

Servant Leadership and Religiosity: An Indicator of Employee Performance in the Education Sector

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Servant Leadership and Religiosity: An Indicator of Employee Performance in the Education Sector

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The current study aims to investigate servant leadership and religiosity of the employee as a performance indicator in the educational sector. First, we discuss leadership concepts, then achieving individual performance through servant leadership. Later, educational management leadership and servant leadership studies and finally, servant leadership, and religiosity with performance. Empirical analysis was on the basis of 323 respondents working in higher education participating in the current study through a survey questionnaire. Among R. K. Greenleaf (1977); Spears (1998) a few servant leadership characteristics, for example, cultural leaders, social justice, empowering others and stewardship are hypothesised and tested with religiosity with employee performance. The results through regression analysis suggest servant leadership is a proactive predictor of employee performance and the relationship is strengthened when tested with religiosity. The study contributes to much-needed study on educational leadership and management studies in Asia (Hallinger & Chen, 2015).

Key words: *Servant leadership, Employee performance, Higher education, Religiosity.*

Introduction

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Leadership factor is important among other factors and leadership quality determines the success or failure of an organisation (Salleh, Fareed & Hamzah, 2018; Williams, Tagai, Santos, Slade, Carter & Holt, 2018). Effectiveness of mobilising individuals towards a collective goal is crucial in the leadership domain (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004). The development of leadership skills depends upon the tradition and perception of an individual. This assumption is about effective leadership developed in individuals for social



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and operational effectiveness, which can lead to organisational improvement and performance (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013; Day, 2000). Servant leadership with a different focus (Gregory, Russell, & Patterson, 2004) does not rely on charisma, but on serving others, like reciprocal services, which primarily means engaging others psychologically to oblige them with the kind return (Cialdini, 2001). Keeping this in view, we can say that servant leaders motivate others, develop and engage followers positively to respond. Servant leaders do not want favours for themselves, but the exchange form of this engagement leads their followers to serve others. Servant leadership study becomes intriguing for academic research, as servant leaders demonstrate multidimensional behaviours (Patterson, 2003; Robert F Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Spears, 1998). Van Dierendonck (2011), directs that cultural leadership, social justice, stewardship and empowering others are a few of the dimensions through which servant leaders direct, empower and develop people in organisational settings. The development of people through leadership may also influence organisational culture (Melchar & Bosco, 2010) that could play a vital role; it may develop trust to overcome individual differences within the organisation (Reinke, 2004).

Previous researchers discussed the prime focus of the organisation to develop and empower employees, which ultimately enhances their performance (Burns, 1998; Fareed, Noor, Isa, Shahzad & Laeeq, 2016). Focusing on performance, servant leadership is the best style to adopt, as servants are self-motivated and performance-oriented (D. Page & T. P. Wong, 2000), also, they work for the betterment of their followers (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Sendjaya et al., 2008). On the other hand, religious beliefs are linked with the behaviour of organisational leaders (Hage & Posner, 2015); because the faith of leaders (religious & spiritual beliefs) has an impact on their leadership practices, thus religion is often considered a source of generating higher levels of trust and empathy for others' inner feelings (Timmins & Martin, 2019; Zarzycka, Liszewski, & Marzel, 2019).

Literature Review

The topic of Educational leadership is triggered in the 21st century due to its significance, and leadership quality influences the life of organisations and individuals. The notion became widespread and began to get increased recognition among school practices due to the vital effects of leadership in the life of learners. Thus, leadership behaviour research provides certainty about leadership behaviours for theoretical development and practical practices. The focus of educational leadership desires an actual model of effective leadership for developing a highly-skilled workforce (Bush, 2007). Cuban (1988), described leadership and management differences by emphasising that leadership is linked with change and management; to maintain the activities, both are equally important. Leadership influence in organisational life is to help others in accomplishing their goals and targets, so in this way,



leaders lead people by motivating them to provide direction. Influencing others doesn't mean for personal motives but for achieving organisational goals. Leaders initiate change processes to achieve existing goals and define the path for setting new goals. Leadership in organisational settings exhibits high personal characteristics in all kinds of settings. Educational leaders articulate organisational vision, seeking staff and stakeholders' commitment towards a better future. Leaders understand how to influence people, create values and beliefs to lead others according to institutional visions (Bush, 2007). Leadership has a link with team performance and motivation (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004; Wang et al., 2018), solving complex social problems (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000; Watts, Steele, & Mumford, 2019) and facilitating individual engagement to perform well, which leads the organisation towards success.

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Hodgkinson (1991, p. 16), found a conceptual difficulty in the field of educational leadership and stated that "Education is not the art of training and subjugating people to serve the profit for others, it is the art of helping people to know themselves, to develop the resource of judgment and skills of learning and the sense of values needed on facing the future of unpredictable change to understand the rights and responsibilities of adults in a democratic society to exercise greatest possible degree of control over their own fate." Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012), considered educational research is twin-faced i.e. inquiry of action or activity in a distinctive way of thinking about attitudes and investigating them. Educational leadership research is difficult for identities who are leaders, followers and their relationships become more difficult due to a variety of stances, yet educational leadership, thus empirically legitimised research can be considered as a new dynamic of educational leadership. Leadership is a process of influence that reflects social influence towards a group of individuals (Yukl, 2002).

Servant leadership studies have progressed in the last 20 years, but a debate about conceptual and empirical clarity is still ongoing. The conceptual debate happens due to the abundance of existing literature, which perhaps mixes and overlaps servant leadership style with other leadership styles i.e. transformational leadership mainly. However, servant leadership conceptual clarity can offer 20 more years of research insight, (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019) in the field of the study of leadership. Graham (1991), called those who encourage comprehensive intellectual and moral growth self-reflective, leadership generates positive and helping behaviour (Bauer, Perrot, Liden, & Erdogan, 2019; Zou, Tian, & Liu, 2015) to shape the job performances of followers (Banks, Gooty, Ross, Williams, & Harrington, 2018; Hsiao, Lee, & Chen, 2015; Stollberger, Las Heras, Rofcanin, & Bosch, 2019).

Servant leaders desire to serve first, not for themselves but for others by conscious choice (Crippen, 2004), which means it is an ideal style to be adopted in educational institutions.



Murphy (2002), suggested social justice, democratic community, and empowerment as Young, Patterson, Wolff, Greer, and Wynne (2015) provide an alternative platform of school leadership as the core physiognomies of servant leadership. Autry (2001), stated evolution to servant leadership through culture required necessary features and time, including stewardship, listening to others, empathy, healing, persuasion, foresight, commitment to other's growth, and building community.

Cultural change through leadership is initiating and sustaining the process of change (Brooks, 1996), generates leadership challenges (Cuban, 1988; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), yet is a slow process due to lack of cultural leaders in education throughout the world. The debate about the suitable role of leadership in changing the culture as pointed out by Hallinger (2003), got research attention. The culture of the institute is far from beyond individual influence, because no single factor alone can change the culture. Leadership roles provide the lens to observe the effects of slow and gradual change in culture, and research about appropriate styles for effective management is endless. Educational settings require a variety of skill sets to deal with faculty and staff differently. For instance, low performance of teachers (Bush, 2019), issues concerning staff like promotion (Askling, 2001), different individual experiences and staff mobility issues (Dziewanowska, Quan, & Pearce, 2018). Academic achievements are required for academic excellence and effective leaders in institutes identify and develop traditions for the authenticity of the institution. To overcome the obstacles and gaps between staff and faculty, leaders set a collaborative culture for meeting high expectations together, like a culture of respect. Servant leaders accept responsibilities by the will which contributes towards cultural enrichment of the place and wellbeing of others above their own. The vital point of servant leadership is a reciprocal form of cultural context. Servant leadership makes efforts to teach and appreciate followers for achieving shared organisational visions and goals (Lowder, 2009). The learning environment has a variety of physical influences as (Moos; Steele) discussed, while (Reid) discussed understanding and shared learning, both refer to R. K Greenleaf (1991) on organisational justice. Like transformational leadership, which has a positive relationship with engaging employees by inspiration and providing motivation towards organisational goals, servant leaders have the same positive influence (Brewer, 2010).

Social justice is required for teamwork and believed to be fair and effective for team performance. Gewirtz (2003), considered employee welfare is a form of distributive justice and commitment for their equitable wellbeing. They believe that employees will be fairly treated among team members, which helps in smooth operations. A collective belief in the team is generated by individuals who are part of that team. The individual perspective of social justice or injustice perception generates the shape of their team belief. The structural approach in the team provides collective understanding formulation between team members based on their interactions with peers. Information sharing, mutual influences, and loyalties



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generated while working together as a team helps them build the same expectations from organisations and leaders. Organisations where no social justice system prevails lead to uncertainty (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002), which is a point of concern for organisations. Social justice and diversity are interconnected terms, age, gender, religion, and ethnic beliefs refer to diversity, while social justice requires inclusion and equal recognition at the workplace. An imbalance between two brings social injustice in an organisation, which can disturb the cultural validity of a stable organisation, thus social justice provides a framework, patterns, and practices for organisational social justice. Leadership through positive influence brings social justice (De Cremer, van Dijke, & Bos, 2006) due to cognition-based trust. As Tyler and Lind (1992) and (Tyler & Smith, 1995) explained that employees' positive relationship to organisational loyalty refers to a sense of identification, therefore, we can conclude that reciprocal respect and trust gained by servant leadership can bring social justice to the organisation. Due to a self-sacrificing kind of leadership style (serving others), the consequences are positive for organisations (De Cremer, van Dijke, & Bos, 2004). Servant leaders use their followers' perceptions to build social justice through influence (Li & Cropanzano, 2009), to build a positive climate.

Intellectual stimulations are part of leadership strategies to change follower's thinking by providing new directions that can inspire their followers well they could have a thing before, (Burke, 1986) can be generated by empowering others. It is a cognitive process but energises the followers through the intellectual stimulation of leaders. Many democratic leaders have done this by providing them with a chance to follow a path which they could never have thought of before. The feeling of empowering others comes through leadership in organisational settings. Servant leadership provides stimulation (Robert F Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002) for positive personal and organisational change to transform personal and organisational cultures towards productivity (Robert F Russell, 2001). Servant Leadership (R. K. Greenleaf, 1977) perspective as natural servants by the understanding of bringing improvements in followers' life by all mean. In the same way, in organisational life, a servant leader's vision foresees a path or direction which is unknown for others but believed by themselves. In educational settings, a servant leader is one who may inspire them to achieve academic excellence, innovative creativity, opening collaborative research opportunities to faculty (classroom environment) (Mulligan, 2016), and provide new training, helping them achieve career change and excellence for staff and managers and work for growth and autonomy (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

Fundamental and moral characteristics of leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2011) are based on personal value, which has a highly significant relationship with the leader-follower relationship (Robert F Russell, 2001). Stewardship, which is based on service, involves the accountability and honesty of a person. Eddy-Spicer, Bubbs, Earley, Crawford, and James (2019), advocated the investigation of internal and external responsibility of school leaders to



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achieve a dynamic balance of institutions. Stewardship provides openness and persuasion with the foremost need of others through building trust in society. Educational institutes require stewardship and the trust of all stakeholders like parents, teachers, staff members and students to bring all of them together for the growth of the institution and community to generate sustained trust over institutional and innovative success (Domínguez-Escrig, Mallén-Broch, Lapiedra-Alcamí, & Chiva-Gómez, 2018).

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Servant Leadership and the Role of Religion in the Lives of Individual

Servant leadership inspires followers in a positive way to help others (Hunter et al., 2013), and positive inspiration brings happiness at work (Salas-Vallina, Simone, & Fernández-Guerrero, 2018). Locus of control refers to the psychological inclination of individuals or persons towards events of their lives. Lu (1999) and Cummins and Nistico (2002), suggested happiness is linked with life experience, age, and internal control, while happiness is associated with ideation (Pannells & Claxton, 2008). Leadership shapes peoples' lives (D. Page & P. Wong, 2000) through positive influence and servant leadership traits (based on serving other's need first), as personality causes trust gaining in organisational life through inner satisfaction. Similarly, religion is also considered a source of internal control, because practicing religion as a strong belief system and code of conduct in life has been found to be significant in many previous studies (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Fiori, Brown, Cortina, & Antonucci, 2006; Furnham, 1982; Gabbard, Howard, & Tageson, 1986; Jackson & Coursey, 1988).

Religion and Servant Leadership

Religious inclination has central importance in the life of individuals' influences indirectly (Hill & Edwards, 2013), which shape their strategies for every situation which is dominant, for instance psychological adjustments (see Tekke, Watson, Kayadibi, & Chen, 2018). The topic of leadership in Islam is deep-rooted, and leadership is often considered through which followers get motivated and encouraged in different situation for utilising different situations, as Jubran (2015), highlighted the importance of leadership due to the deep life influence of Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) as a leader as well as a teacher, and often considered as serving others like the servant leadership view. In educational leadership, mutual responsibility between staff and faculty is always required to overcome a professional and personal setback (Yariv & Kass, 2019). Kriger and Seng (2005), found that 82 percent of the world population which has adopted a reported leadership role in the organisation finds it has a spiritual and religious influence upon their leadership behaviour. Religion provides a spiritual belief system that directly influences shaping behaviour, attitudes and values and work ethics (Xu, Li, Liu, & Gan, 2017).

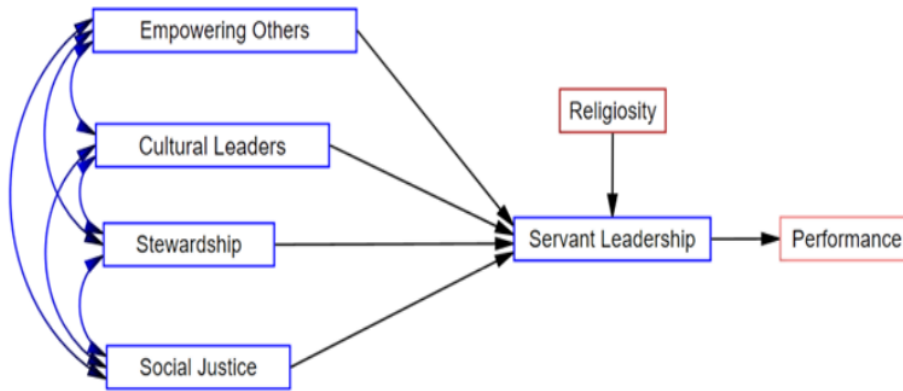


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Hypothesis Development

We developed a hypothetical model of servant leadership based on cultural justice, social leadership, stewardship and empowering others as a focus of current research, in line with (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Van Dierendonck, 2011), who also suggested that servant leadership incorporates a positive attitude for better performance with strong organisational trust and fairness, which by self-actualisation focuses interpersonal stewardship and acceptance, developing and empowering followers by interaction as explained by (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). The servant leadership and followers' core relationship is based on leaders' intrinsic belief value of the individual. They recognise the capabilities of individuals, which enables personal learning through them (Robert K Greenleaf, 1998). They can take benefits from other's expertise, such as motivating them to seek their maximum contributions, facilitating them by essential support and responsibility to accomplish their objectives. Laub (1999), explained that employees often seek direction to fulfil the expectations which are beneficial for both organisation and employee. The servant leader provides them with the required direction to make the workplace more dynamic i.e. understanding needs, abilities and required input of followers. Ferris et al. (2009) emphasised the importance of direction for a high dyadic interpersonal relationship, which is of further importance to finding new approaches to solving old problems with strong dependence and value of a person (Robert F Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002). Macintyre and Virtue's (1984), work highlighted the importance of personal ethics and morality links with traditional religion. Servant leadership is a virtuous leadership style, as (Beekun & Badawi, 1999) discussed Islamic leadership's ethical behaviour towards others, and servant leadership and religious affiliation as discussed by (Khan, Khan, & Chaudhry, 2015) provides theoretical insight about the importance of religion as an external and internal factor that influences individual beliefs. Based on the above discussion, the following conceptual model has been presented for the current research.

Figure 1. Hypothetical Model



Servant Leaders = Empowering others, Cultural Leaders, Stewardship & Social Justice

Moderation = Servant Leadership + Religiosity

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Research Method

The data was collected through a survey questionnaire, with questions about servant leadership, performance and religiosity randomly distributed among higher education employees (university employees). A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 323 were selected with no missing data, then data was generated approximately 6 to 8 weeks later. From two main sampling techniques discussed by (Cohen & Holliday, 1979, 1982, 1996; Schofield, 1996), by personal choice of selection (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2002, p. 110), a probability sampling technique was used for participants who were available and interested, which is a simple means of data collection.

**Results and Discussion****Table 1:** Age and Gender of Respondents

<i>Age</i>			<i>Gender</i>		
n=323	<i>Mean</i>	3.5913	<i>Mean</i>	1.3003	
	<i>St. dev</i>	1.08927	<i>St. dev</i>	0.45910	
Range	Frequency	Percent	Range	Frequency	Percent
<20	20	6.2	Male	226	70.0
21-29	33	10.2	Female	97	30.0
33-39	65	20.1			
40-49	146	45.2			
>50	59	18.3			

Table 1 contains age and gender information of the participants, 70 percent male and 30 percent females participated in the survey questionnaire. Figures indicate that 83.6 percent of respondents' ages were over 30 years. Gender means was 1.30 and St. dev 0.45 while, mean of age was 3.5 and St. dev 1.08. On the basis of the description, we can state that most males and respondents aged above 30 years were our research respondents.

Table 2: Education and Experience of Respondents

<i>Education</i>			<i>Experience</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	2.6873	<i>Mean</i>	3.2508	
	<i>St. dev</i>	0.72536	<i>St. dev</i>	0.98858	
Range	Frequency	Percent	Range	Frequency	Percent
Bachelors	20	6.2	<1 Yr.	22	6.8
Masters	91	28.2	2 to 5 Yrs.	29	9.0
MS/M. Phil	182	56.3	6 to 10 Yrs.	150	46.4
Ph. D		9.3	11 to 15 Yrs.	90	27.9
			15> yrs.	32	9.9

Table 2 describes the frequency of education and experience of the respondents, as we can see that participants having qualifications above master's degrees are 93.8 percent, including M.Phil. and doctoral degrees, out of which 83.3 percent had experience of over six years. On the basis of information given in Tables 1 and 2, we can say that the respondents of the current study were qualified and experienced.



Table 3: Correlation

#		1	2	3	4
1	Cultural Leaders	1			
2	Social Justice	.990**	1		
3	Empowering Others	.757**	.760**	1	
4	Stewardship	.697**	.683**	.830**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 explains the correlation of the construct i.e. servant leadership, cultural leadership, social justice, empowering others and stewardship and correlation is two-tailed significant.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

R	R2	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
.498 ^a	0.248	1.072	0.104	0.498	10.286	0.000
.577 ^b	0.333	-0.462	0.259	-0.215	-1.786	0.075
		-3.278	0.512	-0.770	-6.405	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Servant Leadership

b. Predictors: (Constant), Servant Leadership, Religiosity

c. Dependent Variable: Performance

Table 4 explains the regression analysis of servant leadership as an independent variable, religiosity moderator and performance as the dependent variable. Value of $r=.498$ while p-value remains significant. In model two with moderation, we can see that r changes from 0.498 to 0.577 i.e. servant leadership and religiosity together, while value of p changes from 0.000 to 0.075, resulting in complete moderation of religiosity over servant leadership. The value of B also indicates a significant change from positive (1.072) to a negative value, (-0.462/-3.278) indicates complete moderation of religiosity.

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
b	Regression	10135.465	1	10135.465	105.795	.000 ^b
	Residual	30752.598	321	95.802		
	Total	40888.062	322			
c	Regression	13630.158	2	6815.079	80.007	.000 ^c
	Residual	27257.904	320	85.181		
	Total	40888.062	322			

a Dependent Variable: Performance

b Predictors: (Constant), Servant Leadership

c Predictors: (Constant), Servant Leadership, Religiosity



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Table 5 describes model fitness, which is significant with a servant leadership model and servant leadership with religiosity. Moderation doesn't affect the model fit of all variables.

Conclusion

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Leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). Theoretically, there are three basic ways to explain how people become leaders: the trait leadership theory, the great event theory and the process leadership theory (Bass & Stogdill, 1990) yet leadership is a complex phenomena with universal appeal (Germain, 2012), therefore, the quest for effectiveness of leadership cannot be concluded. Empirical research of servant leadership is a clarion call (Farling et al., 1999) for questing, cultural and social justice, empowering others. Many questions, for instance, about workplace justice, successful integration in the workplace, employee behaviour, developing management skills in employees and cultural competence are concerns of modern organisational research (Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, & Labrenz, 2017; Cheng, 2019; Gkorezis & Petridou, 2017; Núñez, Romero, Sánchez, & Aránega, 2018; Saoula, Fareed, Ismail, Husin & Hamid, 2019; Varela, 2019). Servant leadership through positive influence over followers provides enhanced performance, better integration, and builds management skills for cultural competence within the organisation and individual performance improvements. Countries like Pakistan, where the majority of the population have Islamic ethical practise as an internal belief (See e.g. Yousef, 2000) have built strong work ethics for practice, which is evident in the current study. Religiosity tested with servant leadership strengthened the relationship for the performance of individuals. Servant leadership works for organisational change (see Robert F Russell, 2001; Robert F Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002) and if this continuously transforms followers into serving others first, that would be beneficial for both people and organisations . Religion works as an internal source of happiness and feelings as positive psychology and affects followers by influencing an individual to achieve an effective organisational performance.



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