# Meaningful Work's Ripple Effect: Understanding Employee Helping Behavior through Internalization and Self-Esteem

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of meaningful work behavior on the helping behavior of employees. Further, the purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of value internalization and self-esteem between meaningful work behavior and the helping behavior of employees. The researcher used quantitative research methodology and a positivist research philosophy to conduct this research. The researcher targeted service sector employees to collect data through an adopted questioner. The researcher used a non-probability convenience technique to collect data from respondents. The researcher used item-rate theory to draw a sample size of 310 employees. The researcher selects a non-probability-purposive technique for collecting data from respondents. The findings of the study revealed that self-esteem has a direct and significant relationship with meaningful work. Additionally, the findings indicated a positive and significant direct impact of meaningful work and value internalization. The findings also revealed a significant and positive relationship between self-esteem, value internalization, and helping behavior. Lastly, the findings of this study intended that self-esteem and value internalization sequentially mediate the relationship between meaningful work and helping behaviour. This study has practical implications for all service sector organizations in which employees of generation X are working and helps them to improve the helping behavior of employees through meaningful work.*

**Keywords:** Helping Behavior, Meaningful work, Value Internalization, Self Esteem

## Introduction

The idea of meaningful work behavior has become central to the understanding of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity in the workplace in modern organizational psychology (Wan, Carlson, Quade, & Kacmar, 2022). Meaningful work behavior has a deep effect that extends beyond merely doing duties; it also encompasses the psychological and emotional satisfaction that comes from one's role, responsibilities, and contributions within an organization (Moon & Morais, 2023). Researchers and practitioners are becoming more aware of how important it is to investigate the relationships between different employee attitudes and behaviors and meaningful job behavior as the nature of work changes and becomes more diverse (Y. Wang, Liu, Ni, Liu, & Wu, 2023).

Organizations typically rely on employees' voluntary assistance from coworkers who have encountered task-related issues in order to promote organizational functionality (H. Wang et al., 2023). Helping behavior, which is the voluntary acts of employees toward their coworkers whenever they experience any task-related obstacle, is the term typically used to describe this particular good workplace behavior (X. Wang, Huebner, & Tian, 2023). The efficacy and efficiency of service organizations are positively impacted by this conduct (Preston & Rew, 2022).

Therefore, researchers are very concerned about the helping behavior of employees; this becomes a significant part of the global business paradigm, particularly in the service industry. Helping behavior becomes a cause of employee wellbeing and motivation at the workplace (Ahmed, Liang, Anjum, & Durrani, 2023). On the other hand, in the current era, organizations are very concerned about the work practices, working behaviors, and work values of different generations, particularly the people of generation X, because they are usually the seniors in the organization. Their behavior puts a lot of emphasis on the younger and newcomers in organizations (Moon & Morais, 2023). So, this study tried to find out how meaningful work enhances helping behavior among employees of generation X. Creating a meaningful work environment is very essential to enhancing the self-esteem level of employees, which promotes their attitude of helping (Sujatha, Mukherjee, Singh, & Bamel, 2023). This research strongly contributes to the literature on helping behavior by creating a link between meaningful work and helping behavior based on the self-concept theory. This theory states that how a person perceives his abilities, or unique behaviors, Meaningful work becomes a cause of value internalization, which leads to enhancing the self-esteem of employees, and as a result, they show more helpful behavior within organizations (Supanti & Butcher, 2019).

From the past literature, the gap exists by pointing out that there is very little evidence available that links meaningful work with helping behavior based on self-concept theory (Chou & Chang, 2017). However, most studies linked the relationship of meaningful work with CSR and other positive attitudes at the workplace (Raub & Blunschi, 2014). Therefore, this research, influenced by self-

identity, task value, internal and external factors to adapt socially accepted behaviors, tried to find how meaningful work, value internalization, and self-esteem can lead employees to exercise helping behavior at the workplace under self-concept theory. The framework of the research is based on the serial mediation of value internalization and self-esteem as developing a link among meaningful work and the helping behavior of employees of generation X. Therefore, this study is unique in the sense that it created a link between meaningful work and helping behavior among Generation X employees in the service sector.

This serial mediation effect shows that meaningful work becomes a cause of value internalization among employees; such value internalization leads to the self-esteem level of employees. In this way, employees would reflect themselves as vital and valued participants of the organization, and as an outcome, their positive behaviors at the workplace would also be enhanced. Such self-esteem also builds up a sense of responsibility among workers to positively improve work behaviors and the work environment (Vogel & Mitchell, 2017). Additionally, it was suggested by Grover (2014) that employees who have a strong sense of esteem would cherish their roles, rights, and fundamental beliefs at work and treat the organization and society as if it were their own. Employees' helpful conduct would improve as a result of this contemplation, which would also assist manage their work values, performance, and attitude. Businesses are quite worried about how various generations behave at work. The personnel in the service industry who belong to Generation X (born between 165 and 1980) were the main focus of this study. Employees of generation X are often more goal-oriented, willing to take on new tasks, and diligent. As a result, doing meaningful work can serve as a powerful motivator for people to improve their skills and adopt a positive outlook through self-concept (Weerarathne et al., 2023).

One of the critical outcomes of HR is the positive helping behavior of employees in the organization. Furthermore, helping behavior is a significant human resource aspect for the service industry (Naseer, Bouckenooghe, Syed, & Haider, 2023) and desires to be examined in its own way Hsu and Liao (2016) claim that helping co-workers is vital in the service sector because of the differences in work basics among manufacturing and service organizations. The service sector is mostly based on employee performance and cooperation; thus, meaningful work and helping behavior are the two most critical aspects for the success of service-based organizations.

To address the present specified gaps in the literature about meaningful work and helping behavior, this research aims to determine:

(a) The direct impact of meaningful work on employees' (generation X) helping behavior

(b) To analyze the impact of meaningful work on employees' helping behavior through the serial mediation of value internalization and self-esteem in Generation X.

## Literature Review

## Self-Concept Theory

According to the self-concept theory, an individual's behavioral results are mostly determined by their sense of themselves in the context of their work environment. The hypothesis emphasizes the complex interactions between internalization and self-esteem as essential mediators in the study examining the link between meaningful work activity and employee helpful behavior (Gecas, 1982). It is proposed that meaningful work behavior, which is defined by a feeling of significance, purpose, and job satisfaction, acts as a catalyst to mold an employee's view of their place and contribution within the organizational structure. A greater feeling of identity and purpose develops when people absorb the significance of their job and match their own beliefs with corporate goals. Internalization is a fundamental process that shapes an individual's self-concept in the workplace and shapes subsequent behavioral consequences (Tan, Sim, Yap, Vithayaporn, & Rachmawati, 2023).

Furthermore, the theory suggests that a crucial mediator in this relationship is self-esteem. In addition to encouraging internalization, meaningful job behavior also helps to boost a person's self-esteem in the office (Çelik, Süler, Söylemez, & Koçak, 2023). Employees' self-esteem is bolstered when they believe their efforts are significant and worthwhile, which increases their sense of confidence and self-worth. This increased sense of self-worth then acts as a driving factor, inspiring workers to take on pro-social actions like lending a hand to coworkers, fostering teamwork, and supporting the overarching objectives of the company (C. Li et al., 2023). The important role that self-concept plays within the corporate setting is highlighted by the sequential mediation of internalization and self-esteem, which clarifies the complex psychological mechanisms via which meaningful work behavior favorably promotes employee helpful behavior (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

## Empirical Studies and Hypothesis Devolpement

In this research, the theoretical framework is based on literature relating to the importance of meaningful work as an antecedent of helping behavior according to the theory of self-concept. When the work is supposed to be meaningful, individuals have a logic of fulfillment and determination that delivers a mental sense of well-being (Rai, Kim, & Singh, 2023). Thus, experiencing meaningful work creates inner feelings in individuals, which depict positiveness in their lives and at the workplace. This positiveness leads to the emergence of several positive behaviors at the workplace, like organizational citizenship behavior, corporate social responsibility, helping behavior, coworkers' collaboration, and many others (Oprea, Păduraru, & Iliescu, 2022).

On the other hand, helping behavior is voluntary behavior of employees at the workplace; it can't be easily forced on employees. Research shows that it is the culture, the work settings, and the work aims that inject helping behavior among employees of the organization (Bandura & Lyons, 2012). Several other studies also supported the idea that corporate culture and work settings play a significant role in developing positive volunteer behaviors among employees. One study found that there is a high need for collaboration and helping behavior in service organizations (Farboudi-Jahromi, Tasci, & Sönmez, 2023). Service organizations are highly dependent on their employees' attitudes towards work and customers. Bao, Gao, Shen, Zhang, and Shao (2023) stated that helping behavior comprises valuable individual resources to provide benefits to others. According to the theory of meaningful work, it creates value, feelings of self-identity, and actualization in a person, and as a result, positive volunteer behaviors grow in an individual. Based on this theory and literature support, the following study has developed a hypothesis:

H1: Meaningful work has a significant impact on value internalization of employees.

H2: Value internalization has a significant impact on self-esteem of employee.

According to the research, executing voluntary helping actions can also be challenging for some employees, particularly for generation X, as these activities, other than routine tasks, will result in fatigue (Peng & Zeng, 2017). Furthermore, when workers spend their time listening to the problems of other employees and trying to find solutions to their problems, it may distract them from their own responsibilities and affect task completion (Vanisri & Chandrapadhy, 2024). However, for service sector organizations, helping behavior has high benefits for the company. It is important to enhance the willingness of employees to show helpful behavior at work. Therefore, it is very essential that organizations inject meaningfulness into their work to enhance the helping behavior of employees. However, some mediation is very essential to making the relationship significant (Bani-Melhem, Quratulain, & Al-Hawari, 2021). So, the study developed the following hypothesis:

H3: Self-esteem of employees has a significant impact on employee helping behavior

### *Serial Mediation relation of Value Internalization, and self-esteem between meaningful work, and helping behavior*

Our image of ourselves contributes to our behavior, our actions, and our personalities. When it is connected to the personalities of others, it generates a feedback link to our image. The founder of the theory, Rogers, supposed that the personality of an individual is determined by the wish for self-identity, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Through this theory, an individual determines his actions and behaviors in a specific direction (W. Li et al., 2023).

Research shows that meaningful work helps create value for individuals at the workplace. Research also demonstrated the meaningfulness of the human resource development procedure. However, helping behavior is not part of any job demands or job descriptions, although it is the volunteer behavior of employees that emerged due to the work environment and personality of an individual (Lu, 2023). Thus, meaningful work gives motivation to employees and gives them value internalization through the meaning of work. Furthermore, meaningfulness is prominent in discussions for effecting employee behavior in the service sector; it leads an individual towards valuing organizations, valuing others, as well as achieving self-esteem (Liao, Xia, Xu, & Pan, 2023). Research shows that employees with high self-esteem are more cooperative and positive towards their surroundings. They voluntarily show positive behaviors at workplaces like OCB, social work, and helping behavior (Zhang, Qiu, Li, Liu, & Zhi, 2021).

A study found that meaningfulness suggests a comprehensive state of being and plays a noteworthy role in individuals' wisdom that they have attained their meanings in life, which is vital not only for workers' mental wellbeing but also for high-performing, successful organizations (Munn & James, 2022). This study further argues that employees' internalization of organizational values will also raise their' self-concept, which is directly linked to their self-actualization and self-esteem. This research particularly focuses on the importance of the self-esteem of employees, particularly in generation X, which enhances their commitment to moral values and positive behaviors at the workplace. Value internalization reproduces an individual's level of obligation to moral principles, values, and a positive work attitude. According to W. Li et al. (2023), high internalization is also determined by a principled ideology of meaningful work, and it is a valuable dimension for enhancing an individual's self-esteem and self-identity. Thus, it overall improved the self-improvement motives and played a significant role in employee helping behavior, according to the theory of self-concept. Based on the self-concept approach in organizations, workplace events lead to value for employees and, in return, create self-esteem for them, which leads to employees' positive behaviors. In this aspect, this study formulates the following hypotheses:

H4: Value-Internalization and self-esteem sequentially mediate the relationship between.

## Methodology

The study examined the association between helping behavior and meaningful work among Pakistani Gen X organizational employees, with a particular emphasis on the Lahore service industry. 310 respondents made up the sample size for analysis, which was determined by using a probability sampling approach using data acquired from conventional bank personnel. To determine the sample size, the Yamane formula was used.

To measure the variables, the researcher utilized established instruments. The Meaningful Work measure, comprising six items representing servant leadership, was employed. Self-esteem was measured using a 10-item scale, and Value Internalization was assessed with a 3-item measure. Additionally, Helping Behavior was gauged using a 5-item scale, with respondents rating each item on a 5-point Likert-style agreement scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach was used for data analysis. After examining the measurement model, the researcher looked at the direct and indirect linkages in the structural model. Additionally, a SEM serial mediation analysis was carried out.

Control variables were integrated into the study to account for potential influences on the variables of interest. Gender, with values of 0 for male and 1 for female, was included as a controlled variable due to documented differences in perceptions and attitudes towards work and culture. Job tenure was controlled with categories indicating years of service (0 = 1 to 5 years, 1 = 5 to 10 years, 2 = 11 to 15 years, 4 = above 15 years). Age was also controlled, with values of 0 for 25 years or less, 1 for 25-42 years, and 3 for 43 years and above. This approach aimed to capture the distinct attitudes of Generation X and Generation Y employees, considering their different developmental eras and cultural contexts.

**Data Analysis**

**Measurement Model**

The reliability analysis results for the study's constructs are shown in Table 1. We evaluated each construct's reliability using a variety of criteria. Factor loadings for the Helping Behavior construct, which includes items HB1 through HB6, varied from 0.716 to 0.858, indicating a significant relationship between the items and the construct. There were acceptable levels of collinearity among the items, as shown by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, which varied from 1.108 to 2.396. Good internal consistency was shown by the Helping Behavior's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.522 and Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.859. Furthermore, both the Cronbach's alpha (C-a) and Rho_A coefficients—which both above the suggested cutoff point of 0.7—provided additional evidence of the Helping Behavior construct's dependability.

In a similar vein, factor loadings for the Meaningful Work construct (items MW1 through MW6) varied from 0.731 to 0.869, suggesting a high correlation with the construct. The items' acceptable collinearity was demonstrated by the VIF values, which varied from 1.563 to 2.103. Although the CR was 0.852 and the AVE for Meaningful Work was 0.502, these numbers indicate strong internal consistency. Furthermore, the reliability of the construct was further supported by the fact that the Meaningful Work Rho_A and C-a coefficients were both above 0.7.

Factor loadings for the Self-Esteem construct (items SE1 through SE10) ranged from 0.622 to 0.893, suggesting a good correlation with the construct. The range of VIF values, which was 1.156 to 2.051, satisfied the acceptable collinearity requirements. In terms of self-esteem, the AVE was 0.529 and the CR was 0.826, which suggests adequate internal consistency. Furthermore, the reliability of the Self-Esteem construct was supported by the Rho_A and C-a coefficients, both of which were greater than 0.7.

Lastly, factor loadings for Value Internalization (items VI1 through VI3) varied from 0.663 to 0.856, indicating a good fit with the design. VIF values showed acceptable collinearity, ranging from 1.124 to 1.257. Value Internalization showed high internal consistency with an AVE of 0.539 and a CR of 0.776. Even with their modest deviation from the suggested threshold, the Rho_A and C-a coefficients demonstrated a respectable degree of dependability for the Value Internalization construct.

**Table 1:** Reliability Analysis

| Construct | Items | Factor Loading | VIF | AVE | CR | Rho_A | C-a |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Helping behaviour | HB1 | 0.843 | 2.168 | 0.522 | 0.859 | 0.866 | 0.8 |
| | HB2 | 0.858 | 2.396 | | | | |
| | HB3 | 0.818 | 2.103 | | | | |
| | HB4 | 0.802 | 1.826 | | | | |
| | HB5 | 0.744 | 1.151 | | | | |
| | HB6 | 0.716 | 1.108 | | | | |
| Meaningful work | MW1 | 0.834 | 1.657 | 0.502 | 0.852 | 0.816 | 0.794 |
| | MW2 | 0.794 | 1.563 | | | | |
| | MW3 | 0.731 | 1.235 | | | | |
| | MW4 | 0.869 | 1.959 | | | | |
| | MW5 | 0.786 | 2.103 | | | | |
| | MW6 | 0.744 | 1.598 | | | | |
| Self Esteem | SE1 | 0.744 | 1.547 | 0.529 | 0.826 | 0.779 | 0.768 |
| | SE2 | 0.622 | 1.156 | | | | |
| | SE3 | 0.756 | 1.404 | | | | |
| | SE4 | 0.74 | 1.993 | | | | |
| | SE5 | 0.704 | 2.051 | | | | |
| | SE6 | 0.715 | 1.31 | | | | |
| | SE7 | 0.632 | 1.629 | | | | |
| | SE8 | 0.747 | 1.362 | | | | |
| | SE9 | 0.789 | 1.331 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SE10 | 0.893 | 1.345 | | | | |
| Value internalization | VI1 | 0.663 | 1.22 | 0.539 | 0.776 | 0.646 | 0.583 |
| | VI2 | 0.856 | 1.257 | | | | |
| | VI3 | 0.767 | 1.124 | | | | |

Table 2's findings provide compelling evidence in favor of discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Each construct shares more variance with its corresponding indicators than it does with other constructs in the model if the square root of its average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is larger than its correlations with other constructs in the row. In particular, the diagonal values show the square root of AVE for every construct, supporting the discriminant validity of the model by showing that Helping Behavior, Meaningful Work, Self Esteem, and Value Internalization have higher shared variance with their own indicators than with other constructs.

**Table 2:** Discriminant Validity_ Fornell Larcker Criterion

| | **Helping behavior** | **Meaningful Work** | **Self Esteem** | **Value Internalization** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Helping behavior | 0.722 | | | |
| Meaningful Work | 0.357 | 0.701 | | |
| Self Esteem | 0.372 | 0.275 | 0.574 | |
| Value Internalization | 0.225 | 0.157 | 0.11 | 0.734 |

The discriminant validity between constructs is shown in the Discriminant Validity_HTMT table. The diagonal values validate the validity of each construct by representing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The correlation estimations between the constructs are indicated by the off-diagonal numbers. There is sufficient discriminant validity since all off-diagonal values are less than the diagonal values. In particular, the correlations between Meaningful Work, Self Esteem, and Value Internalization and Helping Behavior are all less than the square root of the AVE for each individual construct, indicating that these constructs are unique within the measuring model.

**Table 3:** Discriminant Validity_HTMT

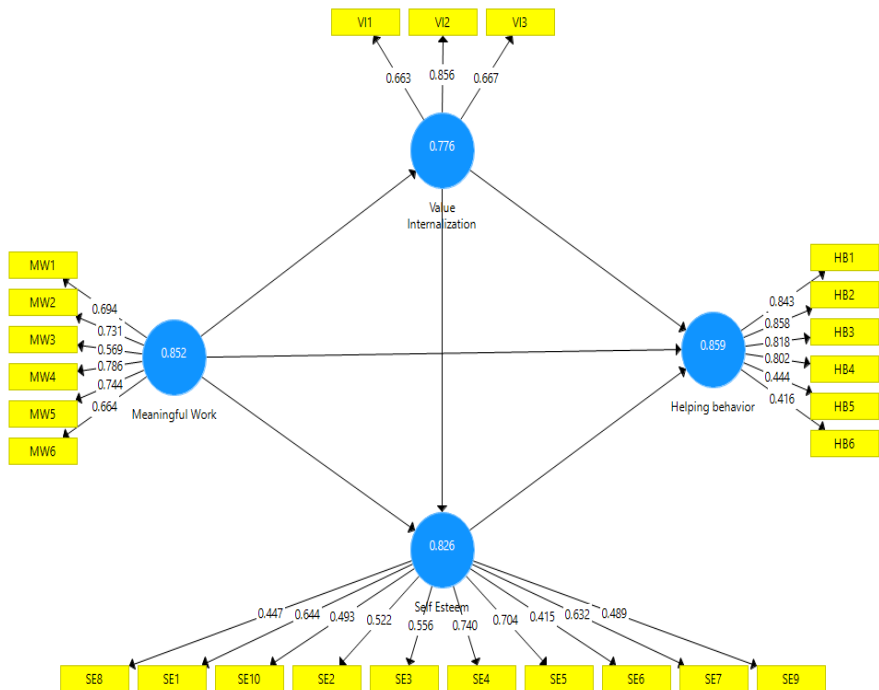|  | Helping behavior | Meaningful Work | Self Esteem | Value Internalization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Helping behavior | 0.722 |  |  |  |
| Meaningful Work | 0.357 | 0.701 |  |  |
| Self Esteem | 0.372 | 0.275 | 0.574 |  |
| Value Internalization | 0.225 | 0.157 | 0.11 | 0.734 |



**Figure 1:** Reliability Analysis

## 4.2 Structural Model

A thorough overview of the study's hypothesis testing and mediation analysis is provided by the table. The significance and intensity of the correlations between the constructs are shown by the β-values and t-values in the direct effects section. The

direct impacts, denoted by H1, H2, H3, and H4, are all supported, demonstrating important relationships: Value Internalization (VI) is favorably influenced by Meaningful Work (MW), which in turn influences Self Esteem (SE), which in turn influences Helping Behavior (HB). Moreover, MW directly affects SE.

In terms of the mediation analysis, Model 1 shows partial mediation, implying that Self Esteem mediates the association between HB and MW, albeit additional variables may also be at play. A smaller mediation effect is shown by Model 2's less prominent Value Internalization (VI) mediation between MW and HB. Nevertheless, in Model 3 (Serial Mediation), the combined route of MW, VI, SE, and HB has a noteworthy if comparatively lesser impact, indicating a sequential mediation effect in which MW and HB are sequentially mediated by VI and SE. Overall, our findings demonstrate the importance of both direct and indirect effects in understanding employee behavior within the organizational framework, supporting the postulated linkages and illuminating the intricate mediation processes across dimensions.

**Table 3: Hypothesis Testing**

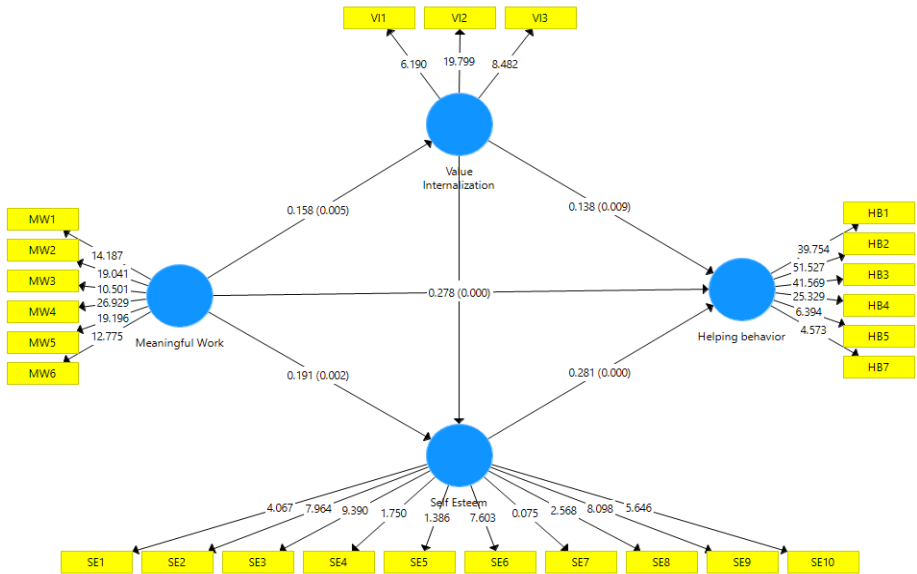| Relationship | β -Value | t-value | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Direct Effect** | | | |
| **H1:** MW ->VI | 0.158 | 2.871*** | Supported |
| **H2:** VI -> SE | 0.12 | 0.03*** | Supported |
| **H3:** SE ->HB | 0.281 | 5.224*** | Supported |
| **H4:** MW ->SE | 0.191 | 3.225*** | Supported |
| **Mediation Analysis (Model 1)** MW -> SE -> HB | 0.054 | 2.944** | |
| **Mediation Analysis (Model 2)** MW -> VI -> HB | 0.022 | 1.811** | |
| **Serial Mediation (Model 3)** | | | |
| **H5:** MW ->VI ->SE ->HB | 0.019 | 2.533*** | Supported - |

**Figure2:** Structural Equational Model Results

**Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed that self-esteem has direct and significant relationship with meaningful work. Its means that the findings stress that current research particularly focuses on the importance of self-esteem of employees particularly in generation X, which enhance their commitment with the moral values and positive behaviors at workplace. In literature researcher confirms the findings of present study by stating that increased feelings of meaningful work would be a pathway to increase employee's self-esteem (Kim & Beehr, 2018). Further, the findings indicated a positive and significant direct impact of meaningful work and value internalization. The current study results are aligned with previous results as one of the researcher concluded that value internalization reproduces an individual's level of obligation to moral principles, values and positive work attitude. According to Ghafoor and Haar (2019), high internalization is also determined by a principled ideology of meaningful work. The findings also revealed a significant and positive relationship of self-esteem, value internalization on helping behavior. The findings of the study confirms the findings of previous study and reported that employee's internalization of organizational values will also rise the employees' self-concept that directly linked with their self-actualization, and self-esteem (Jena & Pattnaik, 2020).

According to the present study's findings, meaningful work significantly and favorably affects employees, especially those in generation X. This indicates that it's critical to increase staff members' inclination to act kindly toward one another at

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work. Consequently, it is imperative that firms infuse meaning into their work in order to improve their workers' helpful conduct. The study's conclusions are consistent with earlier research as the researchers hypothesized that meaningful work influences some of the most significant organizational outcomes in terms of workers' attitudes and behaviors (Saks, 2006). Employees that are engaged in meaningful work report feeling more entire, motivated, and aligned with the organization's ideals (Glavas, 2012). Lastly, the findings of this study intended that self-esteem and value internalization sequentially mediate the relationship between meaningful work and helping behavior. The findings of this study also support from the literature. According to the research executing voluntary helping actions can also be challenging for some employees, particularly for generation X, as these activities are other than routine tasks will result in fatigue (Koopmans et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2023).

## Conclusion

This study examines how meaningful work promoted helping behavior among employees of generation X. The researcher target service sector employees to collected data through adopted questioner. The researcher used non-probability convenience technique to collect data from respondents. The researcher used item to rate theory to draw sample size which is equal to 250 employees. Serial mediation effect is analyzed through Structured Equation Modeling. The findings of the study revealed that self-esteem has direct and significant relationship with meaningful work. Additionally, the findings indicated a positive and significant direct impact of meaningful work and value internalization. The findings also revealed a significant and positive relationship of self-esteem, value internalization on helping behavior. Lastly, the findings of this study intended that self-esteem and value internalization sequentially mediate the relationship between meaningful work and helping behavior. This study has practical implications for all service sector organizations in which employees of generation are X are working and helps them to improve the helping behavior of employees through meaningful work.

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