



PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY MEMBERS' REGARDING SERVANT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF THE DEPARTMENT HEADS

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership is considered to be the most influential leadership styles at present time. Provision of Service to followers is the essence of this leadership. The followers work best under such leaders and their development rate excels. This study was intended to explore the practices of department heads in a public sector University. Interpretivist paradigm, qualitative method and case study design was used to accomplish the intended objective. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on saturation-based sample of n=16 faculty-members using pre-defined themes of servant leadership in higher education and explored the perceptions of faculty-members. The findings revealed that department heads are servant leaders in terms of behaving ethically, development, emotional healing, empowerment, pioneers, relation building and wisdom. This study confirmed that servant leadership is practiced in given context.

Keywords: *Servant Leadership (SL), Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)*

Introduction

Leadership is a vital factor for making the organizations successful. It is an essential need for the University as well. Effective leadership leads to effectiveness of the Universities (Al-Ali et al., 2017). The 21st century leads to change in needs of organizations, leaders and followers. All what required is to have vision, true meaning and healthy connections (Barroca, Neto & Silveira, 2017). Due to changing time as well as political, social and economic influences the Universities and educational institutes needs to have the leaders with abilities to tackle new challenges of progressive and competitive time (Coleman & Earley, 2005; Amin, 2012; Northouse, 2021). Leaders find it difficult to find the best possible strategy to make the staff members satisfied and complete their assigned duty. On the other hand, followers have increased awareness of their protocols within the organization and thus they demand the best way of dealing rather than tolerating any type of behavior. Keeping in view the growing demands of stakeholders, researchers pinpointed the urgency of ethical and value-laden leaders (Hoch et al., 2018, Dede & Ayrancı, 2014, Baykal, 2020). In such a challenging time, human-sensitive, human-caring and committed leaders are demanded. The massive work-load, psychological stress and increased competition at micro and macro level made the friendly environment and staff friendly leaders within the organizations more pleasing (Baykal, 2020). The most prominent leadership style loaded with present time demands of decent, moral and humanly is "servant leadership". The priority is given to staff/workers by such leaders (Hoch et al., 2018). Such leaders are intrinsically motivated to serve, empower and work on developing the followers. There is expression of humility, authenticity, care, and motivation to serve on the part of servant leaders (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership is one of the most influential and comprehensive leadership style in 21st century that develop staff in vital dimensions ethical, rational, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions (Eva et al., 2018; Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya 2015).

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This leadership style aimed to make their staff the best professionals leaving their self-interest (Van Dierendonck 2011; Schaubroeck et al., 2011; Liden et al., 2015). Such leaders try to accomplish needs of staff-members. It is quite evident from literature that the need of servant leadership at present time make it prominent both theoretically and practically. Eva et al. (2019) presented the conceptualization of servant leadership as (1) leadership with focus on others as priority (2) manifestation via one-on-one prioritization of every staff's requirement (3) shift of concern for self to others within organization and beyond at large.

Servant leadership has huge relevance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Latif et al., 2021). Universities face a lot of complications, have limited resources and subjected to enormous competition to be recognized at national and global level. Apart from such hurdles, HEIs are supposed to serve stakeholders. On the other hand, leaders in HEIs came across multifaced challenges in decision making with respect to budget, pay/salary and eliminating the programs (Barnes, 2015). Such challenges can be tackled by servant leadership which is all about serving despite of challenges and hard situations. The common factor that connects servant leadership to HEIs is "service". Servant leadership highly related to HEIs as this leadership implement the idealistic strategy of service in-between leader-worker relation (Van Dierendonck, 2011; Latif & Marimon, 2019). There is a need of servant leadership in HEIs for improving management (Wheeler, 2012). Servant leadership in HEIs leads to transformation within (Ricky, 2017). Servant leaders are better than transformational leaders in HEIs in terms of suitability, efficiency and effectiveness (Spears,1998; Latif et al., 2021).

Rationale of the study

According to Van Dierendonck et al. (2014), the research related to servant leadership is at initial stage and is dominantly limited (Bavik et al., 2017) The plethora of benefits attached to servant leadership lead to increased research in this area in multiple organizations. However, the research is limited and scarce in higher Education sector and University. It was proposed to have extensive research on this area in educational settings to ascertain the concept of servant leadership. To the best of researcher knowledge and available literature in peer-reviewed databases, limited studies were sorted in education sector specifically in HEIs (Hays, 2008; Wheeler, 2012; Latif & Marimon 2019; Parris and Peachey 2013; Latif et al., 2021). Eva et al. (2019) in their systematic review of 20 years reported only 10 studies where servant leadership has been studied within the context of higher education. The research design that was largely utilized for studying servant leadership was Quantitative ($n = 156$) with very few studied it qualitatively ($n=28$). That depicted a a methodological gap. Only quantitative studies ($n=5$) studies have been found on servant leadership in Pakistan. Later studies found to be addressing the servant leadership quantitatively (e.g., Haider, Khan & Taj, 2020) which clearly demonstrates the contextual and methodological gap as well. This study emphasizes to fill these multiple gaps. This study will be an addition to knowledge using social exchange theory as it will explore the concept qualitatively and filling the important contextual gap in HEIs. These gaps are vital to be fulfilled as the concept is needed to be implemented for better results in HEIs. Occurrence of such leadership style by department heads and followers'

satisfaction regarding this will help to implement this leadership style in other Universities and organizations in Pakistan.

Objectives of the study

The objective of the study was:

- To identify the servant leadership practices of the department Heads as perceived by the faculty-members.

Research Question

The research question of the study was:

- What are the servant leadership practices of the department heads as perceived by the faculty-members?

Literature Review

Competitive advantage is the concern of all organizations at present time (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Due to technological advancements and increased competition at global level leads to replacement of old sources of competitive advantage which are rigid and are short term like physical, structural and financial with long term, unique, interconnected and renewable. In this regard, human resources meet the criteria of serving as a source of competitive advantage in modern time. They are viable and are more inimitable (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007; Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2015). If academic organizations wish to achieve a competitive advantage, focusing on academic staff is fundamental (Simmons, 2002). Academic staff provide a source of competitive excellence to universities, as their competencies and experiences cannot easily be replaced (Bowen & Ford, 2002; Shrand & Ronnie, 2021; Aboramadan, Dahleez & Hamad, 2020). Maintaining a human source who is sound by all means in a job is a difficult task for any organization and it get worse under the under ego-driven and self-interested leaders. The chances of getting committed, satisfied and psychologically stable workers become very less under such leadership practices (Luthans and Youssef 2004). SL is an approach to address the gap between the leader/manager and the employees.

Servant leadership, the magnum opus of Robert Greenleaf, is a relatively new but paradox theory of leadership that holds a doctrine that effective leaders are those who serve the people (Myers, 2018). Organization goals are achieved by the provision of whole-hearted attention to their followers and followers' needs (Northouse, 2021). Greenleaf (1998) proposed dual role to human entity that work in any organization that is a servant and a leader. This duality is possible and is imperious for an effective leadership. Servant leaders practice and behave in a way that enables them to meet the followers' needs (Spears, 1998). This is opposed to traditional leaders which focus on to lead first, the servant leaders have a desire to serve first. Greenleaf (1979) defined servant leadership as:

“It involves in nature of a leader to first serve and just serve. He/she then consciously decides to be a leader. The difference arises as the service-first leads to caring of others and the needs/requirements of the people are fulfilled by complete service provision. The testing can be done by checking: Do those

served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 4)

Servant leadership's most unique and distinguishing critical factor is its focus and emphasis placed upon followers (Liden et al., 2014b). Servant leadership is essential for success of organization at present time because such leaders maintain integrity, full fill needs of the sub-ordinates and try to bring the best possible out of the followers' (Liden et al., 2015). In fact, they these leaders can decrease selfishness and promote positivity in the organization. Followers which work under servant leaders feel important and authorized. Servant leaders are inclined towards betterment of the followers and work for the elimination of their weaknesses. This leadership style is linked plenty of desirable work-outcomes of the workers/followers like engagement and psychological improvement leading to elevation of competitiveness of the organization (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2015).

Servant Leadership in Higher Education

Latif et al. (2021) mentioned 7 elements/dimensions of the servant leadership that are linked with Higher-Education system. These dimensions are explained below:

1. **Behaving ethically:** It is characteristics of dealing with workers/subordinates in fair and honest way (Liden et al., 2008 & Liden et al., 2014).
2. **Development:** It is feature of putting the workers//subordinates needs and demands first and helping them in their growth and development to highest level for achieving the success (Greenleaf, 1977/2002).
3. **Emotional healing:** It refers to alleviation of workers'/subordinate's sufferings for nurturing and empowering them for personal and professional growth (Barbuto Jr & Wheeler, 2006).
4. **Empowerment:** It refers to motivating, enabling and encouraging the workers/subordinate personal development (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).
5. **Pioneers:** It is a daring quality to make decisions according to the values having no fear of outcomes (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).
6. **Relationship building:** It is a quality of making strong bond with workers'/subordinates by honest efforts and support (Liden et al., 2008).
7. **Wisdom:** It is the combination of being aware of surroundings and expectations of possible outcomes (Barbuto Jr and Wheeler 2006).

Research Methodology

The context and Respondents

The context of the study was a public sector University, located in D.I.Khan-Pakistan. The target population was teachers. The performance of the teachers is a major concern in higher Education. The performance level may get affected by number of reasons like type of leadership that prevails in particular University. Higher Education Institutes are available for providing service and teachers are also subjected to provide service. Teachers (staff) demands for a leader which help them and provide the opportunities to grow and develop. Servant leadership by nature provide service and thus it is most suitable for 21st century challenging time and requirement of the HEIs. This study was intended to explore the perceptions of the faculty-members comprehensively to find out prevalence of servant leadership behaviors/practices of the department heads.

Research Paradigm and Method

To achieve the intended objective, interpretivism-subjectivist paradigm having qualitative method with case study design was adopted for in-depth study of the phenomenon. Qualitative studies are relevant for in-depth studies exploration of any problem (Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2007). Creswell et al. (2011) claimed that area of the leadership must be studied qualitatively or through mixed-method for better understanding and implementation. Using mixed-method is beyond the scope of this study.

Population and Sample

The population of the study was N=305 (University-admin, 2022). The Purposive sampling technique was used. The sample size was subjected to saturation as this is widely used in qualitative studies. The criteria of inclusion of participants having experience of minimum one year for interviews. All the participants have experience beyond the yardstick set by researcher as the University is well-established and very old, so the faculty-members were well-experienced. The final sample from which data was gathered was 16 who were willing to give interviews.

Table#1 Participants of the Study for interviews

Pseudonyms	Designation	Experience
Ali	Professor	More than 1 year
Asad	Professor	More than 1 year
Salma	Professor	More than 1 year
Nadia	Professor	More than 1 year
Sidra	Associate Professor	More than 1 year
Madiha	Associate Professor	More than 1 year
Khurram	Associate Professor	More than 1 year
Salman	Associate Professor	More than 1 year
Amna	Assistant Professor	More than 1 year
Nadeem	Assistant Professor	More than 1 year
Faraz	Assistant Professor	More than 1 year
Mahpara	Assistant Professor	More than 1 year
Ayesha	Lecturer	More than 1 year
Mirha	Lecturer	More than 1 year
Rehan	Lecturer	More than 1 year
Ahmad	Lecturer	More than 1 year

Research Instrument

Qualitative method research proposes use of interview techniques for data collection. This study used semi-structured type of interviews which allows respondents to express in detailed about their experiences about the intended phenomenon in particular context (Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2007). Semi-structured interviews provide enough flexibility for both parties, researcher and respondents for accurate and comprehensive data collection.

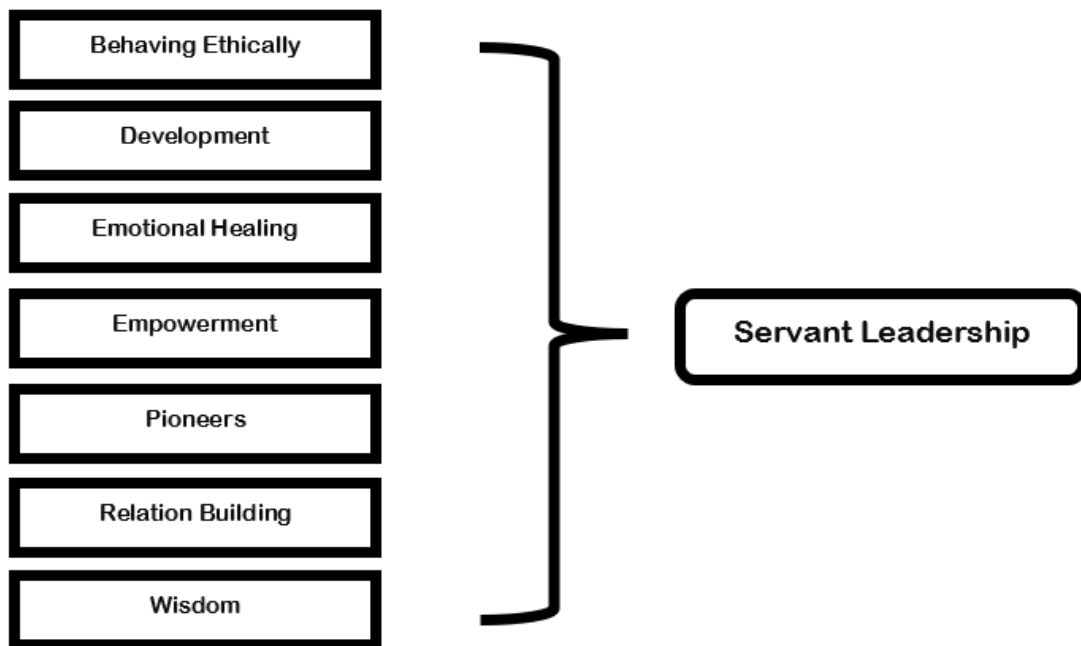
The Interview Protocol

Interview protocol has been developed by the researcher. The detail of the questions along with probes for detailed exploration of the servant leadership behaviors/practices under the predefined themes (*See Figure#1*) of the department heads as perceived by faculty-members are mentioned:

- Do you think your department head behave ethically?
- Do you think your department head help you to develop?
- Do you think your department head is emotional healer?
- Do you think your department head empowers you?
- Do you think your department head pioneer things?
- Do you think your department head maintain relationships?
- Do you think your department head is a wise-man?
- **Probes for getting detailed answers:** How? How often? Any examples.

Data collection and analysis

The respondents were contacted via calls, WhatsApp and personally in offices. The objectives were made clear to respondents and consent was taken. Participants agreed to give interview but time management was matter of concern for interviewing all respondents at once. Thus, another researcher (Doctor/PhD. Management sciences) was briefed about research and was assigned to conduct interviews accordingly. Respondents were mostly available in offices while some were interviewed at their convenient places e.g., tuck shop and hostel rooms etc. on the preset timing as given by the respondents themselves. Some of the participants provided written responses, some interviews were recorded and some were done by writing memos by researchers himself. The ethical considerations were ensured. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data collected under the pre-defined themes and the findings were presented accordingly.



Figure#1 Dimensions of Servant Leadership in Higher Education

Findings

Majority of the respondents were of the view that head of the departments practice servant leadership in terms of behaving ethically, development, emotional healing, empowerment, pioneers, relationship building, wisdom.

Theme#1: Behave Ethically

14/16 respondents had almost similar perceptions regarding this theme.

Verbatim of All

He [department head] is a man of principals. During my job duration [2 years], I didn't witness him in bad conduct or any immoral activity. He is doing job sincerely [Honest], has a fine sense of differentiation about right and wrong and act accordingly [Ethics]. Whenever, I had a meeting with him, he is found to be polite, helping and fair [honest and transparent]. He shows harshness for anything wrong and reject immediately for instance injustice, dishonesty and dodging/fraud [intolerant to deceit].

Theme#2: Development

12/16 respondents stated their perceptions in support of this theme.

Verbatim of Madina

HOD is a cooperative person. HODs' motivational orientation is the key factor that make me confident. He always compels us to involve in activities which help us grow. He sometimes got busy in office work but sometimes he himself [practically rather than just give directions] solve things for us. He does not impose power; he promotes leadership attitude among staff and make us self-dependent. He seems intellectual personality, sometimes propose solution in seconds but take time in situations where he do not have any immediate solution and tell us to meet later.

Theme#3: Emotional Healing

11/16 of the respondents had positive perception towards this theme

verbatim of Mirna

My department head has a caring behavior. It appears that he wants his employees to have courage and unique way of working. Encouragement is always given from his end.

Theme#4: Empowerment

13/16 of the respondents express their agreement to this theme.

verbatim of Saiman

Our boss, at most of the occasions allow me to do what I suggest. At situations where my suggestion may have negative consequences, he amends [discuss with me] and give a plan that is good for me. Once, I also see that even ask the area expert [IT and clerical staff] to get a strategy which is best than his own. I feel like he wants to learn without being ashamed of asking from his lower staff. That is so different that we normally observe.

Theme#5: Pioneers

16/16 participants had perception that reflect head practice of this theme.

verbatim of Nadia

The head of the department is not rigid. He always looks to improve and adopt changes that are better for department as a whole. Quality is the concern in his mind regarding students, teachers and administration. He even stands alone at various occasions for achieving his concerns.

Theme#6: Relation Building

10/16 respondents reveal that their department head practice this theme.

verbatim of Mirna

He always calls meetings and work in team. He asks for strategies for improving relations. He serves as mediator to solve inter-personal clashes. Initiate to talk and help other succeed.

Theme#7: Wisdom

9/16 respondents express the practices of the head under this theme.

Our HOD is well-aware of institutional and national issues. In meetings and discussions, he guides us about different contemporary academic and professional practices in University and across nation. I must say he has bulk of knowledge and experience to tackle multiple situations effectively. He is somewhat intelligent and wise man.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that servant leadership is practiced in the concerned context as majority of the respondents explained. The reason of such practice in given locality is possibly due to culture and social norms will also promote supportive and caring behavior. The concept of dominance and subservience has little influence in such areas. The findings of the study were consistent with Latif et al. (2021). They mentioned the seven dimensions of the servant leadership that are linked with Higher-Education system. As stated above, SL is an approach to address the gap between the leader/manager and the employees. Thus, the prevalence of the heads with servant leadership behavior/practices, the university will prosperous and will bring out the best possible results. The other research studies conducted on servant leadership style mentioned that it is linked with plenty of desirable work-outcomes of the workers/followers like engagement and psychological improvement leading to elevation of competitiveness of the organization (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2015). Servant leadership has huge relevance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Latif et al., 2021). Practice of servant leadership by department heads will prove to be beneficial for the followers and University as a whole.

Directions for Future Research

This research is among the initial qualitative studies in the context of Pakistan. Further research is needed in different localities of Pakistan for implementation of servant leadership after conclusive evidences of its conduciveness. The use of mixed-method is further proposed for researchers to quantify the perceptions through quantitative methods and then validate them through qualitative methods. The impact of servant leadership on different workplace outcomes needs to be studied like psychological capital and thriving at work along with other less studied outcomes to enhance the theoretical underpinning of servant leadership. The experimental studies are also proposed for future researchers for checking the influences of SL on different outcomes. The theoretical frameworks which describe the relationship of leaders with followers needs to be tested and validated like self-determinant theory and other theories that are less used for explaining the concept of servant leadership in Pakistan as well as globally.

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