Research Article   Open Access

Servant Leadership of Unit Heads, Workplace Spirituality And Ethical Climate: A Structural Equation Model on Public Service Motivation

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Abstract: *The study aims to identify the factors that affect Public Service Motivation (PSM) among LGU employees in the Caraga region, Philippines. The study focuses on the relationship between servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and PSM. To establish the participants' rating from validated questionnaires with 400 respondents, the study employed a quantitative, descriptive-predictive research design. Results showed a high level of servant leadership, with empowerment and stewardship as key strengths, though authenticity scored lowest. The ethical climate rated high, particularly in adherence to laws and professional codes, but self-interest remained moderate. Workplace spirituality scored high, highlighted by compassion and meaningful work, while spiritual orientation was least prominent. PSM was generally high, driven by civic responsibility, but self-sacrifice needed improvement. Structural equation modeling identified Model 5 as the best fit. Key indicators retained included empowerment, standing back, forgiveness, and stewardship for servant leadership; self-interest, team interest, company profit efficiency, and social responsibility for ethical climate; and meaningful work, value alignment, and spiritual orientation for workplace spirituality. For PSM, civic duty, attraction to policymaking, and commitment to social justice were central. Moreover, the outcomes align with SDG 16.5 substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms. Findings suggest fostering servant leadership, ethical practices, and workplace spirituality can enhance employee motivation and ethical grounding. Recommendations include leadership training, ethical committees, and initiatives promoting spiritual well-being to sustain effective public service delivery.*

Keywords: Public administration, servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, public service motivation, local government units, SDG 16.5, Caraga, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

Public service motivation (PSM) is encountering significant hurdles in local government units (LGUs) across the Philippines, where persistent issues like corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency pose major challenges. In a 2022 [1] report, Dagohoy and Dura highlighted findings from the Ombudsman showing 2,799 corruption cases involving LGUs, underscoring a systemic problem in public governance. Additionally, former President Rodrigo Duterte's 2021 campaign to dismiss corrupt personnel further revealed a worrying trend—government employees increasingly lack motivation as accountability pressures intensify, threatening their commitment to serve the public. This decline in enthusiasm indicates a broader struggle within the public sector to uphold a high level of service amid financial and ethical constraints (Asian Productivity Organization & Choi, 2023, [2]).

Research supports the notion that public sector incentives might be unintentionally steering employees toward self-interest. Akinyele et al. (2023, [3]) argued that performance-based incentives in government roles often shift focus from public service quality to wealth maximization. This emphasis on personal gain contrasts sharply with the mission of public service, impacting organizational commitment differently compared to the private sector (Boukamcha, 2023, [4]). Concerns about the sustainability of PSM have also been raised by Haider (2019, [5]), who questioned the sector's ability to maintain high engagement among employees in the long term. These studies collectively illustrate how corruption, financial uncertainty, and inadequate performance assessments are eroding public service motivation, creating substantial barriers that LGUs must address to foster a dedicated workforce.

PSM has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing the effectiveness of civil servants, despite the limited research specifically focusing on this area. The significance of studying PSM lies in its demonstrated ability to drive positive work outcomes, as evidenced by various studies. For instance, Lu and Chen (2022, [6]) research established a strong positive relationship between PSM and key work outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, higher work engagement, organizational commitment, and positive work attitudes. Hidayati's (2019, [7]) study further highlights that PSM, mediated by job satisfaction and dedication, significantly improves job performance. Additionally, Shim and Park (2019, [8]) underscore the role of an ethical climate as a crucial determinant of PSM, with servant leadership enhancing its impact at both individual and team levels.

These findings highlight the broader importance of public service motivation (PSM) research, especially in relation to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions. Coccia (2021,[9]) supports this link by suggesting that good governance and effective institutions are essential in reducing poverty and inequality, which is particularly relevant to the sustainable development needs of regions like the Philippines' Caraga area. This research underscores the need to examine PSM not only for its effect on individual and organizational performance but also for its potential to contribute to societal goals. This study builds on this foundation, focusing on how these dynamics unfold within LGUs in the Caraga region to promote a motivated, effective public workforce.

PSM is influenced by various interrelated factors that affect public officials' engagement with their responsibilities. Hassan et al. (2021, [10]) assert that workplace spirituality improves employee well-being, therefore leading to elevated levels of PSM. This indicates that an environment promoting spiritual connection and support can result in more engaged and motivated employees in public service. Rifa'i et al. (2022, [11]) also discovered that Servant Leadership, which prioritizes serving others, markedly enhances PSM by aligning leadership practices with the fundamental ideals of public service. Lee et al. (2022, [12]) elucidate the significant impact of an ethical work climate, showcasing how an organization's ethical framework shapes employee attitudes, resulting in enhanced dedication to public service.

These findings center on Social Exchange Theory, which elucidates the interconnection of workplace culture, leadership, and PSM. Serang et al. (2024, [13]) assert that organizations that invest in ethical leadership, equitable HR policies, and employee well-being generate more motivation and commitment from employees in return. The researcher believes that this theory offers a thorough explanation of the influence of organizational values on PSM, emphasizing the necessity for leaders to foster ethical and supportive settings. Promoting servant leadership, workplace spirituality, and a strong ethical climate are essential measures for maintaining a motivated and committed public service workforce.

This research presents a conceptual framework, as seen in Figure 1 that explores the influence of external factors on PSM, a key internal factor, in light of the study's findings. Perry and Hondeghem (2008, [14]) characterize PSM as an individual's innate motivation to serve public interests. The PSM indicators include a preference for public sector work, commitment to public service, a sense of fairness and justice, responsibility to the public, empathy, and a willingness to sacrifice personal interests. The first external factor examined is servant leadership, which, according to Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011, [15]), is characterized by humble and authentic leadership that fosters stewardship, courage, respect, and acceptance of others. Key indicators of servant leadership include authentic leadership behavior, accountability, and stewardship.

The second external factor, ethical work climate, as conceptualized by Victor and Cullen (1988, [16]), focuses on the ethical environment within the organization. It is defined by orientations toward self-interest, others, and organizational principles. Indicators of this climate include self-serving behaviors, organizational protocols, team benefits, and adherence to legal and ethical standards. Lastly, workplace spirituality, grounded in the study by Pradhan et al. (2017, [17]), evaluates the role of spirituality in the workplace. It includes factors such as spiritual identity, tolerance, meaningful employment, and harmony between personal and organizational values. These variables together form the basis of this study's framework, assessing how they influence PSM within public organizations.
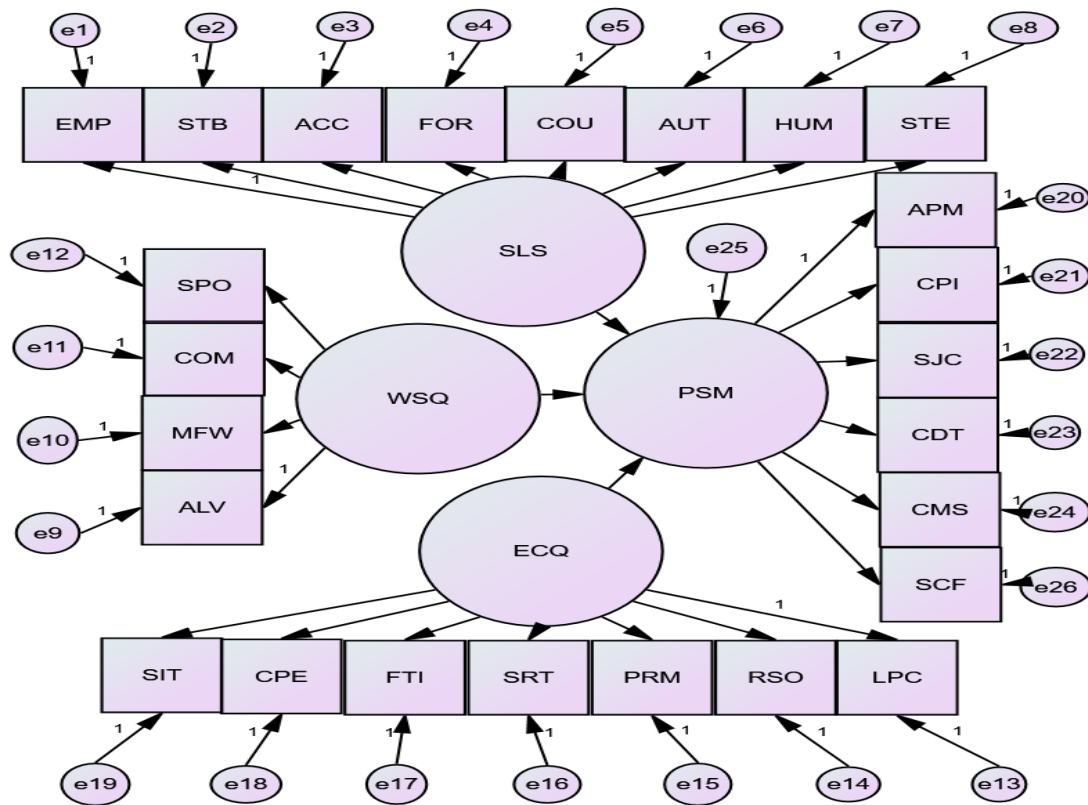
Legend:

PSM	Public Service Motivation	**ECQ**	Ethical Climate
APM	Attraction to Policy Making	**SIT**	Self-interest
CPI	Commitment the Public Interest	**CPE**	Company Profit Efficiency
SJC	Social Justice	**FTI**	Friendship, Team Interest
CDT	Civic Duty	**SRT**	Social Responsibility
CMD	Compassion	**PRM**	Personal Morality
SCF	Self-sacrifice	**RSO**	Rules, Standard Operating Procedures
SLS	Servant Leadership	**LPC**	Laws, Professional Codes
EMP	Empowerment	**WSQ**	Workplace Spirituality
STB	Standing back	**SPO**	Spiritual Orientation
ACC	Accountability	**COM**	Compassion
FOR	Forgiveness	**MFW**	Meaningful Work
COU	Courage	**ALV**	Alignment of Values
AUT	Authenticity		
HUM	Humility		
STE	Stewardship		

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The urgency of this study stems from a significant research gap in understanding the specific factors that influence Public Service Motivation (PSM) within local government units (LGUs) in the Caraga region. While PSM has been widely studied in other contexts, the distinct challenges faced by LGUs in this region—including widespread corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and declining employee motivation—remain underexplored. This gap presents an urgent need for targeted research that can identify management strategies to address these barriers and strengthen public service commitment. Through developing a structural equation model, this study aims to provide actionable insights that can inform policy and management practices, supporting LGUs in fostering an engaged, ethical, and dedicated workforce. Given PSM's critical role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) on peace, justice, and strong institutions, this research is timely, as it aligns with broader societal goals to create resilient public institutions that can better serve communities.

The researcher believes that these objectives of this study carry important global and societal significance, particularly in advancing our understanding of PSM. By addressing critical issues surrounding PSM, the study contributes to the global body of literature while aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which focuses

on promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive institutions. On a societal level, the research sheds light on the interconnectedness of workplace culture, leadership styles, and ethical climates in shaping PSM. This insight is especially valuable for local government units (LGUs), as it offers pathways to improving job satisfaction, service quality, and employee commitment—factors essential for efficient public service. Future researchers in this field will also benefit from the study, as it opens new avenues for exploring how to foster a more motivated and ethical public sector workforce, ultimately creating a positive ripple effect for communities and society at large..

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Thus, this study aims to describe the degree of servant leadership practiced among the unit heads in these units based on factors like empowering others, becoming a listening presence, accountability, forgiveness, taking risks for the greater good, embracing self-truth, leading without needing to control others, and leading as a steward. Secondly, in this study, it will be necessary to ascertain the level of workplace spirituality in these units. Workplace spirituality refers to the sense of community and interconnectedness among employees, and in this study, it is measured through items such as spiritual compass, care, meaningfulness, and organizational values.

Thirdly, it aims to determine the ethical status in the LGUs through self-interest, corporate profitability, friendliness, group interest, social obligation, individual morality, rules, standard operating procedures, and obedience to the laws and norms of professionalism. Fourthly, the research aims to characterize the level of PSM in these LGUs through the fundamental dimensions, which include policy attraction, commitment to public interest, social justice, perceived civic duty, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Also, its fifth aim is to determine the correlation between several factors, such as servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and PSM in LGUs. The sixth objective seeks to determine which variables influence PSM most. Moreover, the seventh research question aims to identify the best fit model for PSM within LGUs.

The hypotheses used in this study pertain to several critical concerns and dimensions of PSM about LGUs. Firstly, the null hypothesis is that there is no correlation between servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and PSM. Additionally, the study explores whether any variable beyond the factors considered has a significant impact solely on PSM within LGUs and whether the best model can accurately describe the factors that influence PSM in these units. Moreover, this study hypothesizes that there is no best-fit model for PSM in the context of LGUs in the Caraga Region.

II.   METHODOLOGY

Described in this section of the paper, are the respondents, materials and instrument and designed procedure employed in the study.

Participants of the Study

The study surveyed permanent rank-and-file employees of Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Caraga region of the Philippines, focusing on generating valuable insights into regional public administration. As of June 30, 2022, there were 13,567 permanent rank-and-file employees across LGUs in this region (Civil Service Commission, 2022, [18]).

To determine an appropriate sample size, the researcher consulted existing literature emphasizing the importance of sample adequacy in structural equation modeling. Shah and Goldstein (2006, [19]) suggested a minimum sample size of 200 to ensure robust data analysis, while Molwus et al. (2013, [20]) recommended a range of 100 to 400 respondents as sufficient for achieving accurate model estimations. Based on these guidelines, a sample size of 400 was chosen for this study to ensure methodological rigor and enhance confidence in the reliability of the results.

In the selection of participants, a stratified random sampling technique, as recommended by Arunachalam (2023, [21]), was employed. The process involved dividing the total population of rank-and-file employees into strata based on their respective cities, ensuring proportional representation. From each city, a proportional number of respondents (66 to 67) was allocated, matching the population size of each city's LGU employees. This approach helped ensure that each city's representation in the sample was proportional to its population size, thereby enhancing the accuracy of error estimation.

For inclusion and exclusion criteria, only permanent rank-and-file employees with at least three years of experience in LGU positions were included, ensuring a knowledgeable participant base. Ethical standards were rigorously followed throughout the study, with participants' rights being safeguarded; respondents participated

voluntarily and could opt out without facing any penalties. This carefully structured sampling strategy enhanced the validity of the findings while upholding participant autonomy and confidentiality.

Research Instruments

The researcher modified and contextualized the questionnaires for this research from online journal sources. To assess the level of servant leadership among the respondents, the researcher adapted a questionnaire from Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011, [15]). The questionnaire, which contained 30 items, based on the eight identified indicators. Recognizing the need to ascertain the state of spirituality at the workplace in the LGUs in the Caraga region, the researcher adapted a questionnaire developed by Pradhan et al. (2017, [17]). With 30 items, it comprised three components: organization, management, and employees.

To evaluate the ethical climate within LGUs in Caraga, the researcher utilized the questionnaire created by Victor and Cullen in 1987 and 1988 [16]. It consisted of seven indicators and a total of 36 items. To assess the degree of PSM among LGU employees in the region, the researcher borrowed Perry's (1996, [22]) questionnaire. This questionnaire comprised six indicators and 40 items gauged employee motivation regarding public institutions.

The research paper underwent a relentless process of continuous improvement. The researcher first submitted it to his research adviser for evaluation and suggestions to improve its presentation. The advisor's recommendations guided the implementation of amendments prior to data collection. The revised paper incorporates the discovered mistakes, comments, and suggestions offered by professional validators. The panel of experts and external evaluators further improved and confirmed the final version, ensuring the highest quality of research.

The researcher meticulously assembled a team of experienced validators to ensure the validity of the questionnaires. Five internal validators, each with a profound understanding of the research area, rigorously reviewed the questionnaire. Additionally, an external validator, an esteemed expert in the field, provided their invaluable insights. All validators meticulously evaluated the research questionnaire on a 1 to 5 scale, thoroughly analyzing the reliability and validity of the questions. In terms of validation, the questionnaires were evaluated by internal and external validators, with an overall rating of 4.51, classified as "Very Good." Individual ratings varied slightly among validators, with two internal validators rating the questionnaires as "Excellent" (score of 5.00), while others rated them between 4.00 and 4.69, indicating a strong consensus on the questionnaires' validity.

The researcher established the research questionnaire's validity through face validity and content validity, and determined its reliability through a pilot test involving 30 LGU members from other regions. The reliability pilot testing results for each variable showed excellent internal consistency across all constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha values as follows: Servant Leadership scored 0.977, Ethical Climate scored 0.968, Workplace Spirituality scored 0.988, and Public Service Motivation scored 0.958. Each variable surpassed the threshold of 0.90, indicating excellent reliability.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized a quantitative, descriptive-predictive study approach. This research design is particularly suitable for structural equation modeling (SEM) due to the complexity of the relationships between variables. Hidayat and Wulandari (2022, [23]) provided support for this quantitative and descriptive-predictive design, highlighting the effectiveness of SEM in predicting unknown variables and measuring errors. The study, slated for the summer of the 2024-2025 academic year, commenced after receiving panel permission. The researcher commenced data collection by officially seeking authorization from the Dean of the University of Mindanao graduate school and the mayors of the six cities in the CARAGA Region. To ensure compliance with ethical standards, the researcher submitted the required documents to the ethics committee for thorough evaluation.

After securing the approval, the researcher gave the respondents a detailed briefing about the study's goal. Afterward, the researcher offered a comprehensive elucidation of each questionnaire item to guarantee the integrity and dependability of the findings. After finishing the surveys, the researcher collected and examined them under the supervision of a statistician. The study derived conclusions and generated suggestions from its findings, employing a range of statistical methodologies. The researcher used the means to evaluate the perceived servant leadership of unit heads, workplace spirituality, ethical cultures, and public service motivation among employees. The researcher also employed the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) to establish the associations among these variables and used regression analysis to identify the independent variable with the most significant influence. Additionally, the researcher used SEM to identify the most suitable model for evaluating public service motivation among LGU employees in the Caraga region's six cities.

The researcher analyzed the participants' responses using a comprehensive scale. The scale ranged from a very high level of expression for the independent variables (such as servant leadership of LGU unit heads, workplace spirituality, and ethical climate) to the dependent variable (the PSM), with a mean score between 4.20 and 5.00, indicating a very high level. A mean score of 3.40 to 4.19 indicates a high level with the variables commonly seen. A

range of 2.60–3.39 indicates a moderate level, where individuals only occasionally notice the manifestations of the variables. A range of 1.80–2.59 indicates a low level, where the respondents rarely detect the occurrence of situations. Ultimately, a mean value ranging from 1.00 to 1.79 signifies a highly minimal level, where the occurrences of variables were hardly recorded.

This study employed the SEM, which involved several essential phases. These steps included defining the structural model, calculating the regression coefficients between latent variables, and assessing how well the model fits the data. The researcher evaluated the model's goodness of fit using several fit indices, such as the chi-square statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The researcher conducted the evaluation of goodness of fit measures using specific criteria, which included a p-value above 0.05, a CMIN/DF value ranging from 0 to 2, a GFI above 0.95, a CFI above 0.95, an NFI above 0.95, a TLI above 0.95, an RMSEA below 0.05, and a P-close value above 0.05. The evaluation criteria used in this study were rigorous to ensure that the structural equation model used was adequate and appropriate.

Ethical Consideration

This investigation adhered to the guidelines provided by the University of Mindanao Ethics and Review Committee (UMERC) to ensure the production of ethically sound results. This procedure helped to guarantee people's voluntary agreement to participate in the survey, non-disclosure of their identity, along with other measures concerning their anonymity, minimization of possible dangers, and highlighting of relative benefits. With that adherence to the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) issued a Certificate of Approval on April 29, 2024 with protocol, numbered UMERC-2024-208.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents and discusses the data collected and evaluated on the servant leadership of unit heads, workplace spirituality and ethical climate, and public service motivation of local government unit personnel.

3.1 Servant Leadership among Unit Heads in Local Government Units

In table 1 shows that the overall mean level of servant leadership among unit heads of local government units is high, with a mean score of 3.96. This high overall mean reflects a strong presence of servant leadership qualities among these leaders. Empowerment and stewardship are the most prominent indicators, scoring the highest at 4.12 and 4.16, respectively, suggesting that unit heads prioritize empowering their teams and practicing responsible leadership. Conversely, authenticity has the lowest mean score at 3.79, although it remains within the high descriptive level, indicating it is still a significant trait among the unit heads. The standard deviation values show some variability in responses, particularly for courage (SD=0.93), standing back (SD=0.88), and stewardship (SD=0.89), suggesting some diversity in how these traits are perceived or practiced among respondents. Despite this variability, all indicators fall under the high descriptive level, reinforcing the robust presence of servant leadership attributes.

Table 1. Level of Servant Leadership among Unit Heads

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Empowerment	0.78	4.12	High
Standing Back	0.88	3.83	High
Accountability	0.81	4.07	High
Forgiveness	0.83	4.03	High
Courage	0.93	3.81	High
Authenticity	0.83	3.79	High

Humility	0.83	3.91	High
Stewardship	0.89	4.16	High
Overall	**0.68**	**3.96**	**High**

The high levels of servant leadership, particularly in empowerment and stewardship, imply that unit heads in local government units are committed to fostering an environment where employees feel valued and trusted. This leadership approach likely enhances employee motivation, commitment, and engagement, contributing positively to organizational outcomes. However, the relatively lower mean in authenticity may point to areas where leaders could further strengthen transparency and genuineness in their interactions, possibly influencing employee trust and loyalty more significantly.

These findings align with the study conducted in the Davao Region, which found very high levels of servant leadership among government employees, positively affecting job satisfaction and engagement (Montejo &Bandiola, 2023, [24]). Servant leadership has been shown to foster organizational commitment and positive work behaviors (Noordin, 2019, [25]). Additionally, while this leadership style is prevalent among school heads in Asuncion District, Santo Tomas, and Davao del Norte, it does not necessarily influence teachers' social and emotional competencies directly (Alibangbang&Tagadiad, 2023, [26]). These results suggest that servant leadership is widely valued in government settings across Mindanao, positively impacting organizational health and employee well-being.

3.2 Ethical Climate in Local Government Units

Table 2 illustrates that the overall mean level of ethical climate among employees in local government units is high, with a score of 3.93, reflecting a generally strong ethical environment. The highest mean, at 4.25, is observed for "Laws, Professional Codes," which falls into the very high descriptive level, indicating a strong adherence to legal and professional standards. On the other hand, "Self-interest" has the lowest mean score of 3.38, placing it in the moderate descriptive level, suggesting that self-interest is less emphasized among employees. The standard deviations range from 0.59 to 0.90, showing moderate variability in responses across indicators, particularly for "Self-interest," which has the highest variability (SD=0.90), implying differences in how this trait is valued or practiced.

Table 2. *Level of Ethical Climate*

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Self-interest	0.90	3.38	Moderate
Company Profit Efficiency	0.71	3.85	High
Friendship, Team Interest	0.81	3.93	High
Social Responsibility	0.74	4.12	High
Personal Morality	0.77	3.91	High
Rules, Standard Operating Procedures	0.75	4.08	High
Laws, Professional Codes	0.78	4.25	Very High
Overall	**0.59**	**3.93**	**High**

These findings suggest that the ethical climate within local government units is robust, especially in terms of compliance with laws and adherence to professional codes. The high mean scores for indicators like "Social Responsibility," "Rules, Standard Operating Procedures," and "Personal Morality" point to a work culture that values

collective accountability and moral standards, likely enhancing employee collaboration and public trust. However, the moderate score in "Self-interest" may indicate a balanced approach, where personal gains are not prioritized over collective goals, fostering a stronger team-oriented environment.

These results align with findings from previous studies on ethics within Philippine organizations. For instance, Benedicto and Caelian (2020, [27]) found a positive correlation between government employees' performance and work ethics. Similarly, teachers in Surigao del Sur exhibited exemplary work ethics, which significantly enhanced total quality management within the Department of Education (Loren, 2023, [28]), although this divisional study may not generalize to other regions. Peñaredondo-Untong (2020, [29]) also reported that employees in Region XII's state universities and colleges ranked professional values as "excellent," showing a strong link between ethical climate and productivity across their roles. Loren and Sucuahi's (2023, [30]) research further supports these findings, indicating that employees in Caraga Region, including those in private sectors like rural banks, demonstrate high professional integrity and compliance with legal standards, with "self-interest" similarly at a moderate level, underscoring a workplace culture grounded in ethical responsibility.

3.3 Workplace Spirituality in Local Government Units

Table 3 shows that the overall mean level of workplace spirituality among employees in local government units is high, with a score of 3.98, indicating a substantial presence of spiritual values in the workplace. Among the indicators, "Meaningful Work" and "Compassion" have the highest mean scores, at 4.08 and 3.93, respectively, highlighting that employees feel a deep sense of purpose and care in their work environment. Conversely, "Spiritual Orientation" has the lowest mean at 3.90, though it still falls within the high descriptive level, showing it is moderately present. The standard deviations, which range from 0.65 to 0.76, reflect consistent variability across indicators, suggesting that employees generally share similar perceptions of workplace spirituality.

Table 3. *Level of Workplace Spirituality*

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Spiritual orientation	0.73	3.90	High
Compassion	0.71	3.93	High
Meaningful Work	0.74	4.08	High
Alignment of Values	0.76	4.02	High
Overall	**0.65**	**3.98**	**High**

The high level of workplace spirituality, particularly the emphasis on meaningful work, suggests that employees find personal and collective purpose in their roles, which can positively impact motivation, job satisfaction, and retention. The strong mean for alignment of values indicates that employees' personal values are in harmony with organizational goals, potentially fostering a supportive and fulfilling work environment. The slightly lower score in spiritual orientation may indicate an area where fostering deeper personal spiritual connection at work could further enhance employees' experiences and sense of belonging.

These findings align with existing literature on workplace spirituality in the public sector. Similar to this study, Hassan et al. (2022, [31]) found that workplace spirituality benefits employees by reducing work–family conflict, underscoring its role in improving well-being. Additionally, Kumari and Tiwari (2023, [32]) found that meaningful work was consistently valued most in workplace spirituality, highlighting its importance across sectors. Oderinde's (2022, [33]) research also supports these results, showing that workplace spirituality, meaningful work, and value alignment strongly predict affective commitment among public sector employees, confirming that workplace spirituality enhances engagement and loyalty among staff.

3.4 Public Service Motivation among Employees in Local Government Units

The data in Table 4 reveal that the overall mean level of Public Service Motivation (PSM) among employees in local government units is high, with an overall mean score of 3.98. This strong level of motivation across all indicators reflects a collective commitment to public service values. Among the indicators, "Civic Duty" holds the highest mean score at 4.06, suggesting that employees feel a strong sense of responsibility towards public service. "Self-sacrifice," with the lowest mean score at 3.86, remains within the high range, indicating that while employees are motivated by selfless service, it is relatively less emphasized than other aspects. The low standard deviations, such as 0.64 for the overall score, indicate a closely clustered set of responses, suggesting a shared, cohesive sense of motivation among employees.

The high level of motivation in these areas implies that employees in local government units are deeply driven by a sense of duty, commitment to social justice, and a desire to positively influence society. This pervasive motivation is likely beneficial for employee engagement, job satisfaction, and dedication to public sector goals. The slightly lower emphasis on self-sacrifice could suggest that, while employees are committed, they may also value maintaining a balanced approach to work and personal well-being.

Table 4. Level of Public Service Motivation among Employees

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Attraction to policy-making	0.74	4.01	High
Commitment to the Public Interest	0.72	3.96	High
Social Justice	0.73	4.02	High
Civic Duty	0.75	4.06	High
Compassions	0.80	3.99	High
Self-sacrifice	0.74	3.86	High
Overall	**0.64**	**3.98**	**High**

These findings align with existing research on public service motivation in local government. For instance, Zhang (2023, [34]) found that public service motivation is positively related to job satisfaction, particularly by reducing feelings of role overload. Castello (2020, [35]) similarly noted that self-sacrifice often scores lower among PSM indicators, supporting the idea that employees prioritize their own well-being alongside their dedication to public service. Loren (2024, [36]) revealed the same opinion, highlighting the impact of professional development and leadership improvement on motivation.

With Loren's study, it can be concluded that targeted training would increase the effectiveness of behavior and results in academic environments. When implemented in public service, nurturing leadership personality and availing opportunities for employee professional development enhance PSM while fulfilling individual and organizational needs for professional work-life balance. These studies reinforce the importance of understanding PSM's different dimensions and the impact of organizational factors when examining motivation in the public sector.

3.5 Significance of the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Public Service Motivation

Table 5.1 presents a significant positive correlation between servant leadership and public service motivation among employees of local government units, with p-values at .000 across various dimensions. This consistently low

significance level indicates that each dimension of servant leadership has a highly significant relationship with aspects of public service motivation, providing a strong basis to reject the null hypothesis. These findings confirm that servant leadership has a positive association on public service motivation in this context.

The implications of this positive relationship are substantial for local government units, as it suggests that promoting servant leadership practices—such as empowerment, accountability, and stewardship—may effectively enhance employees' motivation to serve the public. Since servant leadership emphasizes qualities like standing back, humility, and authenticity, its application can foster a work environment that aligns closely with the values of public service motivation, potentially leading to increased engagement and commitment to public duties among employees.

Table 5.1. Significance of the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Public Service Motivation

Servant Leadership	Public Service Motivation						
	ATP	CPI	SOJ	CID	CMP	SES	**Overall**
Empowerment	.412**	.421**	.388**	.402**	.385**	.380**	**.468****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Standing Back	.311**	.317**	.299**	.360**	.315**	.314**	**.376****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Accountability	.399**	.414**	.431**	.385**	.333**	.319**	**.447****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Forgiveness	.383**	.409**	.343**	.396**	.355**	.387**	**.446****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Courage	.296**	.316**	.312**	.339**	.305**	.322**	**.370****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Authenticity	.363**	.394**	.323**	.387**	.323**	.352**	**.420****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Humility	.326**	.336**	.305**	.349**	.293**	.298**	**.374****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Stewardship	.362**	.350**	.387**	.389**	.355**	.317**	**.424****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Overall	**.441****	**.457****	**.432****	**.466****	**.413****	**.417****	**.515****
	.000	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**

Legend:
ATP Attraction to Policy Making   **SOJ** Social Justice   **CMP** Compassion
CPI Commitment the Public Interest   **CID** Civic Duty   **SES** Self-sacrifice

These results are supported by previous studies, such as Shim and Park (2019, [8]), who found that servant leadership is a valuable strategy for increasing public service motivation in government settings. Additionally, Vuong (2023, [37]) demonstrated that servant leadership positively impacts job performance by encouraging innovative work behaviors, an effect that is especially evident among employees with high public service motivation. Together, these

findings underscore the importance of servant leadership in public sector management, suggesting it can play a critical role in improving both individual performance and overall organizational success.

3.6 Significance of the Relationship between Ethical Climate and Public Service Motivation

Table 5.2 highlights a significant positive relationship between the ethical climate and public service motivation (PSM) among employees in local government units. Each ethical climate dimension—including self-interest, company profit efficiency, friendship and team interest, social responsibility, personal morality, rules and standard operating procedures, and laws and professional codes—demonstrates highly significant correlations with various aspects of PSM, as indicated by p-values at .000 across the board. These consistent significance levels suggest a clear rejection of the null hypothesis, affirming that ethical climate significantly associated with PSM.

The implications of this strong positive relationship are noteworthy for public administration. A well-established ethical climate in local government PSM units appears to foster a workplace culture that aligns closely with the principles of public service motivation, such as civic duty, commitment to the public interest, and compassion. By emphasizing ethics and moral responsibility, local governments can support and enhance employee motivation, leading to greater dedication and ethical decision-making in public service roles.

Table 5.2. Significance of the Relationship between Ethical Climate and Public Service Motivation

Ethical Climate	Public Service Motivation						
	ATP	CPI	SOJ	CID	CMP	SES	Overall
Self-interest	.142**	.170**	.146**	.124*	.210**	.246**	**.205****
	.004	.001	.003	.013	.000	.000	**.000**
Company Profit Efficiency	.294**	.367**	.311**	.371**	.297**	.368**	**.393****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Friendship, Team Interest	.323**	.371**	.332**	.397**	.274**	.409**	**.412****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Social Responsibility	.358**	.408**	.373**	.408**	.320**	.379**	**.440****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Personal Morality	.318**	.359**	.326**	.326**	.273**	.385**	**.389****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Rules, Standard Operating Procedures	.374**	.400**	.431**	.404**	.289**	.348**	**.439****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Laws, Professional Codes	.312**	.358**	.365**	.367**	.257**	.298**	**.383****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Overall	**.393****	**.451****	**.423****	**.444****	**.359****	**.454****	**.494****
	.000	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**

Legend:
ATP Attraction to Policy Making   **SOJ** Social Justice   **CMP** Compassion
CPI Commitment the Public Interest   **CID** Civic Duty   **SES** Self-sacrifice

These findings align with previous research, including Shim and Park (2019, [8]), who noted a substantial link between ethical climate and PSM on a personal level, though not necessarily at the workgroup level. Such evidence underscores the importance of nurturing an ethical climate in local government organizations to strengthen ethical behavior and reinforce public service motivation among employees.

3.7 Significance of the Relationship between Workplace Spirituality and Public Service Motivation

Table 5.3 presents a significant positive correlation between workplace spirituality and public service motivation (PSM) among local government unit (LGU) employees. Each component of workplace spirituality—spiritual orientation, compassion, meaningful work, and value alignment—shows a consistently strong and statistically significant relationship with various aspects of PSM, with p-values below .000.

Table 5.3. Significance of the Relationship between Workplace Spirituality and Public Service Motivation

Workplace Spirituality	Public Service Motivation						
	ATP	CPI	SOJ	CID	CMP	SES	**Overall**
Spiritual orientation	.490**	.528**	.485**	.544**	.440**	.534**	**.592****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Compassion	.509**	.542**	.553**	.540**	.506**	.500**	**.618****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Meaningful Work	.472**	.527**	.477**	.527**	.413**	.491**	**.569****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Alignment of Values	.453**	.529**	.502**	.543**	.447**	.484**	**.579****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Overall	**.542****	**.599****	**.568****	**.607****	**.508****	**.566****	**.665****
	.000	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**

Legend:
ATP Attraction to Policy Making   **SOJ** Social Justice   **CMP** Compassion
CPI Commitment the Public Interest   **CID** Civic Duty   **SES** Self-sacrifice

This consistent significance level across all components allows for a firm rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that workplace spirituality has a positive association on PSM. These findings align with previous research, including that of Hassan et al. (2022, [31]), which also highlighted the positive effect of workplace spirituality on employee well-being and motivation in the public sector.

Similarly, a study by Agus Dwi Raditya and Ida Bagus Ketut Surya (2021, [38]) supported the positive impact of both workplace spirituality and servant leadership on PSM, which, in turn, enhances job engagement. These studies emphasize the value of workplace spirituality in public sector organizations as a means to foster employee dedication and support performance-based management practices.

3.8 Influence of Servant Leadership, Ethical Climate and Workplace Spirituality on the Public Service Motivation of Employee in Local Government Units

Table 6 presents the regression results, showing that servant leadership, ethical climate, and workplace spirituality each significantly influence Public Service Motivation (PSM) among employees of local government units. Servant leadership (p = .001), ethical climate (p = .000), and workplace spirituality (p = .000) all demonstrate statistically significant positive impacts on PSM, as reflected in their low p-values. The overall model is highly significant (p < .000) with an F value of 127.130, indicating a well-fitting model that explains 49.1% of the variance in PSM (R^2 = .491). Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that these factors collectively enhance PSM, with workplace spirituality showing the strongest influence on PSM.

The implications of these findings are noteworthy, as they highlight the role of leadership style, organizational ethics, and a spiritually supportive work environment in fostering motivation for public service among government employees. Emphasizing workplace spirituality in particular could be an effective strategy to enhance employee motivation, as it contributes the most substantial influence on PSM. This suggests that local government units may benefit from policies and practices that foster a supportive, ethical, and spiritually aligned workplace to elevate employees' dedication to public service roles.

Table 6. Influence of Servant Leadership, Ethical Climate and Workplace Spirituality on the Public Service Motivation of Employees in Local Government Units

Public Service Motivation				
(Variables)	*B*	β	*t*	*Sig.*
Constant	.782		4.495	.000
Servant Leadership	.142	.152	3.330	.001
Ethical Climate	.180	.168	3.840	.000

Workplace Spirituality		.484	.495	10.910	.000
	R	.700			
	R²	.491			
	ΔR	.487			
	F	127.130			
	ρ	.000			

Previous research supports these findings, showing a strong link between servant leadership, ethical climate, and workplace spirituality with increased PSM. Shim and Park (2019, [8]) and Vuong (2023, [37]) found that servant leadership enhances PSM both individually and within teams. Additionally, Shim and Park noted that ethical climate, through factors like efficiency and adherence to rules, is positively associated with PSM. Hassan et al. (2022, [31]) further corroborate the role of workplace spirituality, indicating that it enhances PSM by promoting employee well-being. Agus Dwi Raditya and Ida Bagus Ketut Surya (2021, [38]) also found that these factors improve work engagement and job performance, reinforcing the importance of cultivating an organizational culture focused on leadership, ethics, and spirituality to strengthen public service motivation among local government employees.

3.9 Best Fit Model of Public Service Motivation

This section examines the connections between the variables in the study. To determine the most accurate model for the PSM of local government employees in the Caraga Region, we created five models. The researcher evaluated the models using the provided fit indices, which served as the basis for accepting or rejecting the model.

Table 7 presents a comprehensive summary of the goodness of fit measures for the five models we generated. The researcher rigorously evaluated these models using a range of indices: CMIN/DF, GFI, CFI, NFI, TLI, RMSEA, and P-Close. We established specific criteria for each index: CMIN/DF should be less than 2, GFI, CFI, NFI, and TLI should all be greater than 0.95, RMSEA should be less than 0.05, and P-Close should be greater than 0.05. By comparing the fit values of each model against these criteria, we were able to assess whether the models adequately fit the data, providing valuable insights into our research methodology. From this evaluation, it becomes evident that Models 1 to 4, in particular, did not meet the established criteria and highlight why they are not the best fit for the study.

Table 7. Summary of Goodness of Fit Measures of the Five Generated Models

Model	P-value (>0.05)	CMIN/DF (0<value<2)	GFI (>0.95)	CFI (>0.95)	NFI (>0.95)	TLI (>0.95)	RMSEA (<0.05)	P-close (>0.05)
1	.000	4.835	.785	.864	.835	.850	.098	.000
2	.000	4.264	.811	.885	.856	.872	.090	.000
3	.000	3.940	.820	.897	.867	.885	.086	.000
4	.000	3.743	.826	.904	.874	.893	.083	.000
5	.078	1.262	.973	.995	.979	.993	.026	.996

Legend: CMIN/DF – *Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom*   NFI –*Normed Fit Index*
GFI   – Goodness *of Fit Index*   TLI -*Tucker-Lewis Index*
RMSEA – *Root Mean Square of Error Approximation*
CFI–Comparative *Fit Index*

For instance, Model 2 exhibited a CFI of 0.811 and an RMSEA of 0.09, both falling short of the acceptable thresholds, indicating poor alignment between the observed and predicted data. Similarly, Model 4 presented a high CMIN/DF value of 3.743 and an RMSEA of 0.083, suggesting significant misfit and deviations in representing the underlying relationships among variables. These shortcomings emphasize how these models either oversimplified critical pathways or introduced unnecessary complexity, underscoring the importance of refining the model structure to achieve better statistical and theoretical coherence.

Model 5 stands out as the only model that meets all the criteria, with a CMIN/DF of 1.262, GFI of.973, CFI of.995, NFI of.979, TLI of.993, RMSEA of.026, and P-Close of.996. These results, based on the CMIN/DF, TLI, CFI, NFI, and GFI indices and the RMSEA and P-Close indices and showing a great fit (Kline, 2023, [39]). In contrast, Models 1, 2, 3, and 4 do not meet the criteria, with CMIN/DF values greater than two and fit indices below 0.95, indicating poor fit. As a result, the researcher rejects the hypothesis that no model best fits the PSM of LGUs, concluding that Model 5 provides a significantly better fit than the others.

Table 8. *Regression Weights of the 5 Generated Models*

	Exogenous Variables to Endogenous Variable		
Model	**Servant Leadership**	**Ethical Climate**	**Workplace Spirituality**
1	.122***	.476***	.459***
2	.123**	.425**	.459***
3	.114*	.400*	.464***
4	.094NS	.425**	.471***
5	.132*	.425*	.469***

P*<0.05
P**<0.01
P***=0.000

Table 8 presents the regression weights of five models designed to examine the impact of three external factors—servant leadership, ethical climate, and workplace spirituality—on an internal factor, most likely PSM in Local Government Units. Each model's coefficients have significance levels ranging from non-significant (NS) to highly significant (***). The table indicates that ethical climate and workplace spirituality consistently show significant positive relationships with the endogenous variable across all models. At the same time, servant leadership's influence varies, being non-significant in Model 4 and less consistent in other models.

Regarding the hypothesis that "there is no model that best fits the PSM of LGUs," the decision focuses on Model 5 as the best fit. Model 5 exhibits significant coefficients for servant leadership, ethical climate, and workplace spirituality, with ethical climate and workplace spirituality showing substantial positive impacts (both significant at P<0.05). This result suggests that among the tested models, Model 5 provides the most comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing PSM, demonstrating that combining these exogenous variables can effectively boost the endogenous variable.

Figure 2 presents a structural equation model that illustrates the connections between servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and public service motivation. The analysis of Model 5 and the conceptual model reveals specific indicators retained within each variable, highlighting their significance and implications. For Servant Leadership (SLS), the indicators that remain include Empowerment (EMP), Standing Back (STB), Forgiveness (FOR), and Stewardship (STE). These aspects showcase a leadership approach that prioritizes employee support and development, which promotes a culture of trust and empowerment within the organization.

In the Ethical Climate (ECQ), indicators like Self-Interest (SEI), Company Profit Efficiency (CPE), Friendship/Team Interest (FTI), and Social Responsibility (SOR) represent a balance between individual, team, and organizational priorities, fostering a moral environment that values both personal and communal goals. For Workplace Spirituality (WSQ), indicators such as Spiritual Orientation (SPO), Meaningful Work (MEW), and Alignment of Values (AOV)

emphasize a sense of purpose and connection for employees, aligned with the organization's values. Lastly, Public Service Motivation (PSM) includes Attraction to Policy Making (ATP), Commitment to Social Justice (SOJ), and Civic Duty (CID), which collectively underscore an employee's intrinsic drive to contribute positively to society, enhancing their sense of purpose in public service. These indicators and their interplay suggest that servant leadership can create an ethical climate that supports public service motivation, ultimately fostering workplace spirituality.

Figure 2 depicts how servant leadership positively impacts both the ethical climate and public service motivation, indicating that an organization led by servant leaders will likely see employees who are ethically minded, motivated to serve, and spiritually fulfilled. Servant leadership, through empathy, ethical responsibility, and support, encourages employees to act with integrity and social responsibility. This, in turn, strengthens public service motivation, fostering a deeper alignment between individual and organizational values, and enhancing workplace spirituality..
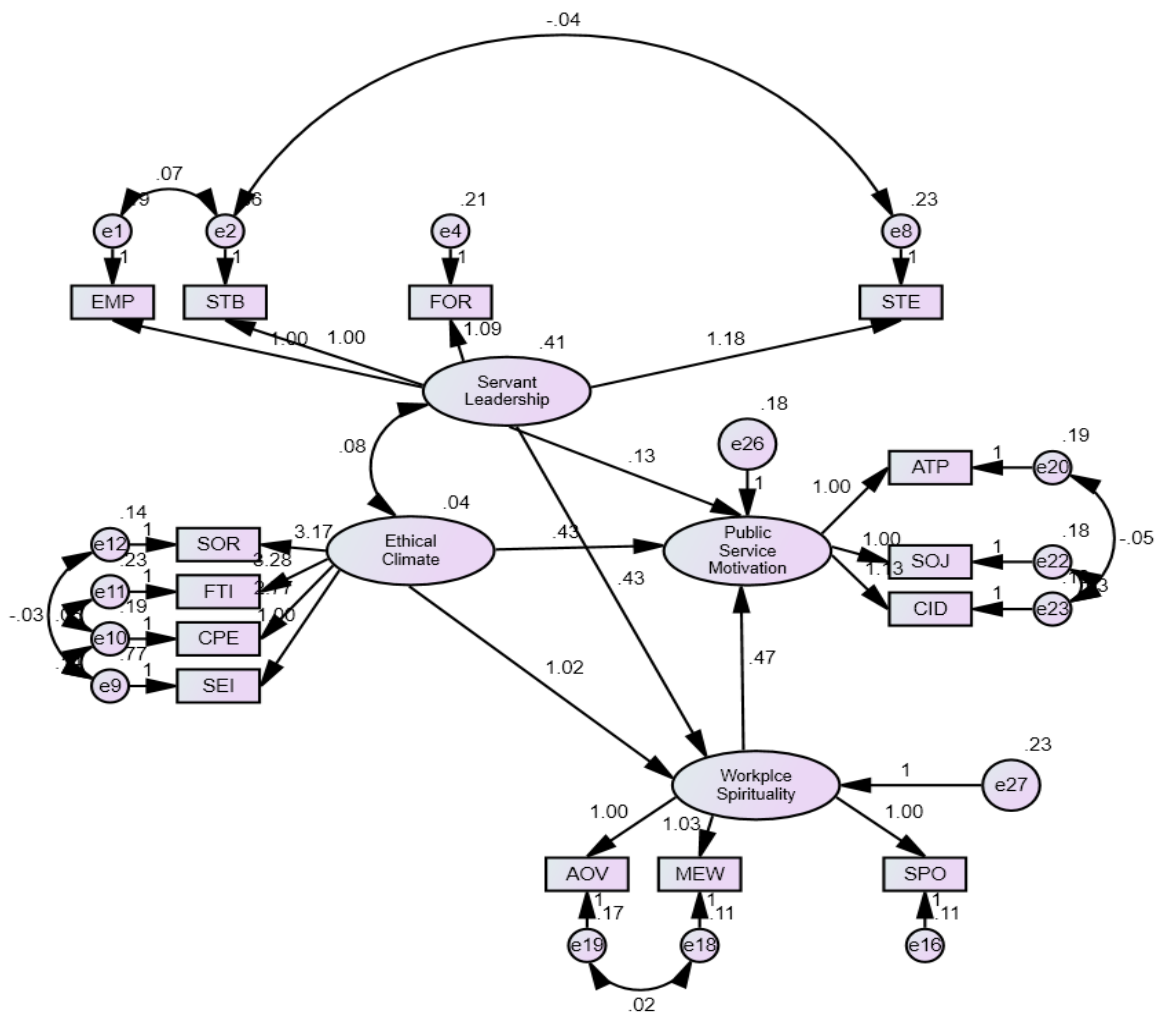
Legend:

ATP	Attraction to Policy Making	**SEI**	Self-interest
SOJ	Social Justice	**CPE**	Company Profit Efficiency
CID	Civic Duty	**FTI**	Friendship, Team Interest
EMP	Empowerment	**SOR**	Social Responsibility
STB	Standing back	**SPO**	Spiritual Orientation
FOR	Forgiveness	**MEW**	Meaningful Work
STE	Stewardship	**AOV**	Alignment of Values

Fig.2Best Fit Model 5 in Standard Solution

For example, a unit head who practices servant leadership could cultivate an environment of open communication, active listening, and moral guidance, creating a supportive and ethically sound workplace. Research by Widayanthi et

al. (2024, [40]) supports this model, showing a link between servant leadership and workplace spirituality, which enriches the work atmosphere. Similarly, Shim and Park (2019, [8]) highlight the positive impact of servant leadership and ethical climate on public service motivation, emphasizing its significance at both the individual and group levels among government employees.

Moreover, Hassan et al. (2022, [31]) found a positive relationship between public service motivation and workplace spirituality within the public sector, showing that workplace spirituality enhances employees' well-being and sense of meaning. This reinforces the model's assertion that an integrated approach—combining servant leadership, ethical climate, public service motivation, and workplace spirituality—fosters a motivated, ethically grounded, and spiritually enriched public service workforce. Organizations that adopt this model can improve employee morale and create a culture of public service values, ultimately enhancing service quality and employee fulfillment.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's descriptive findings indicate that LGU unit heads had a high level of servant leadership. Among the indicators, empowerment and stewardship received the most significant scores, while authenticity received the lowest. Although there were differences in the responses, especially in courage, standing back, and stewardship, all indicators consistently demonstrated a high level of servant leadership attributes. Similarly, the ethical climate among LGU personnel was predominantly high, as evidenced by the highest mean score for "Laws, Professional Codes," indicating a very high level, and "self-interest," indicating a moderate level. The standard deviations exhibited heterogeneity among many metrics.

Moreover, the degree of workplace spirituality among LGU employees remained consistently high, with compassion and meaningful work achieving the most significant average scores, while spiritual orientation obtained the lowest score. According to multiple measures, PSM was consistently high among employees. Civic responsibility was the highest scoring signal, while self-sacrifice was the lowest.

The inferential analysis revealed strong positive correlations between servant leadership, ethical climate, and workplace spirituality with PSM among LGU employees. The correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship between all dimensions of servant leadership and characteristics of PSM, which supports rejecting the null hypothesis. Similarly, several characteristics of the ethical climate, such as self-interest, firm profit efficiency, and social responsibility, have shown significant positive connections with elements of PSM. The results also indicated that various aspects of workplace spirituality, such as spiritual orientation, compassion, meaningful work, and value alignment, were firmly and statistically significantly related to PSM. Regression analysis provided additional evidence that servant leadership, ethical climate, and workplace spirituality substantially impacted public service motivation. The SEM analysis results indicated that Model 5 demonstrated a superior fit based on many indices. This finding confirms that Model 5 is the most appropriate model for evaluating public service motivation among LGU employees.

The results of this investigation corroborated the research's theoretical foundations. The theoretical framework suggests that servant leadership, ethical atmosphere, and workplace spirituality are vital in determining public service motivation. The robust positive correlations and the substantial influence of these variables on PSM have substantiated the soundness of the theoretical framework. The SEM revealed positive correlations between servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and PSM, which align with the postulated theoretical associations. The results of this study confirmed the theoretical assumptions. They showed the practical importance of promoting servant leadership, a robust ethical environment, and workplace spirituality to increase PSM among LGU personnel.

The study's findings suggest that LGUs and associated stakeholders should prioritize the improvement of servant leadership, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and PSM. The entire community will benefit from these recommendations, which aim to cultivate a more efficient and driven public service staff. First, LGUs can improve servant leadership authenticity by implementing focused training programs. Leaders can enhance their authenticity by participating in workshops and seminars emphasizing self-awareness, honest communication, and ethical decision-making. Engaging in mentorship programs, where seasoned leaders provide guidance and support to emerging leaders, can significantly increase the development of genuine leadership skills.

Another approach is to establish ethics committees to supervise and encourage ethical conduct, which is a viable way to improve the ethical environment inside LGUs. In addition, conducting frequent ethics training sessions highlighting the significance of placing the public's welfare above personal interests can enhance employees' comprehension and application of ethical principles. Ethical leadership is essential for supporting ethical behavior.

Furthermore, encouraging a focus on spirituality in the workplace can improve employee involvement and overall welfare. LGUs can implement spiritual development initiatives that encourage and support personnel in exploring and

enhancing their spiritual beliefs and values. Mindfulness courses, meditation sessions, and reflective practices can improve spiritual well-being.

Aside from that, to enhance self-sacrifice in the incentive for public service, LGUs might establish recognition and reward mechanisms that acknowledge acts of self-sacrifice. Recognizing and honoring employees who exceed expectations in their service to the public helps cultivate a culture that values selflessness. Promoting engagement in volunteer programs, where employees actively contribute to community service projects, can enhance public service motivation and selflessness. Studies indicate that self-sacrifice is vital in promoting ethical conduct and facilitating organizational transformation.

Finally, LGUs can implement Model 5 to achieve ongoing enhancement by consistently evaluating and overseeing PSM among their staff. This model can offer valuable insights and aid in making data-driven decisions to achieve continuous improvement. By implementing these recommendations, LGUs can enhance servant leadership qualities, foster a strong ethical climate, promote workplace spirituality, and ultimately increase employee PSM. These actions will contribute to more effective and motivated public service delivery, benefiting the community.

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