These findings imply that followers working under transformational leaders are more likely to engage in meaningful interactions with their leaders, such as sharing organizational visions, learning appropriate work behaviors through role modeling, and building collective

agreement within teams. Such leadership practices appear to foster higher levels of PSM among employees. This outcome is consistent with prior studies (e.g., Jensen & Bro [31]; Wright *et al.* [10]), thereby supporting Hypothesis 2.

### Hypothesis 3

The findings also showed that public service motivation positively contributes to job performance. The standardized path coefficient for the relationship between PSM and JP was 0.198, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.000. This indicates that civil servants who exhibit stronger public service motivation are more likely to perform their jobs effectively. This result corroborates earlier research by Miao *et al.* [13], leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 3.

### Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6

The results provided support for the proposed positive effects of transformational leadership and public service motivation on job satisfaction (JS), as well as the positive association between job satisfaction and job performance. As reported in **Table 5**, the standardized coefficients for TL → JS, PSM → JS, and JS → JP were 0.308, 0.408, and 0.153, respectively, with all p-values below the 0.05 threshold. These findings indicate that civil servants are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction when they perceive effective transformational leadership and possess strong public service motivation. In turn, greater job satisfaction contributes to improved job performance. Therefore, Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 were supported.

### Hypotheses 7, 8, 9, and 10

The empirical results also confirmed the positive relationships among transformational leadership, public service motivation, job satisfaction, employee engagement (EE), and job performance. As shown in **Table 5**, the standardized coefficients for TL → EE, PSM → EE, JS → EE, and EE → JP were 0.141, 0.534, 0.216, and 0.170, respectively, all with statistically significant p-values. These results indicate that civil servants are more likely to become engaged in their work when they experience supportive leadership, hold strong public service values, and feel satisfied with their jobs. Moreover, higher levels of engagement subsequently lead to enhanced job performance. Consequently, Hypotheses 7, 8, 9, and 10 were accepted.

### Control variables

The study also examined the effects of several demographic factors—namely gender, marital status, age, and educational attainment—on job performance. As indicated in **Table 5**, none of these control variables demonstrated statistically significant relationships with job performance. Specifically, no meaningful associations were found for gender ( $\beta = 0.024$ ,  $p = 0.438$ ), marital status ( $\beta = 0.041$ ,  $p = 0.171$ ), age ( $\beta = -0.016$ ,  $p = 0.644$ ), or educational level ( $\beta = 0.029$ ,  $p = 0.355$ ). These results suggest that demographic characteristics did not play a decisive role in explaining variations in job performance among civil servants in this study.

### Hypothesis 11a: Mediating role of public service motivation

The mediating effect of public service motivation on the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction was also examined. First, the results in **Table 5** confirmed that the direct paths from TL to PSM and from PSM to JS were both statistically significant, with p-values of 0.000. Second, bootstrapping analysis indicated that the indirect effect of TL on JS through PSM was also significant ( $p = 0.000$ ), as reported in **Table 6**. These findings demonstrate that PSM serves as a mediating mechanism linking transformational leadership to job satisfaction.

Importantly, the direct relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction remained significant even after incorporating PSM into the model ( $\beta = 0.254$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating a partial mediation effect. The combined direct and indirect impact of TL on JS was 0.333 ( $p = 0.000$ ), highlighting the substantial role of leadership in shaping job satisfaction through motivational processes. While earlier studies primarily focused on the direct influence of transformational leadership on job satisfaction, this study provides additional evidence that public service motivation functions as a critical explanatory pathway. In other words, transformational leadership enhances job satisfaction more effectively when it strengthens employees' motivation to serve the public. Therefore, Hypothesis 11a was supported.

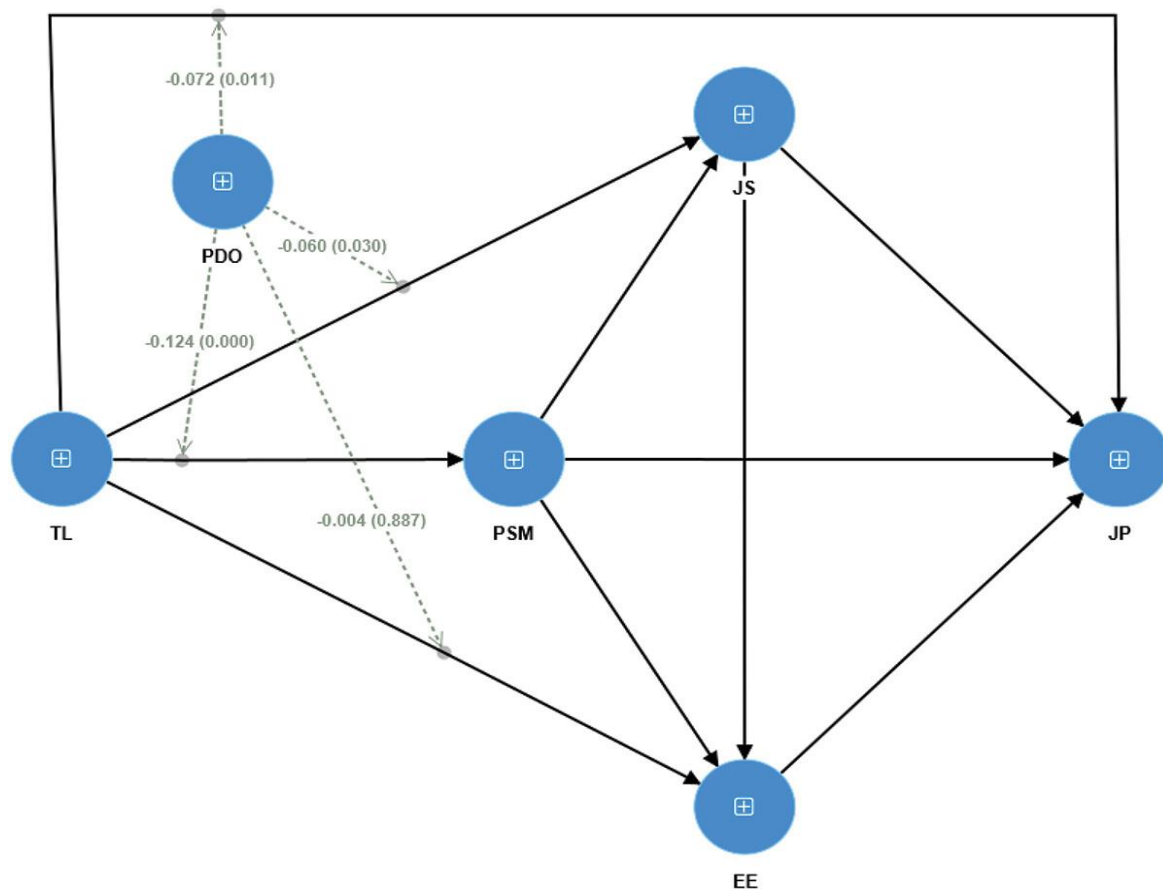
**Table 6.** Presents the results of the mediation analysis for public service motivation

Hypothesis	Pathway Examined	Direct Impact	Indirect Impact	Overall Impact	Type of Mediation	Conclusion
H11a	TL → PSM → JP	0.254***	0.079***	0.333***	Partial mediation	Supported
H11b	TL → PSM → JS	0.308***	0.163***	0.471***	Partial mediation	Supported
H11c	TL → PSM → EE	0.141***	0.214***	0.355***	Partial mediation	Supported

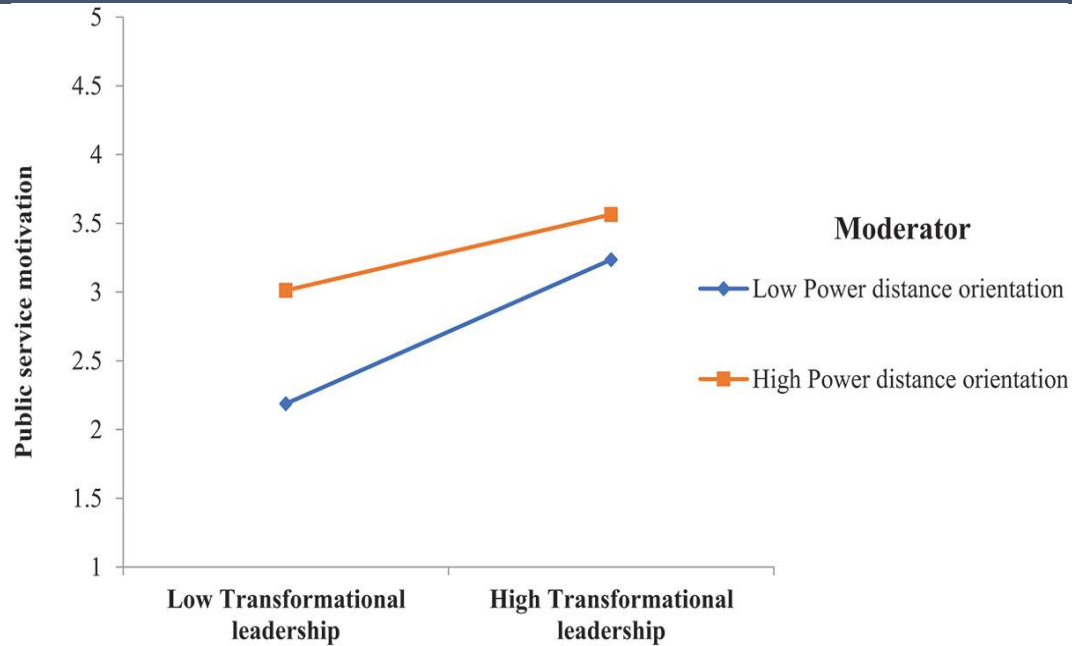
Note: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$

**Hypotheses 11b and 11c.:** Consistent with the evidence presented in **Tables 5** and **6** as well as **Figure 2**, public service motivation was found to function as an intermediary mechanism in the relationships between transformational leadership and both employee engagement and job performance. In each case, the mediation effect was partial, indicating that transformational leadership continues to exert a direct influence on these outcomes even after accounting for public service motivation. These findings suggest that civil servants are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and performance when transformational leadership strengthens their motivation to serve the public. Accordingly, Hypotheses 11b and 11c were supported.

**Hypothesis 12a. :** Hypothesis 12a proposed that power distance orientation (PDO) moderates the association between transformational leadership and public service motivation, such that the positive effect of transformational leadership would be weaker among civil servants with higher levels of PDO. As illustrated in **Figure 3** and reported in **Table 7**, the interaction term between transformational leadership and PDO demonstrated a statistically significant negative effect on public service motivation ( $\beta = -0.124$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). While transformational leadership had a direct positive impact on public service motivation, the presence of high power distance orientation reduced the strength of this relationship, as depicted in **Figure 4**. These results confirm that PDO attenuates the influence of transformational leadership on public service motivation. Therefore, Hypothesis 12a was supported.



**Figure 3.** Illustration of how power distance orientation



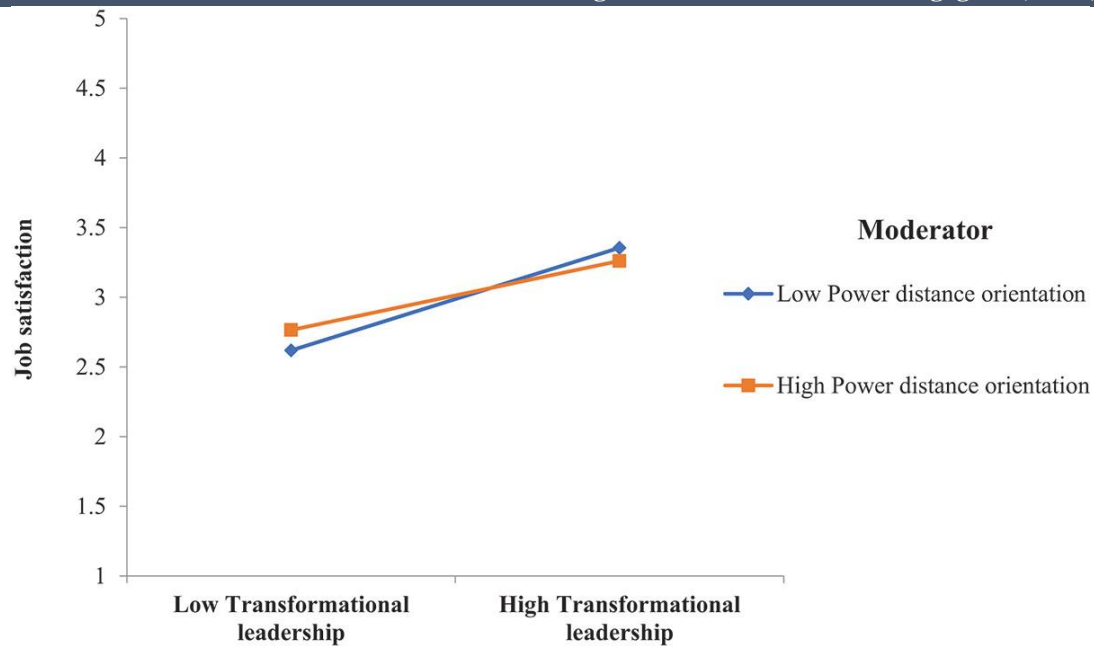
**Figure 4.** Attenuating effect of power distance orientation on the association between transformational leadership and public service motivation

**Table 7.** Results of the moderation analysis involving power distance orientation

Hypothesis	Examined Path	Path Coefficient	Moderation Outcome
H12a	TL → PSM	0.400***	Supported
	Interaction term (TL × PDO) → PSM	-0.124***	
H12b	TL → JS	0.308***	Supported
	Interaction term (TL × PDO) → JS	-0.060**	
H12c	TL → EE	0.141***	Not supported
	Interaction term (TL × PDO) → EE	-0.004	
H12d	TL → JP	0.254***	Supported
	Interaction term (TL × PDO) → JP	-0.072**	

Note: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.05$

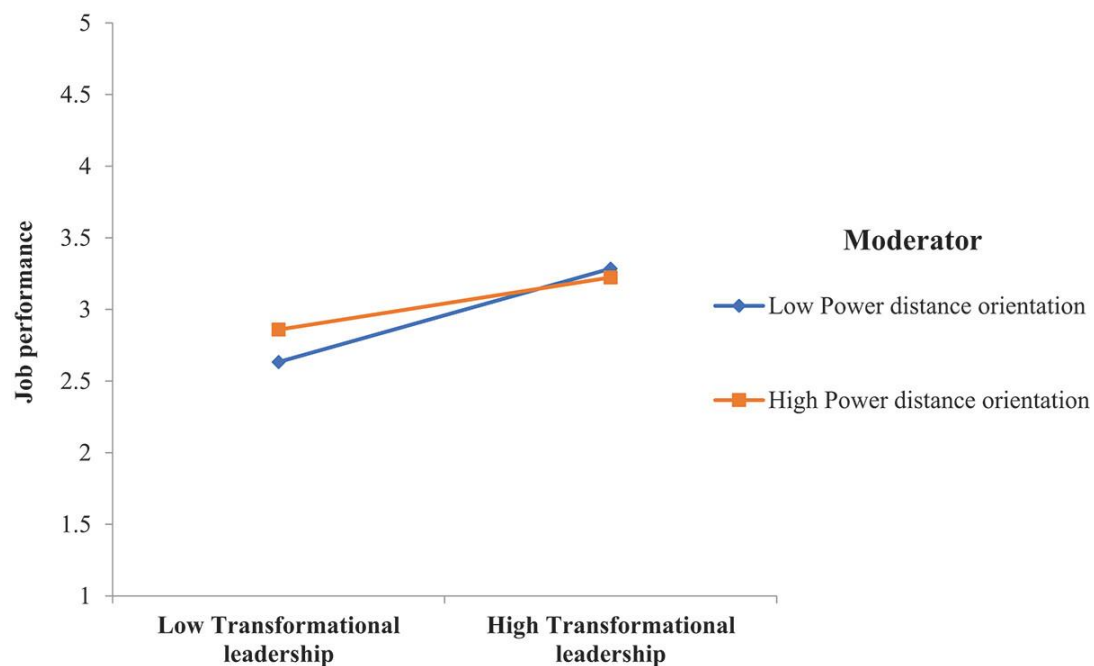
**Hypothesis 11b** proposed that power distance orientation moderates the association between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, such that the beneficial effect of transformational leadership would be reduced among civil servants with higher levels of power distance orientation. As illustrated in **Figure 3** and reported in **Table 7**, the interaction term between transformational leadership and power distance orientation (Moderating Effect 2) exerted a statistically significant negative effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.060$ ,  $p = 0.030$ ). In addition, transformational leadership itself showed a positive direct effect on job satisfaction. These findings indicate that a stronger power distance orientation weakens the positive influence of transformational leadership on job satisfaction, as depicted in **Figure 5**. Accordingly, Hypothesis 11b was empirically supported.



**Figure 5.** Weakening effect of power distance orientation on the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction

**Hypothesis 11c** proposed that power distance orientation moderates the association between transformational leadership and employee engagement, such that the positive effect of transformational leadership would be less pronounced among civil servants with higher power distance orientation. As reported in **Figure 3** and **Table 7**, the interaction term between transformational leadership and power distance orientation (Moderating Effect 3) did not exert a statistically significant influence on employee engagement ( $\beta = -0.004$ ,  $p = 0.887$ ). Accordingly, no moderating effect was identified, and Hypothesis 11c was not supported.

**Hypothesis 11d** posited that power distance orientation moderates the link between transformational leadership and job performance, weakening the positive impact of transformational leadership for individuals with higher power distance orientation. The results presented in **Figure 3** and **Table 7** demonstrate that the interaction effect (Moderating Effect 4) was statistically significant and negative ( $\beta = -0.072$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). In addition, transformational leadership exhibited a direct positive effect on job performance. These findings suggest that a higher level of power distance orientation diminishes the beneficial influence of transformational leadership on job performance, as illustrated in **Figure 6**. Therefore, Hypothesis 11d received empirical support.



**Figure 6.** Diminishing influence of power distance orientation on the transformational leadership–job performance relationship

Regarding model adequacy, Hair *et al.* (2019) suggested using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) to evaluate the predictive capability of a structural model. The analysis revealed that the  $R^2$  value for job performance was 0.385, indicating that transformational leadership, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and public service motivation jointly explained 38.5% of the variance in job performance (**Table 3**). Likewise, transformational leadership accounted for 19.4% of the variance in public service motivation, while 36.3% of the variance in job satisfaction was explained by transformational leadership and public service motivation. Additionally, transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and public service motivation together explained 56.9% of the variance in employee engagement. According to Vuong and Giao [55],  $R^2$  values below 0.02 indicate weak explanatory power, values between 0.13 and 0.26 suggest moderate explanatory power, and values above 0.26 reflect substantial explanatory power. As the  $R^2$  value for job performance exceeded the threshold of 0.26, the findings confirm that the proposed model demonstrates a satisfactory level of fit and predictive accuracy.

## Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of transformational leadership on public service motivation and to examine how these factors collectively shape job-related outcomes, including job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance. By surveying 605 civil servants working in Vietnamese local governments, this research deepened understanding of how transformational leadership and public service motivation are perceived and experienced within the Vietnamese public sector.

The findings revealed interconnected relationships among the key constructs. First, civil servants who perceived their leaders as transformational reported higher levels of public service motivation, which in turn contributed to greater job satisfaction, stronger engagement, and improved performance. Moreover, satisfied employees were more likely to be engaged in their work and demonstrate higher productivity. These results align with earlier studies that highlight the positive role of transformational leadership in enhancing employee attitudes and performance outcomes. Second, the study underscores the importance of transformational leadership for Vietnamese local governments in effectively managing and guiding public organizations. By developing a comprehensive model grounded in prior theoretical frameworks, this research extends existing literature by validating these relationships within the Vietnamese context. Although many of the measurement scales were originally developed and tested in Western settings, they were adapted and empirically validated for Vietnam through careful data collection and analysis. Consequently, the study contributes to theory by demonstrating that relationships identified in Western cultures can be meaningfully generalized to a developing, transitional public-sector environment such as Vietnam.

In addition, the study incorporated power distance orientation as an important moderating variable. By examining power distance orientation at the individual level, this research advances understanding of how cultural value orientations shape leadership effectiveness. The findings indicate that power distance orientation moderates the effects of transformational leadership on public service motivation, job satisfaction, and job performance. Specifically, civil servants with higher levels of power distance orientation tended to experience weaker positive effects of transformational leadership, resulting in lower public service motivation, reduced satisfaction, and diminished performance. One possible explanation lies in the dual nature of power distance values. On the one hand, individuals with high power distance orientation may resist leadership practices that conflict with their deeply held cultural expectations. On the other hand, they may be inclined to comply unquestioningly with authority, which can limit openness to change and innovation. As transformational leadership often challenges established routines and encourages critical thinking, this leadership style may initially create ambiguity, tension, or stress among high power distance-oriented employees. In such cases, increased job demands and perceived uncertainty may undermine motivation, satisfaction, and performance in the short term.

## Policy implications

This study examined the effects of transformational leadership on behavioral outcomes within the Vietnamese public sector, drawing on data from local government employees. Based on the empirical findings, several practical implications are offered for public managers seeking to enhance employee outcomes and organizational effectiveness.

First, transformational leadership was positively associated with public service motivation, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance. Accordingly, the findings highlight the need for cultivating transformational leaders within Vietnamese local governments. Leaders who adopt this style are better positioned to improve organizational performance by inspiring and motivating employees. To strengthen public service motivation and job-related outcomes, public managers should build trust by demonstrating commitment to organizational goals and serving as role models. Attention should be given to employees' individual needs, aspirations, and capabilities, while providing a supportive work environment that fosters personal and professional development. Furthermore, encouraging creative thinking and involving employees in problem-solving processes can enhance job-related outcomes. When leaders stimulate intellectual engagement, employees feel more comfortable expressing ideas, which can further improve performance. Therefore, systematic training and development programs should be implemented to strengthen transformational leadership competencies at all managerial levels.

Second, public service motivation was found to play a critical role in enhancing job satisfaction, engagement, and performance. Given the limited financial resources available to the Vietnamese public sector—where average salaries remain relatively low—monetary incentives alone are insufficient for motivating civil servants. Instead, public managers should focus on non-financial mechanisms, such as transformational leadership practices, to attract and retain individuals with high levels of public service motivation. By fostering meaningful work and aligning organizational values with employees' intrinsic motivations, public organizations can improve performance outcomes without relying heavily on financial rewards.

Finally, the study demonstrated that power distance orientation significantly moderates the effects of transformational leadership on public service motivation, job satisfaction, and job performance. This suggests that leadership effectiveness is partly contingent on followers' cultural value orientations. From a practical standpoint, leaders should actively engage with their subordinates by investing time in coaching, mentoring, and clarifying shared values. Encouraging innovation, acknowledging employees' personal concerns, and supporting individual strengths can help reduce perceived power distance within organizations. By narrowing the hierarchical gap between leaders and followers, public managers can foster stronger emotional attachment to the organization. When civil servants identify with organizational values and feel proud of their membership, they are more likely to demonstrate higher public service motivation, ultimately contributing to improved organizational effectiveness and citizen satisfaction.

### *Limitations and directions for future research*

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, the research was conducted exclusively in Vietnam; therefore, future studies should replicate the model in different cultural and national contexts to enhance generalizability. Second, the sample consisted largely of highly educated respondents. Subsequent research should include participants with more diverse educational backgrounds to better capture variation in public service motivation across employee groups. Finally, this study focused solely on power distance orientation as a moderating variable. Future research should explore the moderating effects of additional cultural dimensions, such as individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural values interact with transformational leadership in shaping public-sector outcomes.

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