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The impact of servant leadership on organizational citizenship behaviors with the mediating role of trust and moderating role of group cohesiveness A Study of public Sector of Pakistan

Haider Raza Abid

Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: haider_abid110@yahoo.com

Amir Gulzar

Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: amirgulzar@hotmail.com

Waqar Hussain

Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: drsukoon@gmail.com

Abstract

The current study investigated the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior along with the role played by trust in leadership and group cohesiveness. The study is causal, cross sectional and quantitative in nature. Sample comprised of 202 employees from three public organizations i.e. banking, education and transport. The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics, simple and multiple, mediated and moderated regression tests. Findings showed a positive association between servant leadership, trust and organizational citizenship behavior. Findings further concluded trust as a mediator and group cohesiveness as a moderator.
KEYWORDS: Servant leadership; organizational citizenship behavior; trust; public sector

Introduction

While the concept of servant leadership is relatively new to the field of organization studies, it is widely argued that it has been in practice since centuries. Central to servant leadership concept is the prioritizing the welfare of those being led; of valuing and developing people; the building of community, and the practice of authenticity. It also promotes the sharing of power between leaders and followers as a means of benefiting each individual, the total organization, and the broader community; and on top a selfless and humble servant leader who believes that

being a leader it is his/her responsibility to serve those working under them (Gordon, 2007). A servant leader is the one who prioritizes the needs of employees and serves beyond employees to fulfill needs of customers, and other stakeholders of the organization (Bambale, 2014).

In the last decade, the concept of servant leadership has been largely discussed and researched by western scholars and researchers (e.g., Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008 and Dierendonck, 2011). Numerous studies have reported the influence of servant leadership on attitudes and performance of subordinates (e.g., Ehrhart, 2004; Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko & Roberts, 2008). In the recent past, several researchers analyzed the mediating role of servant leadership on multiple outcomes of organizations, such as promotions (Neubert et al., 2008), service climate (Walumbwa, Hartnell & Oke, 2010), and organizational justice (Mayer, Bardes&Piccolo, 2008). Although several previous studies have been conducted regarding servant leadership but this issue has rarely been covered by researchers from the perspective of Pakistani context. The current study attempts to fill the research gap and aims to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) with particular focus on organizations in public sector. Therefore the study focuses on the relationship between servant leadership and OCB being bridged by trust. Furtherthe study also investigated the moderating role of group cohesiveness.

Literature Review

The origin of servant leadership is attributed to Greenleaf's (1977) essay entitled the "The Servant as Leader". According to Greenleaf Herman Hesse's The Journey to the East were the source of his ideas about servant leadership. Greenleaf (1977) believes that for servant leaders, the first and foremost thing is the natural feeling to serve first; after that they consciously choose to lead. This is what makes a servant leader different from one who is a leader first. The main difference between a servant leader and other leaders lies in the care taken by the servant leader to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being addressed (Gordon, 1977). For majority of people, servant and leader are two contradictory terms as they believe that one can be either a servant or a leader, rejecting the possibility of one being both as an illogical idea.It was Robert Greenleaf (1977) who, for the first time,merged the two opposing entities into a single practical and powerful combination, thus coining the term 'servant leader'. Greenleaf (1977) refers to servant-leadership as a management style in which an individual both leads and serves in a harmonized way, along with thoughtful interaction with the surrounding environment. For Greenleaf (1977), a servant-leader is an individual with a strong wish to serve along with strong ability to lead. The most important attribute of a servant leader is their ability to combine both service and leadership in such a way that they strengthen each other in a positive manner (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). Some of the qualities of a servant leader include selflessness, humbleness, humility, positive approach to organizational behavior (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) contend that servant leaders represent a positive approach to organizational behavior because their behavior motivates the employees and helps them realize their full potential.

According to Liden et al (2008), servant leadership consists of seven dimensions, namely emotional healing or being sensitive to the personal setbacks of followers, creating value for

the community, such as encouraging followers to engage in volunteer activities that benefit local communities, conceptual skills, or the problem-solving abilities and task knowledge that are prerequisites for providing help to followers, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. It is the approach of leading by serving followers that makes servant leadership unique among leadership approaches (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leadership is related to follower outcomes, including job attitudes, OCB, and performance (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011) as well as outcomes at the team (Ehrhart, 2004; Hu & Liden, 2011; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011) and organizational levels (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012; Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, &Hu, 2014). In short, servant leadership leads to positive outcomes.

Organ and his colleagues (1988) put forth the initial definition of organizational citizenship behavior according to which it was not recognized as a formal term used to assist in enhancing the performance and functioning of any organization. However later Organ (1997) along with his colleagues refined the concept of organizational citizenship behavior by making addition to his studies as considering OCB a kind of performance which is supported by psychological and social environments of an employee. Dimitriades (2007) stated the five determinants of OCB i.e. perceptions of fairness, employee morale, job satisfaction, leadership supportiveness and organizational commitment. It is important to understand that organizational citizenship behavior can neither be imposed nor can be enforced by the supervisors or the managers upon their subordinates because the basis of OCB is voluntary. This means if an employee fails to show their engagement in OCB, there can be no penalty or punishment in return (Organ, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 2006).

OCB is more likely to be recognized as job performance and behavior of employees. OCB is often referred to as extra role performance, or contextual performance of employees (Bambale, 2014). On the other hand, some other researchers have defined OCB as such behavior of employees that is beyond formal job duties such as working for extra hours, helping or assisting colleagues, and giving suggestions to management for making improvements (Organ, 1988).

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) concluded trust as one of the important relational constructs within a work setting. Previous researchers have demonstrated that trust on supervisors and senior management mediates the association between OCB and procedural justice (Chan and Mak, 2008; Ruiz-Palomino, Ruiz-Amaya &Knörr, 2011). This represents that justice in the organization fosters trust among management and employees that leads them to feel less anxious for engaging in the organizational tasks. On the other hand, Bambale (2014) has conceptualized trust in the context of affective and cognitive dimensions and revealed that trust ensures responsibility in employees. This implies that good reasons and availability of knowledge represent the individual's trust on management.

Trust in leadership enhances such values that promote harmony and bind people towards attainment of their goals. It is therefore essentially based on the acknowledgement of diversity and communication skills. Such attributes need to be accomplished in both theory and practice.

Trust in leadership plays a pivotal role for considering the servants to perform above their optimum performance levels. The importance of trust in leadership enhances the productivity of employees which motivates them to serve more than their legal obligation (Bambale, 2014). Therefore, servant leader has a strong background of integrity and values so much so that the followers believe their leader to be role model for themselves (Lord & Brown, 2001). The social exchange theory suggests that when there is high quality exchange between subordinate and leader, there is trustworthy relationship between them (Cohen, 1992). Trust in leader demonstrates the extent to which subordinates react on the support provided by leaders (Ng & Chua, 2006). In this respect, the servant leadership serves subordinates in such a manner which results in developing trustworthy relations between leaders and subordinates.

Group cohesiveness refers to the affinity of the group members with each other and their desire to remain committed with the group in the long run (Lu, 2014). Bambale (2014) contends that group cohesiveness is the relative property of group that determines the extent to which group members remain coherent with each other. The highly cohesive groups reflect high attraction of members for each other, friendliness, cooperation, mutual liking, and positive feelings about each other (Bambale, 2014). Members of such groups place high value for each other and intend to remain with the group in the long run.

There have been multiple reasons that elaborate why cohesive groups demonstrate positive citizenship behavior. The first reason is that members of cohesive groups develop positive and strong feelings with each other than those groups whose members are not cohesive. Hence, members of these groups are more likely to assist each other for accomplishing organizational tasks (Bambale, 2014). The second reason is that the members of cohesive groups develop strong feelings to remain the member of the group in the long run. Therefore, they become loyal with the group and show sport membership feelings with each other. Third reason is that members of cohesive groups show high identity with the groups as compared to those groups which are not cohesive. In this respect, such groups are more likely to insulate them with external threats. Lu (2014) stated that members of highly cohesive groups showed more satisfaction with the group and they also exhibited trustworthy feelings with each other. This implies that members of cohesive groups are more willing to put extra efforts for accomplishing tasks assigned to the group members

On base of above discussion the following schematic diagram and hypotheses may be inferred:

Figure 1 Schematic Diagram
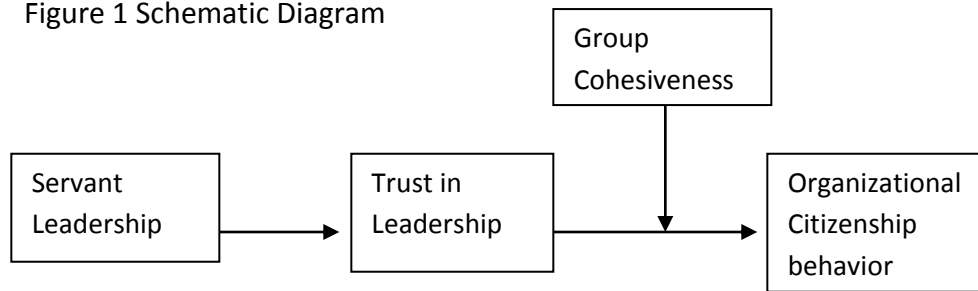
H1: Servant leadership is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

H2. Trust in leadership is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

H3: Trust in leadership mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

H4: group cohesiveness moderates the relationship of servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

Methodology

Survey research method was used for collecting data in this study. Data was collected through a self-administered close ended questionnaire specially developed for the current study. The questionnaire items were constructed based on literature on servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior and the contributing factors of trust in leadership and group cohesiveness. The questionnaire consisted of six sections and had a total of 48 items. The sources are showed in reference. The first section sought to collect demographic information through 3 items regarding study participants' age, gender and educational qualification. The second section consisted of 23 items related to servant leadership; section three consisted of 6 items on trust in leadership; section four comprised 10 items regarding organizational citizenship behavior and section five had 6 items on group cohesiveness. The respondents rated each of the items on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree) taking into consideration the sector they were employed in, while completing the questionnaire. Chronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the scales and found satisfactory i.e. above $\alpha= 0.7$.

Convenience sampling technique was used to select the study population.The questionnaires were delivered personally to a total of 300 employees of three types of organizations public sector in Pakistan, namely banking, education and transport. A total of 202 respondents returned the filed in questionnaire concluding the the response rate 67.3%. Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Sample characteristics

1.	Sample size	202
2.	Age (%)	
	21-25 years	16.3
	26-30 years	28.2
	31-35 years	23.3
	36-40 years	10.9
	41 and above	21.3
3.	Gender (%)	
	Male	53.5
	Female	46.5
4.	Educational Qualification (%)	
	Bachelor degree	49.0
	Masters or above	51.0

Analysis & Discussion

Data was analyzed using SPSS software (v22.0, IBM Corporation; Armonk, NY, USA). All the variables were transformed into natural logarithms. Findings were made through OLS regression.

Table. 2 Regression Analysis

Predictors	Organizational Citizenship Behavior					Trust in Leadership				
	R	R2	t	p	beta	R	R2	t	p	beta
Servant Leadership	.819	.670	20.103	.000	.819	.776	.602	17.359	.000	.776
Trust in Leadership	,810	.657	19.552	.000	.810					

Table. 3 Mediation Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.565	.175		3.222	.001
	Servant_Leadership	.866	.043	.819	20.103	.000
2	(Constant)	.232	.160		1.453	.148
	Servant_Leadership	.504	.060	.477	8.417	.000
	Trust_Leadership	.430	.055	.440	7.770	.000

a. Dependent Variable: OCB

Table. 4 Moderation Analysis

Predictors	Beta	P value	R2	Change in R2
Step 1				
Trust in Leadership	.326	.000	.825	
Group cohesiveness (GC)	.635*	.000	.825*	
Step 2				
TrustxGC	.081*	.012	.830*	.005*

The level of significance between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior is 0.000 (table 2) which indicates that servant leadership has significant impact on citizenship behavior of employees in Pakistani public sector organizations, hence H1 is accepted. The findings also indicate significant influence of servant leadership on trust in leadership making H2 accepted. Mediated regression analysis wan run (table 3), after satisfactorily fulfilling the conditions of mediation. Finding indicates that trust mediates the relation between servant leadership and OCB, hence H3 is accepted. Moderated regression analysis (table 4) proves that group cohesiveness moderates the relationship of servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, hence H4 is also accepted. The results showed that all the 4 factors of servant leadership, trust in leadership and group cohesiveness play their effective role in shaping organizational citizenship behavior.

Conclusion
This study aimed to evaluate the impact of and relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in public sector organisations in Pakistan. The findings revealed a positive relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior and trust in leadership plays an important role in enhancing the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. It is concluded that servant leaders in public sector organizations in Pakistan need to build trustworthy relations with employees so that they behave effectively within organizations. Study further conclude that to get enhanced relationship of trust and OCB manager should focus on enhancing group cohesiveness as well. The results of this study are confined to the use of small sample in three public sector organizations only. Therefore, the generalizability of the study is low. This limitation offers an

opportunity for future researchers to expand the scope of this study to a larger population of other public sector organizations in Pakistan.

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