



Research Paper

Servant Leadership and its Impact: A Review of Literature

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Abstract:

Servant Leadership as a concept has evolved over a period of time and various empirical studies have been undertaken to ascertain whether it has gained importance or is still a novel concept. The current study reviews a small sample of empirical studies from the search on Google scholar and attempts to ascertain if servant leadership has an impact on attitudinal and behavioural outcome of the followers and also whether the concept suitably fits for profit and non-profit organisations. It was found from the studies reviewed that servant leadership is very different from corrective leadership behaviour which focuses upon continuous monitoring of subordinates. However, as observed from the studies reviewed servant leadership enhances job satisfaction and motivation among followers leading to lowering employee turnover.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Servant leadership has attracted attention of researchers in the field of organisational behaviour (OB). The researchers are studying the impact of servant leadership on follower desirable attitudinal and behavioural outcomes and also on the novelty in the concept of servant leadership as compared to modern theories of leadership. Before an extensive study of extant literature could be taken up, we have reviewed a sample of research works on servant leadership pertaining to last decade. The main objective is to understand the development of the concept. Our focus is to find out the stage of research in the area of servant leadership - if the scholars agree on the novelty of the theory as compared to modern theories and if the impact on follower desirable attitudinal and behavioural outcomes is evident. We tried to review a sample of papers from different geographical contexts. The aim of this study is finding answers to the research questions like "Is the concept of servant leadership novel?" "Has the servant leadership a role to play in for-profit organisation?" "Is there an impact of this type of leadership on attitudes and behaviour of the followers?" "Is there a direct impact or is it through mediators? We found that the leadership is at an early stage of theoretical development (Liden et al., 2014). Researchers (Washington et al., 2014) have suggested that servant leadership shares much in common with other modern theories of leadership, especially transformational leadership theory. While it has been found to be different from corrective leadership behaviour that actively monitors subordinates to ensure they routinely meet defined standards (Verdorfer and Peus, 2014). Further, it evidently has a role to play not only in organisations like hospitals and schools but also in for-profit organisations. It enhances desirable attitudes like commitment, intentions like intention to stay and behaviours like organisational citizenship behaviour. It has both a direct and indirect impact through mediators on desirable attitudes, intentions and behaviours.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Liden et al. (2014) investigated a key principle of servant leadership theory that servant leaders guide followers to emulate the leader's behaviour by prioritizing the needs of others above their own (Greenleaf,

1970). This was tested by developing a model that introduced serving culture as key mechanism to find out how servant leadership behaviour affects individual and unit outcomes. Managers' servant leadership was measured by employees using shortened version of the Liden et al. (2008) 28-item servant leadership instrument. One of the key principles of the servant leadership philosophy stated by Greenleaf (1970) is that serving others includes grooming some followers so that they too can become servant leaders. The study used eight hypothesis that were used to justify that servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers above their own. They concluded that Servant leadership is at an early stage of theoretical development and that this form of leadership has the potential to increase follower behavioral and attitudinal outcomes based on empirical studies done so far and can be extended further to uncover how and why this happens.

Washington et al (2014) studied the relationship between servant leadership theory and theories of transformational leadership and transactional leadership using questionnaire data. It was found that employees' perception of their supervisors' were not only positively related to transformational leadership but also to transactional contingent reward relationship transactional active management-by-exception leadership and Laissez faire leadership. Servant leadership was measured using the Liden et al. (2008) 28-item servant leadership instrument. The study was done with an attempt to further develop servant leadership theory by comparing and contrasting it with theories of transformational and transactional leadership using empirical approach. The results of the study suggested that servant leadership shares much in common with other modern theories of leadership, especially transformational leadership theory.

Ozyilmaz et al. (2015) studied the effects of servant leadership on employee attitudes, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and psychological climates through two separate studies using 23-item scale devised by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006). The study drew on Social Exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) for research questions. SET greatly emphasizes Reciprocity as the best-known exchange rule in social interactions (Gouldner, 1960; Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The study aimed at measuring eleven potential dimensions of servant leadership: calling, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, and community building. The results show that servant leadership is positively and significantly related to organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), job satisfaction, and psychological climate. The relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction is also partially mediated by psychological climate. The results conclude that leadership has both direct and mediating effects on employee attitudes and OCB at individual level.

Sokoll (2014) in his study measured the predictive effect of servant leadership on employee commitment to a supervisor which goes beyond the effect of a supervisor's task-oriented behaviour. The study is based on earlier studies (Vandenbergh & Bentein, 2009) which identified the relationship between employee commitment to a supervisor and reduced levels of employee turnover. Since turnover is often associated with high costs for an organization the importance of retaining valuable human resource talent cannot be ignored.

The study has used Russell & Stone's (2002) and Fields and Winston's (2010) servant leadership instrument. Apart from this Becker, Billings, Eveleth, and Gilbert's (1996) employee commitment to a supervisor scale, and Stogdill's (1963) supervisor initiation of structure subscale also used for the study. The study added empirical evidence of validity of the construct and also positive influence servant leadership has on employee commitment to supervisors who demonstrate servant leadership behaviours.

Kashyap and Rangnekar (2013) conceptualized servant leadership based on the idea of Greenleaf (1970), Luthans and Avolio (2009) and Reinke (2004) accepting leader as servant first who is more committed to the well-being of its followers and thus create opportunities within the organization for their growth. This concept will lead to increased employee retention by improving their job satisfaction and ultimately help in improved organizational productivity and long-term survival. They applied this concept to find out the relationship between servant leadership style and employee retention and to discuss the level of servant leadership adopted in Indian organizations. They measured servant leadership with eight dimensions namely Empowerment, standing back, accountability, forgiveness, courage, authenticity, humility, stewardship. They found that servant leadership help in enhancing staying intentions.

McCann et al. (2014) studied servant leadership behaviors of leaders in rural community hospital industry in the present times and its impact on employee satisfaction and Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scores. They identified that servant leadership and employee satisfaction are strongly correlated. They also found that servant leadership has significant correlation between intrinsic satisfaction and HCAHPS scores. Servant leaders should be viewed as trustees of human capital of any organisation (Berendt, 2012). The results of his study indicate that organisations that employ servant leadership will help them increase in their productivity and thus their financial stability is enhanced because of increased profits. This is possible as job satisfaction improves thereby reduction in employee turnover, and a greater focus on the customer.

Mahembe et al. (2014) conducted study to analyse the relationships between servant leadership, organisational citizenship behaviour and school team effectiveness. They were of the opinion that servant leaders rely on direct communication with their followers to understand their needs, goals and desires to bring

out best in them by building self-confidence(Liden *et al.*, 2008; Lord, Brown & Freiberg, 1999) and acting as role model.It was concluded that school teams need leaders who can focus on development of teachers will lead to trustable and respectable environment than to advance their own needs.

III. CONCLUSION:

We found that the leadership is at an early stage of theoretical development (Liden *et al.*, 2014). Researchers (Washington *et al.*, 2014)have suggested that servant leadership shares much in common with other modern theories of leadership, especially transformational leadership theory. Servant leadership has been shown to be clearly different from corrective leadership behaviour that actively monitors subordinates to ensure they routinely meet defined standards (Verdorfer and Peus, 2014). It enhances staying intentions (Kashyap and Rangnekar, 2013) and reduces turnover intentions (Liden *et al.*, 2014). It has a positive relation with employee commitment to a supervisor (Sokoll, 2014), psychological climate (Ozyilmaz *et al.*,2015), organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB)(Ozyilmaz *et al.*,2015; Mahembe *et al.*, 2014); job satisfaction(Ozyilmaz *et al.*,2015; McCann *et al.*, 2014);employee job performance,creativity, and customer service behaviors (Liden *et al.*, 2014); school team effectiveness(Mahembe *et al.*, 2014) The relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction has been found to be partially mediated by psychological climate (Ozyilmaz *et al.*,2015) and that between serving culture and job performance being mediated by employee identification (Liden *et al.*, 2014)

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