Master Thesis

Exploring job flourishing in the public sector: the role of psychological ownership, employee development and servant leadership

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Preface

This Master Thesis has been written as final part of my Master Business Administration at the University of Twente. This thesis is focused on the topic of job flourishing. The inspiration to explore job flourishing in depth is my interest in how people find genuine joy and fulfillment in their work. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I have received great support and guidance from several individuals. I extend my sincere gratitude to my first supervisor, Dr. L. Carminati for all her valuable feedback and guidance throughout my thesis. Your insights have been of great importance in shaping my work and have greatly enriched my academic learning experience. In addition, I also want to thank my second supervisor Dr. J.G. Meijerink for his valuable feedback that significantly contributed to improving the quality of my thesis.

Lastly, I want to thank my supervisor of the Municipality for his guidance and providing the opportunity to conduct this research. I hope that the readers find this thesis informative and that it contributes to a broader understanding of job flourishing. May it inspire others to seek and experience a degree of flourishing in their own professional lives.

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Abstract

Purpose – This research seeks to address the limited research available on job flourishing in the public sector by investigating important but usually neglected antecedents and mechanisms that contribute to both job flourishing and job performance. The research focuses on the roles of psychological ownership, employee development, and servant leadership within public organizations, utilizing the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) theory and the Self-Determination (SDT) theory to examine their relationships.

Method – A mixed-method approach was applied with a survey of N=87 and a total of 7 interviews with both managers and employees. The hypotheses were tested by the use of linear regression and the PROCESS macro in SPSS.

Quantitative findings – The results showed that both psychological ownership and employee development have a significant relationship with job flourishing. While job flourishing partially mediated the relationship between employee development and job performance, it did not partially mediate the relationship between psychological ownership and job performance. Finally, servant leadership did not significantly moderate the relationship between psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing.

Qualitative findings – In the interviews it was recognized that servant leadership is not yet practiced and recognized within the municipality of this research, potentially explaining the insignificant moderation effect. In addition, three aggregated dimensions were concluded from the interviews; 1. Organizational climate, 2. Leadership dynamics and 3. Employee empowerment. Within these aggregated dimensions, trust in leadership and freedom were identified as pivotal themes influencing job flourishing.

Theoretical implications – This research extends the application of the JDR and SDT theories to job flourishing in public organizations, investigating neglected antecedents and mechanisms that contribute to both job flourishing and job performance.

Practical implications – Promoting job flourishing in public organizations requires fostering psychological ownership, supporting employee development, building trust in leadership and giving freedom. Achieving this involves strategies that prioritize employee participation in decision-making and encourage trust-centered communication throughout the organization.

Keywords – psychological ownership, employee development, servant leadership, job flourishing, job performance.

1. Introduction

Today's competitive business world presents uncertain challenges for organizations worldwide, and public awareness about employee health and well-being has increased significantly (Krekel et al., 2019). Particularly, the change in organization's environments after the Covid-19 pandemic has stimulated a change in organizations' attitudes towards employee well-being (Jaskeviciute, 2021) since prioritizing employee well-being can serve as a sustained competitive advantage, enhancing overall employee performance (David et al., 2024). Indeed, recent experimental evidence indicates that a meaningful increase in well-being can lead to an average increase in productivity of about 10 percent (Krekel et al., 2019). In addition, it was found that employees who experience high levels of well-being at work demonstrate greater engagement and show reduced absenteeism and turnover rates (Nielsen et al., 2017; Wijngaards et al., 2022).

A more recent area of focus in relation to employee well-being is job flourishing, defined as an individual's positive state of mental health, encompassing psychological, social and emotional well-being (Fabricio et al., 2022). Job flourishing has gained increasing prominence in recent works within the domain of work and organizational studies (Fabricio et al., 2022). However, despite growing interest and a few exceptions (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024), research on flourishing within the work context remains underexplored, with much of the scholarly attention still directed towards the broader concept of human flourishing (Fabricio et al., 2022). Human flourishing refers to dimensions such as happiness, life satisfaction, a sense of purpose, character development and nurturing social relationships (Vanderweele, 2017). It is important to note that while human flourishing encompasses various aspects of well-being, job flourishing specifically pertains to flourishing within the context of one's work environment. When employees experience job flourishing, there can be direct outcomes such as extra-role and in-role performance, work engagement and a lower intention to leave the company (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023).

Furthermore, even though evidence from positive psychology underscores the profound connection between workplace flourishing and employee health and well-being in the public sector (Cvenkel, 2020), most of the little research on job flourishing has been centered on non-public organizational contexts (Fabricio et al., 2022), leaving the public sector rather unexplored.

And yet, the public sector is a distinctive domain whose organizations are characterized by unique features such as public accountability, governance structures, and societal objectives aimed at promoting the common good (Wu & Thomann, 2023). Consider, for instance, municipalities: they navigate through trends such as transformations in health care, social responsibility, digitalization and changes in laws and regulations (Fischer, 2021). Understanding the unique attributes of public organizations and employee well-being is crucial as it is well-documented that the state of employee well-being in all sectors directly influences job satisfaction, productivity and overall performance (Pacek et al., 2019). Furthermore, research on well-being in both the private and public sector yield diverse findings. Some studies suggest higher levels of employee happiness in the public sector compared to the non-public sector (Meghna et al., 2021; Gastearena-Balda, 2021). This is for example shown by the outcome that public employees, in general, have fewer demands and more job resources than non-public employees, which resulted in higher levels of job satisfaction for public employees (Gastearena-Balda, 2021). Conversely, other studies report non-significant differences in well-being between employees in the public and non-public sectors (Ryu & Kwang Bin, 2020). These divergent findings and the fact that well-being of public sector employees has notably received insufficient attention underscore the need not only to better understand employee job flourishing, but also to conduct further research to explore its antecedents and consequences in public organizational contexts (Steijn & Giauque, 2021).

In this regard, despite the fact that there still is limited literature on job flourishing in general, there have been identified several direct and indirect predictors that contributed to job flourishing in recent years (Fabricio et al., 2022; A'yuninnisa et al., 2024). Notably, recent research by A'yuninnisa et al. (2024) highlight employee emotional intelligence being positively linked to job flourishing as it enhances social interaction and optimizes workplace resources. Leadership emotional intelligence also plays a crucial role, influencing employees' emotional intelligence and job outcomes through both direct and indirect channels, especially within a positive team emotional climate (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024). Among less explored indirect predictors of job flourishing there are, for instance, proactive personality and responsibilities, whereas, among the direct predictors, autonomy, psychological ownership, career advancement, and (ethical) leadership play an important role (A'yunninisa et al., 2023).

Among these predictors, psychological ownership has been identified as an important positive psychological antecedent of workplace motives, attitudes, and behaviors (Olckers & van Zyl, 2017). Psychological ownership is when you have a personal connection to something even though you do not legally own it. It was found that employees in the non-public sector often exhibit a greater sense of psychological ownership than employees in the public sector (Mahsud & Hao, 2017). This difference is attributed to the higher levels of self-efficacy and accountability experienced by non-public sector employees when compared to employees working in the public sector (Mahsud & Hao, 2017). However, since research on the relationship between psychological ownership in the public sector and employee well-being is scarce (Cheng, 2019), psychological ownership is an interesting antecedent to account for as it has been found to link positively with various favorable individual outcomes such as engagement and happiness at work (Pierce & Jussila, 2011), which in turn can be linked to job flourishing.

Similarly, career advancement has been highlighted as a direct predictor of job flourishing, underscoring the importance of providing employees with opportunities for growth and skill acquisition (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023). However, it is essential to acknowledge that career advancement is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather it is closely intertwined with employee development (Day et al., 2021). When focusing on employee development, individuals can become capable of helping the organization's effectiveness and responsiveness to societal needs (Walters & Rodriguez, 2017; Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Moreover, companies that provide regular development opportunities are achieving higher levels of employee satisfaction and a lower employee turnover rate (Wagner, 2000). Public organizations can motivate employees to remain committed, as well as encourage them to engage in organizational citizenship behavior, by offering employee development opportunities (Mylona & Mihail, 2022). Employee development is thus crucial in the public sector to ensure employee satisfaction and adaptability to the changing environment (Wagner, 2000; Fischer, 2021).

An important condition to boost employee development and ultimately performance is leadership (Chak et al., 2023; Day et al., 2021), and among the many different styles, servant leadership plays a key role (Agusta & Azmy, 2023). Servant leaders put a high emphasis on the growth and well-being of their followers and the organizations or communities they serve (Liden et al., 2014; Kritz & Speranza, 2022). Servant leadership abilities within public

organizations can cultivate higher levels of public service motivation even though the complex bureaucratic environments can also be a barrier to the practice of servant leadership (Roberts, 2022; Kritz & Speranza, 2022). Given the lack of research on the actual effects of servant leadership in relationship with job flourishing within a public sector context, it is decided to research the potential moderating effect of servant leadership.

While psychological ownership, employee development and servant leadership have been studied often in private sector contexts (Olckers & van Zyl, 2017; Dachner et al., 2019; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020), their relationships with job flourishing may manifest differently in the public sector. For instance, the sense of psychological ownership might be influenced by the public service ethos, potentially affecting it impact on job flourishing (Kousina & Voudouris, 2023). Similarly, the bureaucratic nature of many public organizations could potentially influence employee development initiatives and servant leadership practices (Goulet & Frank, 2002; Mulgan, 2021). Therefore, in light of the above and guided by job demand-resources theory (JDR) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and the Social Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008), this thesis aims to understand the antecedents and mechanisms able to explain job flourishing and job performance in the public sector. The following research question is posed:

How do psychological ownership, employee development and servant leadership influence job flourishing and, ultimately, job performance?

By addressing this research question, this thesis extends the current literature on job flourishing in two ways. Firstly, this thesis explores job flourishing and its mechanisms in the neglected context of the public sector by accounting for specific factors fundamental to promote well-being and performance in such organizations. Secondly, this thesis sheds light on how to boost job flourishing within the workplace context by focusing on underresearched antecedents and processes grounded in a combination of theories.

Considering these insights, it becomes imperative for public sector organizations to foster environments where employees can flourish. By examining the relationship between psychological ownership, employee development, and servant leadership, this thesis also offers practical implications for enhancing job flourishing in the public sector.

To achieve a comprehensive exploration of these relationships, this thesis employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

By the understanding of this thesis, public sector employees can implement targeted interventions and policies that promote job flourishing and create a positive work environment.

1.1 Outline of the study

In the upcoming chapter of this thesis, we introduce the theoretical framework. This involves distinguishing between various antecedents and the moderator. Additionally, we delve into the development of hypotheses. The third chapter provides an explanation of the research methodology employed. Subsequently, we discuss the results in the following chapter, along with the corresponding answers to the hypotheses. Finally, the last chapters of this thesis present a discussion and conclusion, highlighting the most significant findings and implications for the future.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The differences between public and non-public organizations

The topic of employee well-being has emerged as a paramount concern for both public and non-public organizations and organizations adopt different management practices to increase employee well-being (Steijn & Giauque, 2021). Employee well-being is often perceived as a critical aspect of organizational performance and effectiveness, influencing factors such as job satisfaction and retention (Ogbonnaya & Aryee, 2021). Research in both public and non-public sectors has shown different findings regarding employee well-being (Meghna et al., 2021; Gastearena-Balda, 2021; Ryu & Kwang Bin, 2020). For instance, Uzaina (2019) found that psychological well-being and quality of life were found to be higher among employees in the public sector as compared to employees working in the non-public sector. Similarly, Lahat and Ofek (2020) noted that public sector employees have higher levels of emotional well-being than non-public-sector employees. Other studies supported these findings by showing that public sector employees exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction than non-public employees (Steel & Warner, 1990; Aryee, 1992; Andrade & Westover, 2022). However, it must be stated that other studies found non-significant differences in whether employee well-being is higher in the public sector than the private sector (Ryu & Kwang Bin 2020; Steijn & Giauque, 2021).

A notable clarification of the significant differences between public and non-public sector employees could be the degree of job security (Hur, 2022). Employees in the public sector often benefit from greater job security due to their jobs being less susceptible to economic disruptions, contrasting the more volatile nature of employment in the non-public sector (Hur, 2022). The perception of employees towards their job security is considered an important factor for employee well-being and their attitudes towards the organization (Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2011). Indeed, it was found that when employees do not feel job security, this is negatively related to their employee well-being (Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2011). However, it must be stated that other research shows that public sector employees are often less committed to the organization than non-public employees (Goulet & Frank, 2002; Lyons et al., 2006). More recent research by Ryu and Kwang Bin (2020) even reports non-significant differences in well-being between employees in the public and non-public sectors. These discrepancies in the literature accentuate the importance of exploring the topic of well-being in the public sector even further.

2.2 The Job-Demands Resources Theory and the Self-Determination Theory

To conduct such exploration, it has been decided to employ both the job-demands resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and the self-determination theory (Mayer & Sparrowe, 2019), to offer a comprehensive picture of job flourishing dynamics. The job-demands resources theory delves into how organizational settings consisting of job demands and job resources influence employee performance and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). According to this theory, jobs characterized by high demands but lacking sufficient resources may result in negative outcomes such as burnout and diminished job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). On the other hand, when sufficient job resources are available, they can mitigate the effects of job demands, leading to positive outcomes such as enhanced performance and increased job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The JDR theory posits that job demands and job resources interact in shaping the work experiences and well-being of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The JDR theory is one of the most established models with a broader scope than other models because it can be tailored to a wide variety of work settings (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Ong & Johnson, 2023).

However, while the JDR theory provides valuable insights into external factors affecting employee well-being, it has certain limitations. For instance, the JDR theory does not always distinguish between 'demands' and 'resources', and primarily focuses on the external environment (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Yet, it is important to consider that personal resources also play a significant role in employee well-being (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Moreover, the JDR theory's narrow focus on the workplace environment limits its ability to fully capture the multifaceted and multidimensional nature of job flourishing (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024). Therefore, it becomes essential to also integrate the self-determination theory (SDT) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the job flourishing dynamics (Mayer & Sparrowe, 2019). While the JDR theory focuses on the balance between demands and resources, the SDT theory adds insight into the quality of motivation that drives employee behavior and well-being (Deci & Ryan,2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This can help to explain why certain resources may be more effective in promoting job flourishing than others (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

The SDT theory posits that individuals have innate psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which, when satisfied, improve autonomous motivation, wellness, and effective performance (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

These three psychological needs are considered essential nutrients for human flourishing (Spreitzer & Porath, 2013). The SDT theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivation of workers to engage in activities for their inherent satisfactions and personal reward and extrinsic motivation that involves performing tasks for external rewards or avoiding negative consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Leaders can apply principles from the SDT theory to foster positive relationships and recognize employees' competence and growth (Deci & Ryan, 2008). While much research traditionally focuses on either employee well-being or company profitability, SDT provides insights for developing policies and environments that simultaneously enhance employee wellness and improve performance quality (Deci et al., 2017). Nonetheless, a limitation of the SDT is its primary focus on intrinsic motivation and individual psychological needs, which often overlooks the external contextual factors that can influence job flourishing within the workplace (Dreison et al., 2018). This is where the JDR theory complements the SDT theory as it emphasizes the impact of external workplace resources and demands on employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The integration of both theories offers a comprehensive perspective on job flourishing by addressing personal resources alongside contextual workplace factors (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024). Given the evolving nature of job flourishing research, which currently lacks unified definitions and consistent measures, combining these theories helps to capture both intrinsic and extrinsic influences essential for understanding employee flourishing (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023). Thus, the JDR and SDT theories together provide a foundational framework for examining how organizational dynamics shape job flourishing, ultimately influencing job performance.

2.3 Hypotheses development

2.3.1. The relationship between psychological ownership and job flourishing

Job flourishing refers to employees' experience of positive emotions, engagement, and a sense of fulfillment in their work (Keyes, 2002). It represents a state where employees not only experience positive emotions but also exhibit high levels of engagement and a profound sense of fulfillment in their work (Fabricio et al., 2022). Psychological ownership refers to the feeling of a connection over a concept or person that may or may not be supported by formal ownership (Jussila et al., 2015; Olckers & van Zyl, 2017). In an organizational context, this concept reflects the attachment and investment employees feel toward their work, team, and

the organization as a whole (Olckers & van Zyl, 2017). Employees can develop a sense of psychological ownership over the tangible and intangible assets of the company where they work, even though they are not legal owners (Mahsud & Hao, 2017).

In light of the JDR theory, psychological ownership can be viewed as a resource for employees, providing them with a sense of control and investment in their work (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Psychological ownership also influences how job demands and job resources impact employee well-being, as employees who feel a strong sense of ownership may perceive challenges and opportunities to utilize resources effectively (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Furthermore, individuals who feel a stronger sense of psychological ownership tend to display greater resilience in coping with workplace stressors, indicating it as a job resource (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Psychological ownership can also contribute to the perceived significance of job resources available, thereby increasing their efficacy in fostering employee well-being and performance (Kundi et al., 2021).

The SDT theory states that when employees feel competence, relatedness, and autonomy in their work, they are more motivated and happier (Deci et al., 2017). When employees perceive themselves as competent in their role, they can achieve mastery of their tasks, resulting in a higher sense of psychological ownership (Cerasoli et al., 2016). Secondly, when employees feel related to others by having meaningful relationships, they are more likely to identify with the organization's goals and values, leading to higher psychological ownership (Dhir et al., 2024). Lastly, when employees experience autonomy, they are more likely to feel that they own their contributions, fostering intrinsic motivation and a higher psychological ownership (Cerasoli et al., 2016). By fulfilling the basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, employees develop a stronger sense of psychological ownership (Gillet et al., 2012). When employees feel a strong sense of ownership over their work, they are more engaged and motivated (Tummers & Bakker, 2011), leading to enhanced job satisfaction and positive emotional experiences that characterize job flourishing (Rapti et al., 2017).

Although research has shown some potential negative consequences of psychological ownership on employee well-being (Wagner et al., 2022; Ran & Zhou, 2024), several studies have underlined the positive and beneficial influence of psychological ownership in relation to the happiness of employees and job satisfaction (Mayhew et al., 2007; Khan & Gul, 2021). Based on the theories and recent literature, psychological ownership can thus serve as a

motivational resource that enhances job flourishing. We therefore state the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: *Psychological ownership positively influences employee job flourishing in the public sector.*

2.3.2. The relationship between employee development and job flourishing

Employee development encompasses activities that enhance an individual's skills, knowledge, and abilities within the workplace (Hezlett & McCauley, 2018). It involves expanding an individual's capacity to function effectively in their present or future job and work organization (Dachner et al., 2019). This multifaceted process extends beyond traditional training initiatives and encompasses programs such as on-the-job learning, mentoring, coaching, and learning experiences tailored to employees' needs (Chen & Klimoski, 2007). Many public sector jobs can be characterized by high, ambiguous, and often competing demands in uncertain circumstances: a context where continuous learning and development from employees is crucial (Franken et al., 2022).

Employee development is considered a job resource within the JDR theory because it enhances employees' skills and competencies, enabling them to perform their tasks more effectively and efficiently (Demerouti et al., 2001; Tummer & Bakker, 2021). When individuals perceive that the organization invests in their development, they are more likely to feel valued and engaged in their work (Wagner, 2000). In addition, when organizations prioritize employee development, they show their commitment to investing in the long-term success and well-being of their employees (Alkhodary, 2023). The provision of skill development and opportunities not only serves as a job resource (Demerouti et al., 2001) but also aligns with the fundamental human need for autonomy and competency present in the SDT theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). By supporting employees in acquiring new skills and knowledge, organizations can facilitate their sense of autonomy and competence, thereby promoting intrinsic motivation and meaningful work (Martela & Riekki, 2018). In addition, employee development can also contribute to a sense of relatedness by fostering collaboration among employees, as learning initiatives often involve group interactions (Forner et al., 2020).

Public sector organizations have increasingly recognized the significance of investing in employee development as a strategic approach to enhancing both individual and organizational outcomes (Mylona & Mihail, 2022). Offering training and development

initiatives to public sector employees is related to higher levels of organizational commitment and increased job satisfaction (Mylona & Mihail, 2022). Furthermore, Hollar et al. (2022) emphasize that providing development opportunities is not only beneficial for employees but also serves as a mean for organizations to increase performance and overall health. Similarly, Napitupulu et al. (2017) found a positive significant relationship between development opportunities and job satisfaction within the public sector context.

Considering these insights from both the theories and the recent literature, we state the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b: *Employee development positively influences employee job flourishing in the public sector.*

2.3.3. The relationship between job flourishing and job performance

Job performance is defined as the related behaviors that employees perform in the process of work to achieve organizational goals (Motowidlo, 2003; Woods, 2009; Yin, 2023). These behaviors can be observed and measured based on an individual's contribution to organizational objectives (Yin, 2023).

According to the JDR theory, specific job resources such as role clarity, opportunities for advancement, and remuneration predict job flourishing (van Rensburg et al., 2018). When abundant job resources are present and effectively counterbalance job demands, employees are more likely to experience positive emotions, which ultimately could lead to job flourishing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Albrecht et al., 2021). Job resources help mitigate the stress associated with high demands and foster an environment where employees can develop and contribute to organizational goals (Claes et al., 2023). Job resources are positively related to job satisfaction, whereas job demands are negatively related to job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Claes et al., 2023). In terms of job performance, high job demands can negatively impact performance if not balanced by sufficient resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Conversely, adequate job resources can enhance performance by reducing the adverse effects of job demands (Schaufeli & Taris,2014). By maintaining a balance between resources and demands, organizations can create conditions that support both job flourishing and job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Claes et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Taris, 2024).

The SDT theory postulates that self-determined behaviors (e.g., engaging in tasks for autonomous reasons) contribute to job satisfaction, whereas external reasons (e.g., fear of

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being fired) are less conducive to well-being (Lam & Gurland, 2008). The SDT furthermore emphasizes that satisfying the three basic psychological needs -competence, relatedness, and autonomy- is essential for individuals to flourish and perform at work (Thibault-Landry et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2013).

With regard to literature, a well-known research area is the happy-worker is a productive-worker hypothesis, suggesting that happy employees tend to be more productive in their work (Cropanzano, 2001; Fogaca & Junior, 2016). The relationship has received a significant amount of scholarly attention since the relationship is not always straightforward (Sender et al., 2021). Most studies found positive significant relationships between happy workers and productive workers, but it must be noted that individual differences and organizational contexts are of influence (Fogaca & Junior, 2016; Garcia-Buades et al., 2020). However, the research of Rensburg et al. (2018) found a direct positive relationship between job flourishing and job performance. Similarly, van de Voorde et al. (2012) demonstrated a positive association between employee well-being, encompassing happiness and overall well-being, and organizational performance. Flourishing employees show higher levels of job satisfaction, cultivate healthier relationships, and engage in more effective learning practices, all contributing to enhanced job performance (van der Walt & Lezar, 2019). Given these consistent findings across various research showing a positive relationship between job flourishing and job performance, we state the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Job flourishing positively influences job performance.*

2.3.4. The mediating role of job flourishing

Job flourishing is characterized by positive emotions, engagement, and a sense of fulfillment in the workplace (Keyes, 2002)—elements that are critical for optimal job performance (Fabricio et al., 2022). Psychological ownership strengthens employees' connection to their work, which is essential for employee to feel valued in their roles (Mahsud & Hao, 2017). This sense of ownership can boost motivation and engagement, fostering an environment where employees are more likely to flourish, ultimately leading to improved job performance (Kundi et al., 2021; Olckers & van Zyl, 2017; Bai et al., 2024). Similarly, while employee development provides individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge, the true impact on job performance is often realized when employees feel fulfilled in their roles and are able to flourish (Martela & Riekki, 2018; Fabricio et al., 2022; Alkhodary, 2023). Thus, several studies

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suggest that job flourishing serves as a crucial link between psychological ownership and job performance, as well as between employee development and job performance. Without a state of job flourishing, the potential benefits derived from psychological ownership and employee development may not fully translate into improved job performance (Fabricio et al., 2022). However, it is important to acknowledge that additional factors, such as organizational commitment and work engagement, may also influence the relationships between psychological ownership, employee development on job performance (Tolentino, 2013; Ye at al., 2022). Considering these influences, we anticipate a partial mediation effect of job flourishing in the relationships between psychological ownership and employee development on job performance. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: *Job flourishing partially mediates the relationship between psychological ownership and job performance.*

Hypothesis 3b: *Job flourishing partially mediates the relationship between employee development and job performance.*

2.3.5. The moderating effect of servant leadership on the relationship between psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing

Servant leadership is a form of moral-based leadership where leaders prioritize fulfilling the needs of employees rather than solely satisfying their personal needs (Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020; Canavesi & Minelli, 2021). Servant leadership, characterized by ethical behavior and a focus on nurturing the growth and well-being of followers, has gained significant attention in organizational research (Eva et al., 2019; Sun, 2013). This leadership style emphasizes listening and empathy to enable employees to realize their fullest potential, a phenomenon often expressed in the perception of job flourishing (Colbert et al., 2016; Ribera & Ceja, 2018). By practicing servant leadership, a serving culture can be created, which in turn can enhance business performance (Liden et al., 2014). However, accepting servant leadership in the public sector depends highly on employee engagement and the ethical climate (Roberts, 2022).

There have been identified various and sometimes inconsistent results when leadership is researched in view of the JDR theory. While some researchers see leadership as a valuable job resource (Salas-Vallina & Fernandes, 2017), others consider it a challenging job demand (Nielsen et al., 2018). Leadership is perceived as a resource when leaders exhibit empowering and supportive behaviors that boost employees' capacity to manage job

demands and attain work objectives (Salas-Vallina & Fernandes, 2017). On the other hand, leadership can be seen as a demand when it is ineffective or unsupportive, diminishing employees's sense of autonomy and potentially resulting in adversing consequences such as reduced job satisfaction (Nielsen et al., 2018). However, according to Liden et al., (2014), servant leadership is not seen as a destructive form of leadership and therefore this leadership style is less likely to be seen as a job demand that causes stressors among subordinates (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). When focusing solely on the JDR theory, job control and supervisor support are more often seen as a job resource rather than a job demand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). More interesting are those who view leadership not solely as a resource or demand but as a factor shaping the interplay of job demands and resources (Fernet et al., 2015). The role of leadership can influence how job demands are perceived and managed by employees, as well as the extent to which job resources are utilized to cope with the demands (Fernet et al., 2015). This supposes a potential moderating effect between the antecedents of psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing.

As proposed by the SDT theory, all individuals have the inherent tendency to pursue growth and development, but the success of this pursuit depends on contextual factors (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Leadership is a crucial contextual factor significantly influencing individuals' motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). It was found that, specifically, servant leadership has a positive impact on thriving at work as employees can experience an increased sense of growth and empowerment (Jiang & Wei, 2024). Moreover, a servant leader's attentive focus on employees' development helps fulfill the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness present in the SDT theory (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). In addition, servant leaders create employee development opportunities by offering guidance, feedback, and work resources to create new opportunities (Awasthi & Walumbwa, 2023). Recent research performed by Giolito et al. (2020) has found a positive relationship between servant leadership and employee flourishing. This shows that servant leadership may contribute to employee flourishing, which in turn can have a positive impact on the overall performance of organizations (Giolito et al., 2020).

It is important to note that the relationship between psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing may vary between the private and public sector because of the presence of servant leadership (Das et al., 2014). Servant leadership practices in the private sector can differ significantly from their application in the public sector due to

the distinct goals and operational dynamics of the environments. In the private sector, servant leadership often emphasizes enhancing employee engagement, boosting innovation, and driving financial performance (Blakely & Bumphus, 2004). Whereas, in the public sector servant leadership focusses more on public accountability and community engagement (Roberts, 2022). Public sector employees may prioritize collective goals over individual achievements, potentially leading to a different expression of psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing (Uzaina, 2019; Mulgan, 2021). Given this context, it becomes interesting to research the potential moderating effect of servant leadership on the relationship between psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing within the public sector. Based on the theories and the recent literature, we state the following moderation hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: *Servant leadership positively moderates the relationship between psychological ownership and job flourishing.*

Hypothesis 4b: *Servant leadership positively moderates the relationship between employee development and job flourishing.*

2.3.6. The hypothetical model

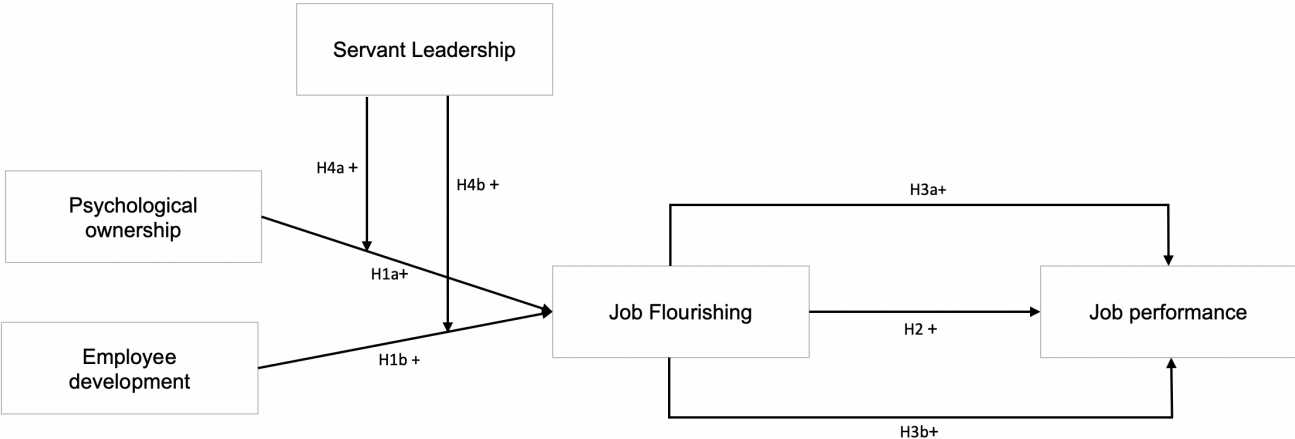Based on the stated hypothesis, the following hypothetical model is illustrated:

Figure 1 | Hypothetical model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This thesis employs a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component of this design aims to investigate the relationships between the variables outlined in the hypothetical model (Wilson, 2019). Whereas the qualitative component enriches this investigation by offering deeper insights and nuanced explanations of these relationships (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The mixed-method approach is chosen because the results of the qualitative research can clarify the outcomes of the quantitative research (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). First, quantitative research has been performed by a cross-sectional survey, collecting data at a single point in time (Kim, 2021). After the data collection from the survey, interviews are held with employees to gain further clarification on the information collected in the surveys. By employing this mixed-method research design, this thesis leverages the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to triangulate findings, enhance validity, and explore the multifaceted aspects of the research question (Takona, 2024). Triangulation refers to using various methods to investigate a research question, aiming to increase the validity and credibility of findings while minimizing research biases (Noble & Heale, 2019). Integrating both quantitative and qualitative data enhances the credibility of the research findings by providing multiple sources of evidence to support conclusions (Timans et al., 2019).

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

3.2.1. Quantitative research

The target population for the survey comprised of all employees working at the chosen municipality located in the East of the Netherlands. It was decided to include all the approximately 300 employees working at the municipality as this ensures the most comprehensive representation of the views upon job flourishing. With a total number of 342 municipalities in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2024), this municipality serves as ideal sample for data collection in a public sector context. The researcher had access to this specific municipality as she was physically present at the office working on her Master thesis, facilitating direct engagement with the target population. The survey was distributed through the municipality's intranet platform. Additionally, to increase the response rate, the researcher personally approached employees to participate in the survey. The survey was

conducted in the Dutch language, and it was mentioned in the survey that all the results were processed anonymously and voluntary participation was assured. The survey was posted on the intranet for four weeks, between June and July 2024, with a reminder message on the intranet after 1.5 weeks and a second reminder after 3 weeks. The final response rate resulted in 30% of all employees. All the survey questions with the corresponding scales can be found in Appendix A.

3.2.2. Qualitative research

Through the researcher's network in the municipality, employees from different layers in the organization were contacted to participate in interviews. A purposive sampling approach was used to select employees in different roles, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives, which is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of job flourishing within the organization (Campbell et al., 2020). Participants were assured that their participation in the interview was voluntary and all responses given would be anonymous and confidential. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) was developed based on the themes and conclusions derived from the theoretical framework, but respondents were encouraged to speak freely when discussing their perceptions on job flourishing. A total of seven employees participating from different departments and with different organizational functions (see Table 1 for details). The exact roles of the participants are emitted to guarantee participants anonymity. The average interview lasted 30 minutes.

Table 1 | Details of participants in interviews

Participant	Gender	Role	Tenure
1.	Male	Managerial	3 years
2.	Male	Employee	4 years
3.	Female	Employee	2.5 years
4.	Male	Managerial	15 years
5.	Female	Managerial	2 years
6.	Male	Employee	5 years
7.	Female	Employee	2 years

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1. Survey measures

Psychological ownership. Psychological ownership was measured with the 12-item Psychological Ownership Questionnaire (POQ) (Avey et al., 2009). The POQ measures four promotion-oriented dimensions that can benefit an organization, namely: 1) self-efficacy (''I have the confidence to suggest doing things differently''); 2) accountability (''I accept responsibility and take the consequences of these responsibilities''); 3) sense of belongingness (''I feel that I am part of the organization''); and 4) self-identity (''I feel a strong connection to the organization''). Each item was measured by making use of a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) (Avey et al., 2009). The psychological ownership scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.778.

Employee development. Employee development was measured with the 9-item employee development scale considering the perceived investment in employee development and taking charge (PIED) (Dysvik et al., 2016). Each item is measured by the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Dysvik et al., 2016). Sample items of this scale are: ''My organization provides offers career counseling and guidance'' and ''My organization invests in my development''. The employee development scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.869.

Servant leadership. Servant leadership was measured with the 7-item servant leadership scale (SL-7 scale), developed by Liden et al. (2015). The scale is a shorter version of the original 28-item servant leadership measures (SL-28) by the same authors. All items of this scale are assessed with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Liden et al., 2015). Sample items from this scale are: ''My supervisor is supportive and understanding when navigating through emotional difficulties'' and ''My supervisor empowers me by providing new opportunities to take on new responsibilities''. The servant leadership scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.814

Job flourishing. Job flourishing was measured by the 15-item Flourishing-at-Work-Scale, designed to evaluate three key dimensions of well-being in the workplace, namely: 1) emotional well-being; 2) psychological well-being; and 3) social well-being (Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017).

Participants rated their responses on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (every day) (Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017). Sample questions from this scale are: ''During the past month at work, how often did you feel good at managing the responsibilities of your job?'' and '' During the past month at work, how often did you feel energized to work?''. The job flourishing scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.867.

Job performance. Job performance was measured by the 4-item scale of Gibson et al. (2009) that assesses various dimensions of job performance, focusing on individual contributions within a team or organizational context. Respondents were asked to score the extent to which they believe they demonstrate performance-related behaviors or outcomes using the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Gibson et al., 2009). Sample items for this scale are: ''I am consistently a high-performing individual'' and ''I make few mistakes''. The job performance scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.578.

3.3.2 Interview protocol
The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach (See Appendix B for the whole set of questions), selected for its ability to balance guiding the conversation with predetermined questions and allowing participants the freedom to explore and elaborate on their viewpoints based on their experiences (Brinkmann, 2014). The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the municipality, which enabled the observation of both verbal and non-verbal cues. This method also fostered a stronger rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Curasi, 2001), potentially making participants feel more comfortable and open in their responses. On average, each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, and all were conducted in Dutch, enabling participants to express themselves comfortably in their native language. The interviews were primarily transcribed verbatim to capture all the nuanced aspects of participants' responses.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1. Quantitative analysis

To comprehensively analyze the quantitative data gathered from the survey, the statistical software programs SPSS and the PROCESS macro were employed. These programs facilitated a systematic approach to understanding the dataset and answering the hypotheses.

The initial step in the quantitative analysis involved gathering the descriptive statistics and checking for missing data. In total, 12 cases out of 99 were excluded from the analysis due to non-starters and missing data, resulting in a final sample size of N=87. After removing missing data, Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability of the measures. Except for job performance, all variables exceeded the 0.7 rule of Cronbach's alpha (psychological ownership; 0.778, employee development; 0.869, servant leadership; 0.814, job flourishing; 0.867, job performance; 0.578) (Taber, 2018). The lower alpha for job performance can be attributed to its scale comprising of only four items (Taber, 2018). No outliers were identified in the dataset. Subsequently, all the questions related to the constructs in the conceptual model were aggregated by averaging the respective questionnaire items. Since all the assumptions were met, a regression analysis was performed to delve deeper into the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. A bivariate regression analysis was performed in SPSS with the independent and dependent variables testing for both the mediation and moderation hypotheses.

Check of regression assumptions

Checking assumptions is a critical step to ensure the validity and reliability of the statistical tests employed with the dataset. This was done by checking assumptions before starting the regression analysis. The first assumption that the relationships between the relationships between the independent and dependent variables were approximately linear. This was confirmed by creating scatterplots (Appendix D.1), which showed that the assumption was met. The second assumption concerned the normality of residuals, which posits that residuals should be normally distributed. This was verified by creating both a scatterplot and a histogram of the residuals, both of which indicated a normal distribution, thereby meeting this assumption (Appendix D.2). The third assumption, independence of residuals, requires that errors be independent of each other. This was checked using a Q-Q plot of standardized residuals, which showed no random scatter, indicating that this assumption was met

(Appendix D.3). The fourth assumption was the absence of multicollinearity, meaning that the independent variables should not be highly correlated. This was tested using the VIF index (Appendix D.4), which was found to be below 5, thus meeting this assumption. Finally, the fifth assumption was that there were no outliers in the dataset, a confirmed condition.

3.4.2. Qualitative analysis

The goal of collecting qualitative data was to gain a deeper insight into the perceptions of job flourishing within the municipality, complementing the quantitative findings. To process the qualitative data, interviews were first transcribed. Following transcription, a thematic analysis was conducted in the program ATLAS.ti. This thematic analysis method, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves identifying recurring themes within the data. The coding process included several steps: familiarizing oneself with the data (step 1), generating initial codes (step 2), searching for themes (step 3), reviewing the themes (step 4), defining and naming the themes (step 5), and finally, producing the report (step 6) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be linked to the Gioia method, in which first-order codes are created, followed by second-order themes, and lastly aggregated dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012). By employing the Gioia method, the qualitative analysis benefits from a structured approach that enhances the reliability and validity of the research findings (Gioia et al., 2012). Throughout the Gioia method, the researcher went step by step through the 3 main stages as presented in Magnani & Gioia's (2023) work. Before starting the first step of the Gioia method, general coding was performed. General coding helps to organize and familiarize with the data, identifying key themes and streamline the subsequent coding process. The general coding resulted in a total of 115 codes, which can be found in appendix C. After the general coding, the creation of analytical coding was applied which resulted in the 1st-order concepts and 2nd-order themes (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). During the 1st-order coding process, there were already several overarching teams which automatically led to the 2nd-order themes which explained the 1st-order concepts from a more theoretical perspective. The next step involved creating aggregated dimensions based on the 2nd-order themes (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). As the overall goal was to answer the main research questions, this led to a total of three aggregated dimensions as described in the following chapter.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative findings

This chapter presents the quantitative findings and answers to the hypothesis of the thesis. The descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations are presented. After that, regression analysis was performed to answer the hypotheses.

4.1.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation table

With regards to the constructs measured in this thesis, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and the Pearsons' correlations between the variables. The examination of inter-variable correlations enabled us to uncover that there indeed were positive significant correlations shown, as expected by the hypotheses of this thesis.

Table 2 | Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations for the research variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological ownership	4.88	0.35		0.243*	0.538**	0.622**	0.186
2. Employee Development	3.45	0.50			0.450**	0.344**	-0.115
3. Servant Leadership	4.03	0.45				0.543**	0.071
4. Job Flourishing	4.57	0.45					0.290**
5. Job Performance	3.82	0.30					
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

4.1.2. Regression models and hypotheses testing

It is important to acknowledge that, due to the complexity of the model and the limited sample size, running the entire hypothetical model in its entirety was not feasible. Consequently, the model was divided into two parts: one with psychological ownership as the independent variable and the other with employee development as the independent variable. Below, the results from the model with psychological ownership as independent variable are presented first (Model 1), followed by the findings from the model with employee development (Model 2).

4.1.2.1. Model 1: Psychological Ownership

Hypothesis 1a states that psychological ownership positively influences employee job flourishing in the public sector. As shown in model 1 (Table 3), the results showed that PO had a significant direct effect on JF (β= .622, *p <.001*), thus hypothesis 1a is supported.

Hypothesis 2 states that job flourishing positively influences job performance. As seen in model 2 (Table 3), JF was entered as direct predictor of JP. The results imply that JF had a significant direct effect on JP (β= .322, *p <.01)* and therefore hypothesis 2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3a and 3b look at the mediating effect of JF between PO and ED with JP as outcome variable. Hypothesis 3a states that job flourishing (JF) partially mediates the relationship between psychological ownership (PO) and job performance (JP). As shown in model 3 (Table 3) PO is significantly related to JF (β= .665, *p <.001),* but neither the direct effect of PO on JP (β= .0109, *p>0.01*) nor the indirect effect of PO on JP through JF (β= .2103, 95% CL [-.0096, .4505]) reached statistical significance. Therefore, JF does not partially mediates the relationship between PO and JF and thus hypothesis 3a is not supported.

Hypothesis 4a states that servant leadership (SL) positively moderates the relationship between psychological ownership (PO) and job flourishing (JF). In model 4 (Table 3) the interaction term PO × SL, which represents the moderation effect, was not significant for JF (β = -.0829, *p > .05*) and also not significant for JP (β = .1895, *p > .05*).

Table 3 | Psychological ownership

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	JF	JP	JF	JP	JF	JP	JF	JP
PO	0.622***	0.186			0.6655***	0.0109	0.5039***	0.0395
SL							0.2529*	-0.1218
JF				0.322**		0.3160*		0.3851*
PO X SL							-0.0829	0.1895
R2	0.387	0.030		0.084	0.3871	0.0842	0.4525	0.1136

*p <0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<.001. Standard errors in parentheses*

4.1.2.2. Model 2: Employee development

Hypothesis 1b states that employee development positively influences employee job flourishing in the public sector. As shown in model 1 (Table 4), the results showed that ED had a significant direct effect on JF (β= .297, $p < .05$). Thus, hypothesis 1b is supported.

Hypothesis 3b states that job flourishing (JF) partially mediates the relationship between employee development (ED) and job performance (JP). In model 3 (Table 4), ED is significantly related to JF (β = .4156, $p < 0.001$), and both the direct effect of ED on JP (β = -.3150, $p < 0.05$) and the indirect effect of ED on JP through JF (β = .1692, 95% CI [.0260, .3605]) reached statistical significance. Therefore, JF partially mediates the relationship between ED and JP, providing support for hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 4b states that servant Leadership positively moderates the relationship between employee development (ED) and job flourishing (JF). In model 4 (Table 4) the interaction term ED × SL, which represents the moderation effect, was not significant for JF (β = .0453, $p > .05$) and also not significant for JP (β = -.0161, $p > .05$).

Table 4 | Employee development

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	JF	JP	JF	JP	JF	JP	JF	JP
ED	0.297*	-0.110			0.2972*	-0.3150*	0.1112	-0.2248
SL							0.4269***	-0.0357
JF				0.322**		0.4156***		0.4339**
ED X SL							0.0453	-0.0161
R2	0.116	0.013		0.084	0.1185	0.1364	0.3097	0.1374

*p <0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<.001. Standard errors in parentheses

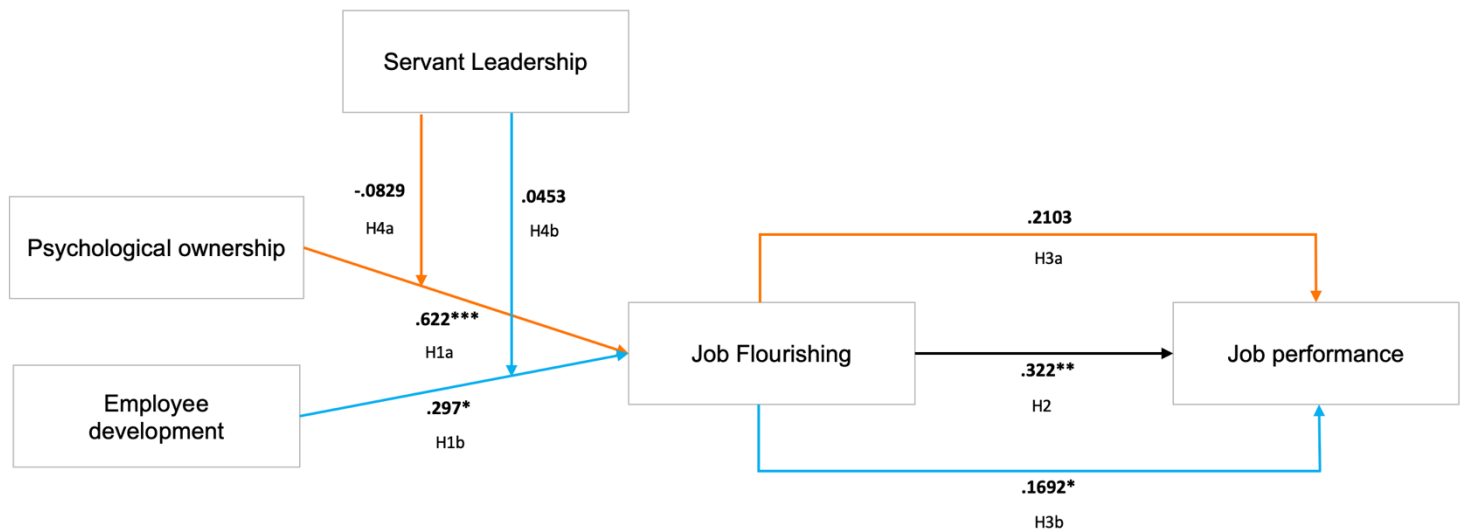Below is presented the hypothetical model with the statistical results.

Figure 2 | graphical representation of the hypothesized model on job flourishing within the public sector. Model 1 (psychological ownership) illustrated in **orange** and Model 2 (employee development) illustrated in **blue**. Significant levels *p <0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<.001.*

4.2 Qualitative findings

In addition to the quantitative analysis, interviews were conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of the relationships under study. These interviews offered valuable insights, helping to further explore and clarify key dynamics, particularly the non-significant moderation effect of servant leadership on both psychological ownership and employee development could be further investigated. With the use of the Gioia method after the coding, three aggregated dimensions were derived from the qualitative findings; 1. Organizational Climate, 2. Leadership Dynamics, and 3. Employee Empowerment. Figure 3 provides an overview of the data structure. The codes that came more from managers are written in italics, the codes from employees are underlined in text and those who are shared by both have no special textual.

Below the figure, a further explanation of the first-order concepts and second-order themes, which led to the aggregated dimensions can be found. The first-order codes will be supported by quotes derived from the interviews.
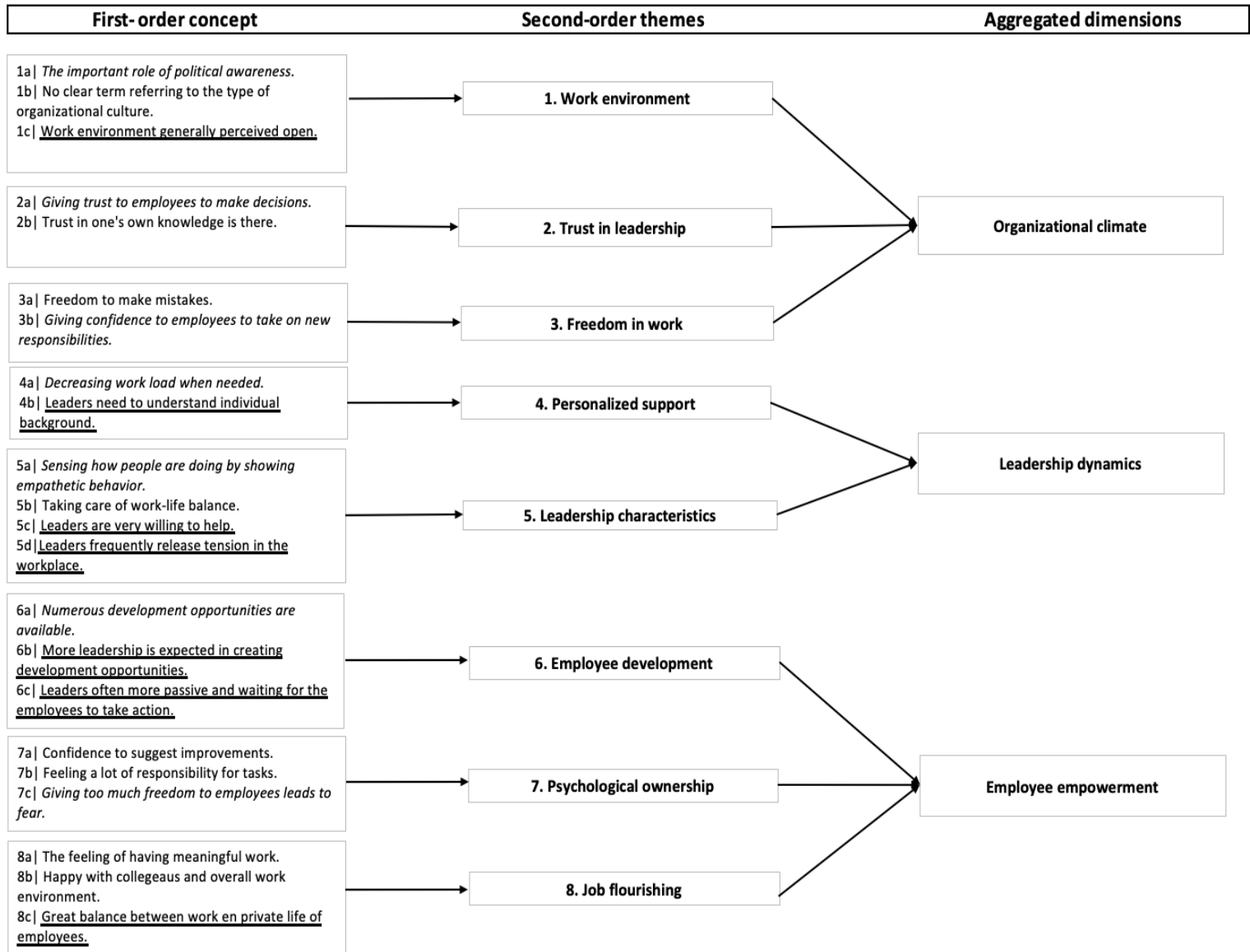
First-order concept	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimensions
1a| *The important role of political awareness.* 1b| No clear term referring to the type of organizational culture. 1c| <u>Work environment generally perceived open.</u>	1. Work environment	
2a| *Giving trust to employees to make decisions.* 2b| Trust in one's own knowledge is there.	2. Trust in leadership	Organizational climate
3a| Freedom to make mistakes. 3b| *Giving confidence to employees to take on new responsibilities.*	3. Freedom in work	
4a| *Decreasing work load when needed.* 4b| <u>Leaders need to understand individual background.</u>	4. Personalized support	
5a| *Sensing how people are doing by showing empathetic behavior.* 5b| Taking care of work-life balance. 5c| <u>Leaders are very willing to help.</u> 5d| <u>Leaders frequently release tension in the workplace.</u>	5. Leadership characteristics	Leadership dynamics
6a| *Numerous development opportunities are available.* 6b| <u>More leadership is expected in creating development opportunities.</u> 6c| <u>Leaders often more passive and waiting for the employees to take action.</u>	6. Employee development	
7a| Confidence to suggest improvements. 7b| Feeling a lot of responsibility for tasks. 7c| *Giving too much freedom to employees leads to fear.*	7. Psychological ownership	Employee empowerment
8a| The feeling of having meaningful work. 8b| Happy with collegeaus and overall work environment. 8c| <u>Great balance between work en private life of employees.</u>	8. Job flourishing	

Figure 3 | Data structure. In i*talics* are responses from managers, in <u>underlined </u>are responses from employees, and in normal font are responses shared by both managers and employees.

4.2.1. Aggregated Dimension: Organizational Climate

The first aggregated dimension is called Organizational Climate, comprising three second-order themes: 1. Work environment, 2. Leadership trust, and 3. Freedom in work. These second-order themes collectively describe the key aspects that shape the overall atmosphere and quality of the work setting, influencing how employees perceive and experience their workplace.

<u>Work environment</u>

The concept of the work environment emerged prominently during the interviews, encompassing various dimensions that shape the workplace experience within the municipality. Employees uniformly described the work environment as open and approachable, characterized by a culture where peers are accessible and supportive of one another's knowledge and expertise. This openness fosters collaboration and mutual reliance, contributing to a cohesive team dynamic. As one participant expressed, *"Peers are approachable, and people feel that they can rely on each other's knowledge."*

However, the unique context of operating within a public environment also highlighted the importance of political awareness among employees. Recognizing the potential impact of their actions beyond the municipality, particularly in politically sensitive matters, underscores the need for caution and responsibility in decision-making. *"When dealing with politically sensitive matters, the risk of harm is simply much greater in our sector, and taking specific responsibilities requires being really cautious."*

Interestingly, the term "culture" was not frequently mentioned in the interviews, with many employees expressing a pragmatic focus on their work environment rather than labeling it with a specific cultural identity. Nevertheless, there was an occasional reference to a *"family culture,"* with varying interpretations among employees. While some viewed it positively as linked to a supportive home environment, others held reservations about having a family culture. For some the term family culture implied a blurring of boundaries, where the organization seemed to intrude on personal life. They preferred a clearer separation between work and home, viewing these as distinct areas of life rather than extensions of family.

Trust in leadership

Trust in leadership emerges as a foundational element in the municipality. Trust surfaced as a central theme in interviews, highlighted by participants as essential for optimal job performance and satisfaction. Employees universally recognize trust from their leaders as pivotal to their ability to perform effectively in their roles. Central to this is the belief that autonomy and confidence in one's abilities are closely tied to trust from their leaders. Employees value leaders who demonstrate confidence in their knowledge and skills, viewing this perceived trust as instrumental to their professional growth and job satisfaction. As expressed by one participant, *"Trust is the foundation of job flourishing and enjoying their work."* Moreover, trust empowers employees to take initiative and innovate, actions they undertake most confidently when they feel genuinely trusted by their leaders. This trust is seen as essential for assuming ownership and responsibility within the organization. *"Giving the trust to people and also making sure that they are at the right position within the organization looking at their strengths and weaknesses,"* reflects the sentiment that trust aligns capabilities with responsibilities, fostering a supportive and effective work environment. However, while trust is widely acknowledged and appreciated, interviewed leaders also acknowledge the challenges that come with giving trust to the teams. Delegating authority and empowering teams while maintaining trust can be complex, as noted by one leader: *"Within my own department, I am very focused on continuously delegating and giving the team the confidence that I do not need to be involved but this remains a challenge."* Overall, there is a high level of trust in leadership, but challenges persist. Addressing these challenges effectively could significantly enhance job satisfaction and overall employee flourishing, as noted by all participants.

Freedom in work

Freedom in work emerged as a pivotal theme during the interviews, gaining significant importance among employees as a catalyst for both psychological ownership and job flourishing. Experiencing freedom in performing the work was repeatedly cited by employees as essential for fostering a sense of ownership and enabling flourishing in their roles within the municipality. Employees highly value the autonomy to approach their work in ways that resonate with their individual styles and preferences.

This freedom empowers them to innovate and take ownership of their projects, as highlighted by one employee: *"I was given all the space and freedom to create a program on this topic, and I really enjoyed being able to do that."* Such autonomy not only enhances creativity but also instills satisfaction in their work. Furthermore, the freedom to make mistakes without fear of punitive measures is highly appreciated among all employees. This supportive environment encourages risk-taking and continuous learning among employees. They feel empowered to explore new tasks and responsibilities, confident that they can seek assistance and grow from their experiences within the organization. *"You also need to feel a certain freedom to ask for help from others within the organization."* Overall, the freedom granted within the municipality is highly appreciated by employees as it nurtures a culture of trust, autonomy, and personal responsibility.

4.2.2. Aggregated Dimension: Leadership Dynamics

The second aggregated dimension is called Leadership Dynamics, comprising two second-order themes: 1. Personalized support, and 2. Servant Leadership. These second-order themes share the common characteristic of how employees perceive leadership within the organization, particularly in terms of the attention and support leaders provide to each individual employee.

Personalized support

During the interviews, a unanimous sentiment among employees was the recognition that each individual requires a tailored approach to flourish in their roles. This personalized approach is crucial, especially concerning job flourishing at work. Managers play a pivotal role in this by fostering genuine curiosity about their employees' backgrounds, motivations, and aspirations, both professionally and personally.

Employees emphasized the importance of managers being attuned to their workload and emotional well-being. For instance, when managers notice an employee overwhelmed with tasks, they intervene proactively to alleviate the burden. As exemplified by one participant, *"Recently, I noticed a colleague was overwhelmed with her workload, so we stepped in and reassigned some of her tasks, which took a burden off her shoulders."*

Moreover, employees expressed a strong desire to be recognized as individuals with unique needs and preferences.

They value managers who provide personalized support tailored to their specific circumstances. *"It is really about tailoring the approach and looking at each individual because one person might need a lot of development opportunities, while another just wants to focus on their work and has no interest in that at all."* The theme of personalized support ultimately centers on the importance of being present for employees during both good and challenging times and recognizing each individual's unique strengths and weaknesses.

Leadership characteristics

Leadership characteristics emerges as many employees mentioned the leadership attention towards employee well-being in the organization. Nearly all participants expressed that their managers genuinely care about them, demonstrating empathy and a keen awareness of their employees' emotional states. This empathetic approach is exemplified by managers who actively observe and sense the atmosphere among their team members, such as noticing changes in mood for example in the coffee pantry. As one manager shared, *"We are situated opposite the coffee pantry, and there you can feel how people are doing; you can sense the atmosphere and know if something is going on."* The leaders also prioritize personal connections and check in with employees regularly, ensuring they feel supported beyond their professional duties. This involves asking about employees' well-being during meetings and conducting meaningful one-on-one discussions to understand their challenges and aspirations. *"During meetings, if we hear or feel something and people do not come to us, we make sure to ask during one-on-one meetings: how are you?"* Furthermore, employees appreciate the support they receive from managers during difficult personal circumstances, recognizing the impact of personal life on work performance. This compassionate approach helps maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life, fostering a supportive environment where employees feel valued and understood. An employee said the following: *"For example, in the event of a family death, a lot of time is taken for people, and there are always many calls to check on how you are doing."* While the present leadership is appreciated, there are areas identified for improvement. Some employees noted that not all managers consistently delve deeply enough into personal matters during their interactions, sometimes remaining on the surface.

Despite this, there is a general consensus that managers are accessible and responsive when deeper support is needed. *"I know that my manager, for instance, is not always very personal and sometimes could ask a bit more when he calls to check on me, instead of staying on the surface in those conversations. But I know how to reach him if I need him, and I know he is always 100% there for me."* During the interviews, it became evident that employees do not identify a single, specific type of leadership. The HR employee mentioned servant leadership, but other participants did not refer to the term servant leadership during the interviews. It appears that the current leadership is appreciated within the organization without being explicitly labeled as a particular type nor servant leadership.

4.2.3. Aggregated Dimension: Employee Empowerment

The third aggregated dimensions is termed employee empowerment, comprising three second order themes: 1. Employee development, 2. Psychological Ownership, and 3. Job Flourishing. These second-order themes share the common characteristic of fostering a workplace environment where employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to the organization's goals and their professional growth. Each theme underscores the importance of empowering employees through opportunities for development, cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility, and promoting job satisfaction and fulfillment.

Employee development

Development opportunities within the municipality are plentiful, encompassing both physical training sessions and e-learning programs. While these opportunities exist, there is a consensus among employees that more proactive involvement and support from managers are needed to fully use these resources. Participation in trainings varies, with some employees actively engaged while others remain passive. This discrepancy is often attributed to managers' attitudes toward creating and facilitating development opportunities, particularly for employees who may be less assertive. As one employee highlighted*, "I know that some people are less assertive, but I believe the manager should be aware of this and also sense the development needs of their employees."* Currently, the responsibility for personal development primarily falls on the employees themselves, requiring them to take initiative and seek out opportunities. Reflecting on this responsibility, another employee stated, *"So as employees, we are responsible for our own development."*

While some employees are comfortable with this arrangement, there is a shared sentiment that more proactive involvement from managers would be beneficial. *"Personally, I do not mind that the initiative for development opportunities lies with me, but I can also imagine that it would be nice if it came more from the manager."* Overall, employees acknowledge the availability of development opportunities but express a desire for greater managerial support and initiative. They expect managers to not only be aware of their developmental needs but also to actively promote and facilitate suitable opportunities. This includes making better assessments of what programs or training sessions might be beneficial for individual employees.

Psychological ownership
Psychological ownership is a crucial goal within the municipality, signifying employees' sense of responsibility towards their work and the organization. However, despite its importance, it is evident that this theme still requires substantial improvement. One of the primary obstacles hindering the development of psychological ownership is the adherence to formal requirements. As one employee mentions: *''Ownership is still being hindered because we hold on to certain formal requirements, and whether that is due to fear or a lack of self-confidence is being instilled, I find hard to say''.* This statement highlights the internal barriers employees face, whether they stem from ingrained procedural constraints or personal insecurities. To create a stronger sense of psychological ownership, it is essential for employees to feel empowered to take initiative and assert their ideas. Another employee expressed the necessity of personal initiative: *''You should not make yourself dependent on others but you should think: I have a good idea, so I am going to pitch it to anyone and I really want to do that. So you need a kind of ownership for that, the courage to take that step. ''* In the interviews, it also became clear that ownership is not without its potential downsides. A phenomenon referred to as ''space fear'' was identified, where too much ownership can lead to stress and anxiety among employees. One employee explained: *''There you have it, space fear; the fear of having too much space makes me scared and stressed, and that affects others as well. We need to be really careful with that.''.* This comment illustrates the delicate balance required in promoting psychological ownership without overwhelming employees.

It is important to note that psychological ownership differs from freedom in work as it refers to the sense of possession and personal investment an employee feels towards their work, tasks, or the municipality. This differs from simply having freedom at work, which is more about autonomy and the ability to make decisions independently.

Job Flourishing

Job flourishing represents an optimal state where employees find their work meaningful, enjoy a positive work environment, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Within the municipality, these aspects are recognized and valued, but there is always room for improvement to ensure that all employees experience these benefits fully. Understanding what drives employees and what makes them feel content is fundamental. One employee emphasized, *"It is just important to know what the intrinsic motivation an employee is and what they feel content with, so to really have a good picture of the person and not go by what you think of someone."* This highlights the necessity of genuinely understanding each employee's motivations and satisfaction to foster a supportive work environment. The significance of meaningful work was captured by another employee, who reflected, *"Then I experienced meaningful work because you could really get the maximum out of someone, and that is really what it's all about in the end."* This statement underscores the importance of roles that allow employees to fully utilize their skills and potential, contributing to a sense of accomplishment and purpose within the organization. The experience of job flourishing is further illustrated by an employee who shared, *"And I dare say that I flourished in that because, at that moment, I was in a good vibe, and everything just fell into place."* This remark shows the ideal state of job flourishing, where the alignment of personal and professional satisfaction leads to a fulfilling work experience. In conclusion, job flourishing in the municipality is characterized by meaningful work, positive colleague relationships, and a balanced work-life dynamic. Recognizing and nurturing the unique drives and contentment of employees, providing opportunities for meaningful contributions, and supporting a positive work atmosphere are essential for promoting job flourishing.

5. Discussion

This research aimed to advance the understanding of job flourishing within the public sector by exploring the roles of psychological ownership, employee development and servant leadership. The central research question guiding this thesis was: *How do psychological ownership, employee development and servant leadership influence job flourishing and, ultimately, job performance?* By addressing this research question, the research sought to fill the gaps in the existing literature about the antecedents that may enhance employee job flourishing and job performance in public organizations.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this research contribute to the understanding of job flourishing by exploring underresearched factors and by unpacking the processes and mechanisms leading to it. More specifically, concerning the limited research on job flourishing and its potential predictors, particularly in the context of public organizations (Fabricio et al., 2022). Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources theory (JDR) and Self-Determination theory (SDT) theory, this research showed two significant predictors of job flourishing, namely psychological ownership and employee development. According to the JDR theory, organizational resources like psychological ownership and employee development help buffer job demands and enhance well-being by providing the support employees need to flourish (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Psychological ownership is crucial as it fosters a deeper emotional connection to work, enhancing employees' engagement and positive emotions (Tummers & Bakker, 2011), which are in this research found to be important for employees in order to achieve levels of job flourishing. Similarly, employee development promotes job flourishing by giving employees the right skills and opportunities to grow. This aligns with the SDT, which posits that fulfilling basic psychological needs, including the need for competence, is crucial for employee well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Thus, by fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth, public sector organizations contribute to an environment in which employees can flourish.

Secondly, this research found that job flourishing partially mediated the relationship between employee development (ED) and job performance but did not partially mediate the relationship between psychological ownership (PO) and job performance. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), psychological ownership directly boosts job performance by fulfilling core psychological needs for autonomy and competence, which drive intrinsic

motivation and proactive behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This suggests that psychological ownership leads to heightened motivation and engagement, directly influencing performance outcomes without requiring job flourishing as a mediator (Olckers & van Zyl, 2021).

In contrast, employee development may influence job performance indirectly by first fostering job flourishing; as employees engage in development opportunities, they experience greater personal growth, satisfaction, and well-being, which are elements central to job flourishing and can ultimately enhances job performance (Hollar et al., 2022; Mylona & Mihail, 2022). Thus, while psychological ownership directly impacted job performance by meeting key psychological needs, employee development supported job performance more indirectly by first cultivating a flourishing work experience.

Thirdly, the moderation analyses revealed that servant leadership did not moderate the relationships between either psychological ownership or employee development on job flourishing. This showed that servant leadership does not influence or change the way psychological ownership and employee development impact job flourishing. From the JDR theory, research has reported inconsistent results on whether leadership is seen as a resource or a demand. While leadership can be a valuable resource when empowering and supportive (Salas-Vallina & Fernandez, 2017), it can also be a demand if ineffective or not fitting the environment (Nielsen et al., 2018; Roberts, 2022). Servant leadership may indeed be less fitting to a public sector environment due to several contextual factors that influence employee motivation and structure (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Roberts, 2022). According to Goulet & Frank (2002), this can be the case because the public sector is often dealing with pre-existing organizational conditions and a lack of familiarity with the concepts of servant leadership. The demands placed on public sector leaders often differ from those in the private sector, making it more challenging to adopt servant leadership practices due to factors such as bureaucratic structures, complex stakeholder landscapes and the focus on policy implementation (Goulet & Frank, 2002; Mulgan, 2021). Because of this, the insignificant moderation effect can be attributed to the type of leadership chosen for this research. In the context of the public sector, it was found that transformational leadership is likely more effective, as it facilitates adaptability to the unique challenges and constraints of this environment (Araya-Orellana, 2022). While servant leadership is generally seen as less likely to create stressors, as it supports rather than burdens employees (Liden et al., 2014; Tummers & Bakker, 2012), the distinctive characteristics of the public sector- such as bureaucratic

structures, public accountability and collective goals- may limit its effectiveness. This contextual mismatch could therefore explain why the moderating effect of servant leadership is insignificant in this research. In addition, a potential explanation for the insignificant moderation effect could relate to the 'dark sides of servant leadership' as discussed by Camm (2019). While servant leadership is intended to support and empower employees, it can sometimes manifest as paternalistic behavior, where leaders make decisions on behalf of employees under the assumption that they know what is best for the employees (Camm, 2019). This approach can inadvertently undermine employee autonomy, which is a core component of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and essential for fostering intrinsic motivation and job flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Furthermore, in an effort to shield employees from potential setbacks, servant leaders may unintentionally adopt authoritarian practices, limiting employees' freedom to take initiative, experiment, and innovate (Camm, 2019). This protective but controlling leadership style can suppress employees' sense of psychological ownership over their work and hinder the development of personal resources necessary for flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Nielsen et al., 2018; Giolito et al., 2020). While servant leadership aims to be supportive, these unintended consequences may explain why it fails to significantly enhance the positive effects of psychological ownership and employee development on job flourishing in a public sector context.

Furthermore, the qualitative component of the research provided deeper insights into the insignificance of the moderation effect. During the interviews, only a limited number of comments were made regarding servant leadership, and when the interviewer introduced the theme, many participants appeared unfamiliar with this leadership style in the organization. This suggests that servant leadership may not yet be recognized as a prevalent leadership approach within the municipality chosen for this research. However, it is noteworthy that the quantitative results did reveal a significant positive direct effect of servant leadership on job flourishing. This finding suggests that leaders in the public sector who adopt a servant leadership style can still enhance job flourishing independently of their interaction with psychological ownership or employee development. This finding is in line with the research of Giolito et al., (2020), who also found a positive direct relationship between servant leadership and employee flourishing.

Lastly, an intriguing outcome of this research is the emergence among our qualitative results of two pivotal themes- trust in leadership and freedom -. These themes were not originally

included in the research design, yet they surfaced as foundational elements impacting employee experiences with job flourishing. Trust in leadership can be defined as the belief that a leader will act in the best interest of the employees, demonstrating reliability, integrity and competence (Legood et al., 2021). The outcome of freedom in this research is distinct from psychological ownership. Freedom should be defined here as the ability to act independently and make choices without external constraints (Kronfeldner, 2021), emphasizing the actual capacity for self-directed actions. In contrast, psychological ownership focuses on the cognitive-affective state where individuals feel a sense of possessiveness and responsibility towards their work (Cheng, 2019). The unexpected emergence of these themes suggests that trust in leadership and freedom are integral to understanding the dynamics of employee job flourishing and performance. In view of the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) theory, trust in leadership can be seen as a critical job resource. Trust in leadership enhances employees' perception of support and stability, which can mitigate the adverse effects of job demands and foster a positive work environment and can lead to increased job satisfaction and thereby promote job flourishing. (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Especially in a public sector context, trust in leadership extends beyond the organization to the public. Leaders who are trusted by their employees are more likely to gain the trust of the public, which is vital for the legitimacy and effectiveness of public institutions (Vallentin, 2022). From a Self-Determination Theory (SDT) perspective, trust in leadership is crucial as it fosters an environment where employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are met, leading to higher job satisfaction and engagement (Forner et al., 2020). The role of freedom in the workplace, as also emphasized by the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) theory, improves job performance by fostering employee autonomy and reducing stress (Borst et al., 2019). This sense of control increases engagement and motivation, leading to enhanced productivity and job satisfaction in the public sector (Borst et al., 2019). When viewing freedom from the SDT perspective, the emphasis shifts to how autonomy, competence and relatedness interact to promote intrinsic motivation among employees (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Freedom in the workplace not only supports these basic psychological needs but also enables individuals to pursue personal growth and meaningful contributions, which are key to employee job performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The unexpected emerge of trust in leadership and freedom as key themes in this research highlights their potential in understanding job flourishing, particularly in the public sector context.

In conclusion, this research expands the limited literature available on job flourishing within the public sector. By identifying key predictors like psychological ownership and employee development, along with potentially significant indicators such as trust in leadership and freedom, this research provided valuable insights into the factors that promote job flourishing and job performance.

5.2 Practical implications and recommendations

This research provides practical implications for public organizations focusing on employee well-being and job flourishing. Firstly, the significant positive effect of psychological ownership on job flourishing suggests that fostering a strong sense of ownership among employees can lead to higher job flourishing and job performance. Organizations in the public sector should consider strategies to enhance psychological ownership, such as involving employees in decision-making processes and giving more autonomy in daily tasks.

Secondly, the direct relationship between servant leadership and job flourishing shows that leaders who adopt a servant leadership style, characterized by supporting and empowering employees, can significantly improve job flourishing. Therefore, public organizations should prioritize developing and promoting servant leadership principles to create a supportive work environment, ultimately enhancing job performance of employees. When servant leadership is not present in a public organization, adopting and implementing this leadership style requires time. It therefore is recommended to establish in-house servant leadership development programs that can help cultivate the necessary competencies among leaders as these programs focus on empowering followers, promoting ethical behavior and fostering a culture of service (Awasthi & Walumbwa, 2023).

Thirdly, the central role of trust in leadership and freedom highlights the importance of integrating these elements into organizational strategies to boost employee well-being and job flourishing. Public sector organizations should prioritize nurturing and developing trust between leaders and their teams. This can be achieved through community engagement and transparency in communication (Lansing et al., 2023).

5.3 Limitations and future Research

While the findings offer valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged to provide context and guide future research. Firstly, the hypothetical model employed in this research was relatively complex, incorporating both mediation and moderation paths. These models typically require larger sample sizes to ensure reliable statistical results (Sim et al., 2022). However, the sample size in this research was relatively small (N=87) for the overall conceptual framework to be tested. Therefore, two separate models were tested instead of the model as a whole. Although the results were reliable by splitting the model, future research could consider running a similar model with a larger sample size so that it could be tested in its entirety.

Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the study poses challenges and capturing temporal dynamics, particularly with respect to the mood of participants at the time of completing the survey and answering the interview questions. Feedback from participants in this research suggested that their responses to the Flourishing at Work Scale could be influenced by their mood on the survey day, potentially impacting data consistency. However, the positive aspect lies in the mixed-method design of this research. The integration of interviews alongside the quantitative results provided deeper insights into participants' perspectives, helping to contextualize the quantitative data.

Thirdly, the qualitative findings show the importance of trust in leadership and freedom in relation to experiencing job flourishing, yet these factors were not included in the hypothetical model since we opted for a simultaneous mixed-method design. For future research, it is therefore recommended to first conduct more in-depth qualitative research to explore variables, followed by a quantitative study that incorporates these variables into statistical models. This sequential mixed-method approach would provide a better understanding of job flourishing in the public sector, allowing researchers to first uncover insights through the qualitative method and then test their relationships with other variables through quantitative analysis (Subedi, 2016).

6. Conclusion

This research has advanced our understanding of job flourishing in the public sector by highlighting the significant roles of psychological ownership and employee development as direct predictors of job flourishing. Although servant leadership did not moderate these relationships as anticipated, it still showed a positive direct effect on job flourishing, emphasizing its relevance to public sector management. The emergence of trust in leadership and freedom as key themes further illustrates the complexity of factors influencing job flourishing in public organizations. Ultimately, fostering psychological ownership, supporting employee development, and creating trust in leadership and freedom practices are essential for promoting job flourishing and performance in public sector organizations.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Survey questions

Psychological ownership – Psychological ownership questionnaire (Avey et al., 2009)

	Items
	Self-efficacy
1.	I have confidence to suggest doing things differently
2.	I successfully navigate challenges and overcome obstacles at work
3.	I have the ability to achieve high levels of performance within my role
	Self-identity
4.	I feel a strong connection to the organization
5.	I identify myself with the mission and value of the organization
6.	I agree that my role in the organization is an aspect of my personal identity
	Accountability
7.	I accept responsibility and take the consequences of these responsibilities
8.	I accept to take ownership of the consequences, both positive and negative, resulting from my work
9.	I feel accountable for meeting the expectations and goals set by the organization
	Belongingness
10.	I feel that I am a valued member of my team and department
11.	I perceive a sense of support from my colleagues in the work environment
12.	I feel connected to the organizational community and culture

Employee development – Perception of investment in Employees's development (Dysvik et al., 2016)

1.	My organization provides opportunities for skill training and development.
2.	My organization offers career counseling and guidance.
3.	My organization supports my efforts to learn and grow.
4.	My organization provides information about career paths within the company.
5	My organization encourages me to participate in training programs.
6.	My organization invests in my development.
7.	My organization helps me acquire new competencies.
8.	My organization provides resources for my professional growth.
9.	My organization assists me in planning my career

Servant leadership – servant leadership scale (SL-7) (Liden et al., 2015).

1.	Emotional healing: my supervisor is supportive and understanding when navigating through emotional difficulties
2.	Creating value for community: my supervisor actively supports initiatives that contribute to the community
3.	Conceptual skills: my supervisor demonstrates a strong understanding of complex concepts
4.	Empowering: my supervisor empowers me by providing new opportunities to take on new responsibilities
5.	Helping subordinates grow and succeed: my supervisor actively supports my professional growth and development
6.	Putting subordinates first: my supervisor prioritizes well-being and success of their team member
7.	Behaving ethically: my supervisor consistently demonstrates ethical behavior and integrity in their interactions and decision-making

Job Flourishing – Flourishing at Work Scale (Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017)

	Items
	Emotional well-being
1.	Job satisfaction: during the past month at work, how often did you experience satisfaction with your work?
2.	Positive affect: during the past month at work, how often did you feel happy, cheerful and good-spirited?
	Psychological well-being
3.	Autonomy: during the past month at work, how often did you experience freedom and choice when carrying out an activity?
4.	Competence: during the past month at work, how often did you feel good at managing the responsibilities of your job?
5.	Relatedness: during the past month at work, how often did you feel connected to others in the work environment?
6.	Psychical engagement: during the past month at work, how often did you feel energized to work?
7.	Cognitive engagement: during the past month at work how often did you focus a great deal of attention on your work?
8.	Emotional engagement: during the past month at work, how often did you get excited when you perform well on your job?
9.	Meaningful work: during the past month at work, how often did you experience your work as meaningful?
10.	Learning: during the past month at work, how often did you have the perception that you acquire and apply knowledge and skills to your work?
11.	Purpose: during the past month at work, how often did you experience that your work makes a difference to the world and serves a greater purpose?
	Social well-being

11.	Social acceptance: during the past month at work, how often did you feel you really belong to the organization?
12.	Social actualization (growth): during the past month at work, how often did you believe in the potential of others in the organization?
13.	Social contribution: during the past month at work, how often did you regard your daily activities as adding value to the organization?
14.	Social coherence: during the past month at work, how often did you find the way the organization works, makes sense to you?
15.	Social integration: during the past month at work, how often did you experience a sense of relatedness, comfort and support from the organization?

Job performance - 4-item scale (Gibson et al., 2009)

1.	I am consistently a high performing individual
2.	I am effective in achieving my goals and tasks
3.	I make few mistakes
4.	I deliver high quality work

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview guide

At the start of each interview, I provided participants with an overview of the research objectives and gave detailed explanations about the topics we would discuss. I explained my gratitude for their participation and emphasized the confidential and voluntary nature of their involvement. Additionally, I informed participants that the interview would be recorded to ensure accuracy in the data analysis. I assured participants that their anonymity and privacy would be protected throughout the process, in adherence to ethical guideline and standards. Below you can find the semi-structured interview guide:

Topics	
Psychological ownership	Can you describe a specific situation where you suggested doing things differently in your work environment?
	Could you share an experience where you felt particularly valued by your team or department?
Employee development	Can you share an experience where you actively engaged in developed opportunities provided by the organization?
	How has the organization supported your career aspirations and goals?
Servant leadership	Can you provide an example of a time when your supervisor demonstrated support and understanding while you were navigating through emotional difficulties?
	Can you describe a situation where your supervisor empowered you by providing new opportunities to take on new responsibilities?
Job flourishing	How do you perceive your psychological, social and emotional well-being at work?

	Can you share a recent experience at work where you felt a strong sense of meaningfulness in your tasks and responsibilities?
Job performance	Can you provide examples of a recent accomplishments where you feel you have consistently performed at a high level in your role?
General	Are there any other factors that could potentially influence job flourishing according to you?
	Is there anything else you would like to share before we close the interview?

Appendix C: ATLAS.TI codes

Code	Count 1	Count 2
Employee responsibility for own develo...	2	0
Employee well-being in the organization	2	0
Employer responsibility in career paths	1	0
Examine the development needs on be...	1	0
Expectation of leader	2	0
Facilitating the development process	1	0
Feedback techniques	1	0
Feedback training	1	0
Feeling responsible for tasks	1	0
Feeling the emotions of employees	1	0
Figuring out employee needs	1	0
Freedom to make mistakes	2	0
Freedom to suggest improvements	1	0
Frequent individual conversations with...	1	0
Frequent investments in team building	1	0
Frequent ownership	2	0
Generational differences regarding own...	1	0
Giving confidence to employees to take...	1	0
Giving freedom for taking ownership	4	0
Giving suggestions	3	0
Great employee well-being	2	0
Having ownership in your nature	1	0
Having the room to implement change	1	0
Helping each other	1	0
Helping the employee as a leader	1	0
High experienced job flourishing	2	0
Honesty towards employees	1	0
How to become old within the municipa...	1	0
Improve work processes to make indivi...	1	0
Individualistic approach in employee ne...	1	0
Individualistic development opportuniti...	1	0
Informal catch-ups with employees	1	0
Intuition to understand the feeling of y...	1	0
Investments in development opportunit...	1	0
IT system difficulties	1	0
Lack of clear definition on organization...	1	0
Lack of unity in leadership	1	0
Leader releases tension in the work pla...	1	0
Leaders are willing to help	1	0
Leadership initiative in developing empl...	2	0
Learning from peers	1	0
Long employment contracts	1	0
Making time for employees to discuss i...	1	0
Meaningful work	3	0
Motivations to work	2	0
Natural career paths movements	1	0

◇	○	Need from management to take owners...	1	0
◇	○	New vacancies are linked to talents of...	1	0
◇	○	Open work environment	1	0
◇	○	Organizational culture	1	0
◇	○	Passive attitude from leader towards d...	1	0
◇	○	Paying attention to the individual	1	0
◇	○	Personal drive for work	1	0
◇	○	Possible career paths in the organization	1	0
◇	○	Preference for development opportuniti...	1	0
◇	○	Preference for direct communication	1	0
◇	○	Promoting ownership in the organization	1	0
◇	○	Questions asked from leadership to em...	1	0
◇	○	Right people at the right place	1	0
◇	○	Risks in the work	1	0
◇	○	Role of communication in expectation...	1	0
◇	○	Role of leadership regarding ownership	2	0
◇	○	Role of leadership with employee devel...	2	0
◇	○	Role of trust in job flourishing	1	0
◇	○	Role of trust in suggesting improvements	5	0
◇	○	Room to be creative	1	0
◇	○	Safe work environment	1	0
◇	○	Sensing how people are doing	1	0
◇	○	Servant leadership	2	0
◇	○	Solving problems at the work place	1	0
◇	○	Stimulating development opportunities	1	0
◇	○	Suggestions for applying more modern...	1	0
◇	○	Take action when unfamiliair things are...	1	0
◇	○	Taking initiative for developing yourself	5	0
◇	○	Taking on responsibilities besides the d...	1	0
◇	○	Taking ownership	8	0
◇	○	Team feeling	1	0
◇	○	The balance between work and private...	1	0
◇	○	The conversation cycle ''het goede ges...	1	0
◇	○	The importance of political awareness	1	0
◇	○	The role of time and trust in building rel...	1	0
◇	○	Training possibilities	1	0
◇	○	Trust in employees on behalf of manag...	1	0
◇	○	Trust in own knowledge	1	0
◇	○	Understanding individuals' background	1	0
◇	○	Unity in leadership	0	0
◇	○	Work with passion	3	0
◇	○	Working future focused	1	0
◇	○	Worry about time consuming developm...	2	0

◇ ○	Advising management	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Ambitions of employees	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Analyzing talents within the team	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Asking for help	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Autonomy to achieve job flourishing	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Being afraid of ownership	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Being assertive in developing	▭ 3	▭ 0
◇ ○	Being independent in taking ownership	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Being pro-active in the work	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Brainstorming with peers	▭ 2	▭ 0
◇ ○	Budget for employee development	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Bundle the individual powers to achiev...	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Changing work environments	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Close contact with leader	▭ 2	▭ 0
◇ ○	Confidence to suggest improvements	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Continous focus on employee develop...	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Continuous learning	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Creating awareness about employee w...	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Decreasing work load	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Development opportunities	▭ 2	▭ 0
◇ ○	Different solutions required	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Difficult formal language used	▭ 1	▭ 0
◇ ○	Empathetic behaviour	▭ 3	▭ 0

Appendix D - Checking assumptions:

Appendix D.1- Linearity
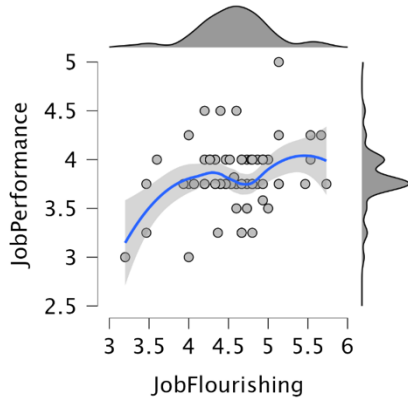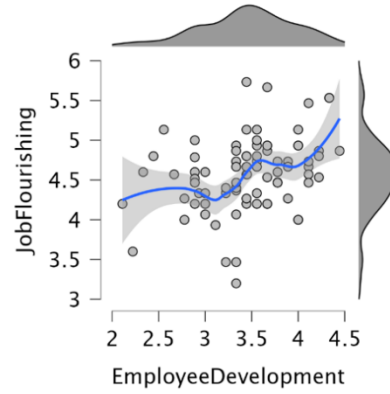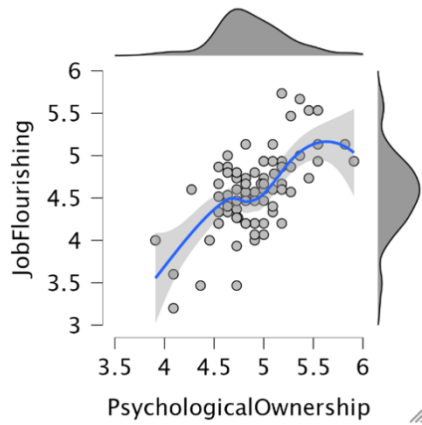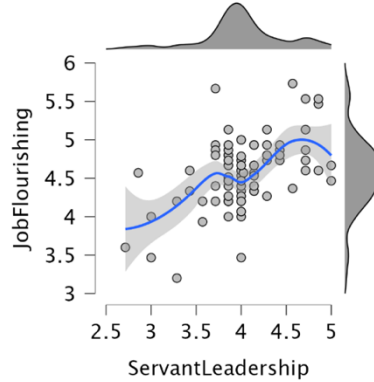
Appendix D.2- Normality of residuals

Normality of residuals

Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: JobFlourishing

Histogram
Dependent Variable: JobFlourishing

Mean = 1.20E-14
Std. Dev. = 0.988
N = 87
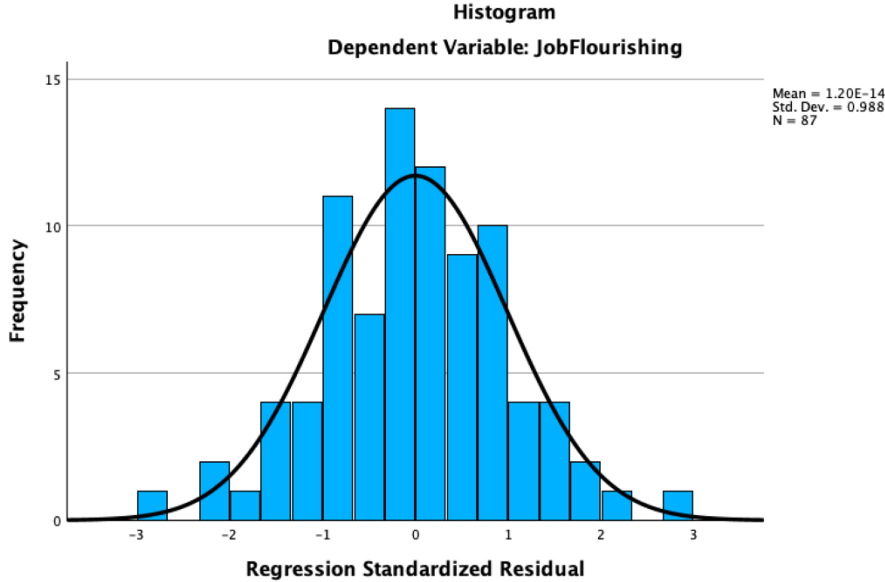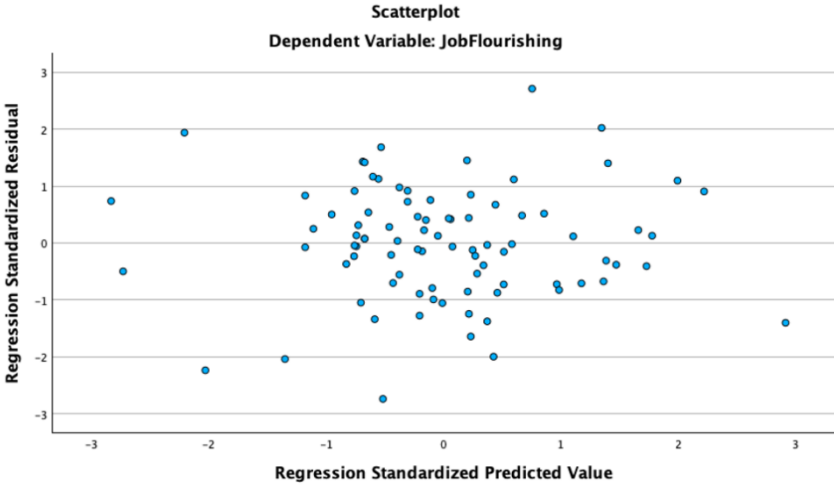
Appendix D.3- Independence of residuals

Q–Q Plot Standardized Residuals
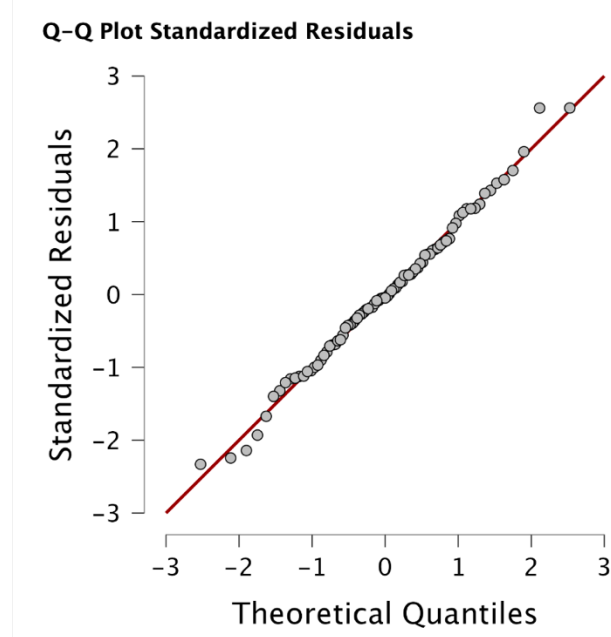
Appendix D.4- VIF index for multicollinearity

Coefficients ▼

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Collinearity Statistics	
							Tolerance	VIF
H_0	(Intercept)	4.57	0.05		94.57	< .001		
H_1	(Intercept)	0.33	0.53		0.63	0.53		
	PsychologicalOwnership	0.60	0.12	0.47	4.89	< .001	0.73	1.37
	EmployeeDevelopment	0.11	0.08	0.12	1.34	0.18	0.79	1.27
	ServantLeadership	0.23	0.11	0.23	2.22	0.03	0.61	1.63