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Servant Leadership: Influence of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

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- Abstract:

Research Question: The research objective of this study was to use empirical research to investigate the impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Motivation: Despite the growing scholarly interest in servant leadership (Adiguzel, Ozcinar, & Karadal, 2020; Karatepe, Ozturk, & Terry Kim, 2019; Kozak, 2020), the area still lacks coherence and clarity. Although most improvements have been published in top-tier management journals, servant leadership research has also been published in other fields such as nursing, tourism, and education (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019). These studies, however, are mainly focused on developed market economies whereas research in transition economies is limited. It is for this reason that we wanted to examine servant leadership and its relationship with job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the Republic of Serbia. Idea: Our main goal was to put the theory to the empirical test through known and validated questionnaires about whether servant leadership has a positive statistically significant impact on organizational commitment and whether servant leadership has a positive statistically significant effect on job satisfaction. Data: The quantitative data for the analysis were collected from February 5, 2020, until February 15, 2020, based on the results of a survey of 102 online participants. The basic sampling criterion was that the respondents were employed. Tools: Primary data were collected through a questionnaire. Servant leadership was measured by questionnaires compiled by Fields & Winston (2010) and Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011), job satisfaction was measured by an adjusted questionnaire developed by Spector (1994), and organizational commitment by a questionnaire developed by Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979). Descriptive statistics, correlation, and simple regression analysis were used in the data analysis. Findings: The results show the statistically significant positive impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Moreover, servant leadership has a stronger impact on job satisfaction than on organizational commitment. The obtained research results are in the accordance with the results pointed out by Hamideh and Mahmood Zare (2012); West and Bocarnea (2008); Mohammad, Hussein and Mohammad (2011); Ebener and O'Connell (2010); Hu and Liden (2011) and Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008). Contribution: The results of the study may serve as guidance that organizations can use as inputs in the process of making future decisions and strategies in the human resource management (HRM) practice.

Keywords: servant leadership, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational behaviour, HR management

JEL Classification: J28, M12, D23, M54, O15

1. Introduction

Northouse (2001) defines *"leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal*". Janicijevic (2011) further explains that the words *"influence"*, *"vision"* and *"followers"* are most often associated with leadership. The capability of a leader to create or explain a vision and convince followers to work toward that vision's realization is the core of leadership. Simultaneously, the important notion for comprehending a leader is his power, or influence over followers (Qiu, Dooley, & Xie, 2020; Saleem, Zhang, Gopinath, & Adeel, 2020; Tuan, 2020; Yang, Gu, & Liu, 2019; Ye, Lyu, & He, 2019; Ying, Faraz, Ahmed, & Raza, 2020).

The necessity of leaders being in service to their followers, receptive to all types of suggestions, and prepared to help, support, and promote greater efforts and dedication is highlighted by modern organizational situations (Mahlagha & Levent, 2022; Stojanovic Aleksic, 2016; Bao, Li, & Zhao, 2018; Farrington & Lillah, 2019; Gui, Zhang, Zou, & Ouyang, 2021; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018; Karatepe, Aboramadan, & Dahleez, 2020; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Luu, 2020). As a result, one of the most dominant features of leadership success is the ability to lead oneself, as well as the success and contentment of followers.

Conducted research in the field of servant leadership (Frederick Cotezer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017; Ruiz-Palomino, Gutierrez-Broncano, Jimenez-Estevez, & Hernandez-Perlines, 2021; Karatepe, Ozturk, & Terry Kim, 2019; Adiguzel, Ozcinar, & Karadal, 2020; Weilin, Bei, Hui, & Yanzi, 2020; Norizah Mohd & Usama, 2020; Elche, Ruiz-Palomino, & Linuesa-Langreo, 2020) reveals that servant leadership has a favourable influence on innovation, organizational commitment, trust, job satisfaction, self-efficiency, and the balance between work and personal life. The findings on the positive impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction were validated by Hamideh and Mahmood Zare (2012), West and Bocarnea (2008), Mohammad, Hussein, and Mohammad (2011), and Aboramadan, Dahleez, and Hamad (2021). As regards organizational commitment and the impact that servant leadership has on it, studies by Hu and Liden (2011), Ebener and O'Connell (2010), and Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) have shown a positive correlation.

2. Theoretical Review

In modern business conditions, the leader is of paramount significance for the survival and development of the company, since he/she determines the vision, motivates, and guides employees. Effective leadership can result in increased efficiency and cohesiveness, personal development, and greater employee satisfaction (Van Wart, 2003).

Recently some special approaches to leadership have emerged that bring new dimensions to research including team leadership, exchange theory, transformational leadership, entrepreneurial leadership, women's leadership, and guru leadership, (Simic, Slavkovic, & Stojanovic Aleksic, 2020; Vrcelj, Vrcelj, & Jagodic Rusic, 2015; Northouse, 2007). Among modern theories of leadership, the concept of transformational, transactional, charismatic, and servant leadership stands out.

2.1 Servant leadership

The idea of servant leadership, which defines a leader as someone who is primarily concerned with the interests and needs of others, including followers, members of one group, and the larger community, comes from Robert Greenleaf who believed that leadership is not a privilege, but something that obliges and something that should be earned. Servant leadership is "a way of looking at leadership that is entirely focused on followers, in which the leader's position is viewed as supportive rather than directive, and the leader's major goal is to serve his followers rather than to dominate" (Greenleaf, 1998).

Servant leadership is a multifaceted ideology that begins with a desire to serve (Greenleaf, 1998), and with the purpose of leading and developing others (Spears, 2010) to ultimately achieve a higher goal that brings benefits to individuals, organizations, and societies (van Dierendonck, 2011). Traditional leaders favour directives and instructions, but servant leaders stress assistance, facilitation, and advice, which enable followers to better comprehend their surroundings and the demands placed on them (Greenleaf, 1998).

Spears (1995) emphasizes the following characteristics of servant leaders: willingness to listen, compassion, willingness to comfort, self-awareness, persuasiveness, conceptualization, predictability, willingness to serve, community building, and commitment to others' development. Authenticity, humility, compassion, responsibility, courage, altruism, integrity, and willingness to listen were identified as eight characteristics of servant leaders by Frederick Cotezer et al. (2017) after a servant leadership survey that included a sample of 24 literature reviews, 21 different countries, 5 qualitative studies, 55 quantitative studies, and 3 combined studies. Focht & Ponton (2015), as a result of their research, cite the following primary characteristics of servant leaders: empathy, humility, helpfulness, spirituality, and the ability to lead.

Servant leaders encourage their followers to participate in activities outside of their current professions in order that they should foster a sense of community, as well as to encourage personal and professional development and lifelong learning (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2012). According to Russel & Stone (2002), vision, integrity, honesty, trust, helpfulness, respect for others, and empowerment are all qualities that servant leadership promotes. Servant leaders have the skill to meet followers' subtle, emotional, and spiritual needs, allowing their personal growth and transformation. Servant leaders highlight the best in their followers, pro-

viding new energy for greater efforts and accomplishments and instilling a sense of perfection and irreplaceability. Everything they do, they do primarily having in mind the well-being of their associates, where one of the most important criteria for the success of leaders is the degree to which those who are "served" are satisfied, happy, and able to lead themselves (Stojanovic Aleksic, 2007).

Servant leaders not only help their teams to be mentally and emotionally healthy, but they also strengthen cohesiveness, cooperation, and connection with followers through understanding their needs and emotions (Ravinder Jit, Sharma, & Kawatra, 2017). Research shows (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Ehrhart, 2004; Hu & Liden, 2011; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010) that in organizations where servant leadership is used, connectedness and collaboration between leaders and followers inspire followers to be pro-social and altruistic, resulting in enhanced organizational performance.

Guillaume, Honeycutt, and Cleveland (2012) point out that when used correctly, the servant leadership paradigm provides enormous benefits to both individuals and the organization as a whole. Parris and Peachey (2013) highlight that more than 20 percent of the top 100 companies according to Fortune magazine sought guidance and assistance from the "*Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership*" including companies such as Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and Vanguard Investment Group.

2.2 Servant leadership and job satisfaction

Nowadays, many businesses perform research to measure their employees' levels of job satisfaction. "Job satisfaction is described as a favourable emotional state experienced by an individual when evaluating their job and the experience gained from doing it" (Locke, 1976). Thus, the term "employee satisfaction" refers to what percentage of employees are satisfied with their jobs

Lai Wan (2007) claims that a company's top priority should be to keep its employees happy. When employee satisfaction increases, the performance of the organization improves. On the other hand, employee dissatisfaction has the opposite effect on the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Javed, Balouch, & Hassan, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary that every organization that strives for a better market position, take into should consider the degree and scope of satisfaction of its employees, in a way that continuously measures their degree and scope of satisfaction. The analysis of the obtained results in the organizational factors (working conditions, working atmosphere, interpersonal relations, possibility of advancement, internal communication, etc.), which elements have a high positive impact on job satisfaction, and which factors have a weak (negative) impact on job satisfaction. In that context, the top management of the organization undertakes certain organizational measures and activities to eliminate negative factors and further develop positive influences (Strukan, Djordjevic, & Sefic, 2014).

Job satisfaction is viewed as a "general attitude towards work", or satisfaction with five specific dimensions of work: 1) financial compensation, 2) work as such, 3) opportunity for promotion, 4) superiors and 5) associates (Susnjar & Zimanji, 2005). Job satisfaction is structured, according to most authors in this field, by several variables that can be reduced to five formalized aspects of job satisfaction: 1) satisfaction derived from completing specific tasks, 2) satisfaction derived from belonging to an organization, 4) satisfaction derived from the financial situation, and 5) satisfaction derived from belonging to an organization, 4) satisfaction derived from the financial situation, and 5) satisfaction derived from belonging to an organization, and creative work, good relations with co-workers and supervisors, excessive personal freedom in the working place and the potential for development, along with job stability and the capability to manage personal and professional life, are the most significant facets of job satisfaction in the context of leadership (Strukan, Djordjevic, & Sefic, 2014; Maric, Todorovic, & Znidarsic, 2021).

Stringer (2006) in his study observed a significant link between leadership behaviour and job satisfaction as a result of a combination of internal and external factors. The nature of the person's work, the duties that make up the job, professional development, a sense of responsibility, and job achievement are all internal influences. Working conditions, such as salary, associates, and managers, are all external influences (Jankovic, et al., 2011). Numerous researchers analysed servant leadership and its impact on job satisfaction (Hamideh & Mahmood Zare, 2012; West & Bocarnea, 2008; Mohammad, Hussein, & Mohammad, 2011; Lisbijanto & Budiyanto, 2014; McCann, Graves, & Cox, 2014). The outcomes of the research conducted by the given authors show the important connection between servant leadership and job satisfaction. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H1: "Servant leadership has a positive statistically significant effect on job satisfaction".

2.3 Servant leadership and organizational commitment

Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) define "organizational commitment as acceptance of the organization's goals and principles; readiness to go above and beyond for the organization's benefit; and a desire to stay in it". Also popular is the definition of organizational attachment characterized by a multidimensional approach formulated by Yiing and Ahmad (2009): organizational attachment implies: affective attachment - emotional attachment and identification with the organization; temporal attachment - an attachment that is linked to the expense of leaving a company; and normative attachment - refers to a feeling of obligation to stay with a company.

In the past few decades, organizational commitment has become the subject of numerous studies. The reasons for the increasing interest of academics the topic lie in the results of research that confirmed the negative correlation between organizational attachment and absenteeism and leaving organizations (Steers, 1975). Further, organizational commitment is positively correlated with job satisfaction (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). In his research, Whitener (2001) has shown that a high degree of commitment to an organization results in a higher effectiveness of the organization as a whole.

According to Goh and Low (2014), the success of the organization's long-term goals is related to organizational commitment. Employees that are committed to the firm they work with are eager to make a major personal contribution, go above and beyond their obligations, and have a genuine desire to remain working under the company's auspices. In other words, attachment to an organization is described as an emotional link that connects an employee to an organization that reduces the likelihood that an employee will leave the organization in which he or she is employed.

When compared to other types of commitment, affective organizational commitment, which refers to employees' emotional attachment to the company, identification with it, and involvement in it, is the most important element in employee retention. Employees, who are emotionally committed, identify with the objectives of the organization, and want to remain part of it, will not leave the organization (Ahmad & Omar, 2010). Similar research results were published by Addae, Praveen Parboteeah and Velinor (2008), Ali and Baloch (2009), Chan Yin-Fan, Yeoh Sok, Chee-Leong and Syuhaily (2010), and Kozak (2020).

According to theoretical studies, there is a positive correlation between servant leadership and organizational commitment. This is confirmed by qualitative research by Ebener and O'Connell (2010), but also by empirical research conducted by Hu and Liden (2011); Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008), and Sokoll (2014). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: "Servant leadership has a positive statistically significant impact on organizational commitment".

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research setting and participants

Empirical research was undertaken to utilize survey methodologies to investigate servant leadership's impact on employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. The questionnaire was distributed online using the Google Forms platform. The total number of e-mail addresses to which the questionnaire link was distributed was 250. The number of responses received in the period from February 5, 2020 until February 15, 2020, was 102, which represents a response rate of 40%. The basic sampling criterion was that the respondents are employed in an organization in the Republic of Serbia.

More female respondents (53%) than men (47%) were included in the sample. When it comes to the age structure, 39% of respondents were under 30 years old, 33% of respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, 20% of respondents belong to the age group between 51 and 60, 8% were respondents who are between 51 and 60 years old. Only persons over 60 years of age did not participate in the given sample. The respondents are primarily divided into two age groups: those under 30 years of age and those between 31 and 40 years old, in about equal numbers.

If we look at the level of education of respondents, the largest number of respondents (39%) have a bachelor's degree, a slightly smaller percentage of respondents have secondary education (29%), while 26% of respondents have a master's degree. The smallest groups of respondents have an undergraduate (first) degree (3%) and the title of Doctor of Science (4%). When it comes to the respondents' years of work experience in a given organization, the largest percentage of respondents are employed in the organization for less than 5 years (43%), while the smallest number of respondents (9%) are employed longer than 21 years. A quarter of respondents (26%) spent between 6 and 10 years in the company, while the same percentage of respondents (11%) were employed in the company between 11 and 15 years and 16 and 20 years, respectively. The number of respondents is approximate regarding the size of the organizations in which they work. The largest number of respondents work in an organization employing 50 to 249 employees, while the smallest percentage is of those (23%) who work in organizations that have between two and 9 employees.

3.2 Instruments

The instrument used to measure servant leadership is a combination of constructs taken and adjusted based on questionnaires compiled by Fields and Winston (2010) and Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), job satisfaction was measured by an adjusted questionnaire developed by Spector (1994), and organizational commitment by a questionnaire developed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). Descriptive statistics, correlation, and simple regression analysis were used in the data analysis.

Using descriptive statistical analysis, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for each construct were calculated (Table 1). The findings of the investigation at the aggregate sample level show that the grades of the surveyed respondents range from 2.88 to 4.25, with a standard deviation from 0.895 to 1.435.

Respondents gave the highest marks to the findings that they get along well with their colleagues and that they like to work with them where the arithmetic mean was 4.25; and that they are ready to make additional efforts in order for the organizations in which they work to be successful (4.01), while they rated the findings related to the chances for promotion at work (2.88), and the fairness of rewarding their efforts (2,90) with the lowest marks. For all constructs, the values of the standard deviation range from 0.895 to 1.423. There is a similar degree of heterogeneity in the assessments of all 25 constructs.

The reliability and internal consistency of the constructs grouped around each variable were measured via the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Table 1). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient values vary from 0 to 1, with values greater than 0.7 indicating adequate reliability and consistency (Nunnally, 1978). The values of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the research range from 0.881 (Job Satisfaction) to 0.954 (Servant Leadership). The Cronbach's alpha for the entire model is 0.899. The obtained values indicate adequate reliability and internal consistency of the variables.

Variable	Constructs	м	SD	Cronbach`s Alpha
Servant leadership	<i>My superior (leader)</i> provides me with all the information I require to do my duties effectively.	3.57	3.57 1.223 0.954	
	makes it easier for me to accomplish my work by giving me the authority to make judgments.	3.59	1.205	
	helps me develop and progress. 3		1.317	
	gives me a lot of opportunities to acquire new skills.	3.27	1.329	
	has a long-term vision.	3.33	1.381	
	thinks that helping others is the most important thing.	3.11	1.342	
	wants to build relationships based on trust.	3.63	1.334	
	is always honest.	2.98	1.435	
	does what he advocates and preaches.	3.24	1.299	
	respects the opinions and ideas of others.	3.43	1.190	
	is looking forward to the success of his colleagues.	3.60	1.359	
Job satisfaction	I am well paid for the work I do.	2.98	1.297	0.881
	The work I do is appreciated a lot.	3.44	1.294	
	I am satisfied with the chances for promotion at work.	2.88	1.423	
	I get along well with my colleagues, and I like working with	4.25	0.895	
	them.			
	The goals of the organization I work for are clear to me.	3.90	1.286	
	I feel satisfaction when performing work tasks.	3.66	1.190	
	I feel that my efforts have been rewarded in the right way.	2.90	1.411	

 Table 1: Descriptive statistics results of constructs and Cronbach`s Alpha of variables

Variable	Constructs	М	SD	Cronbach`s Alpha
Organizational commitment	I want to continue working with the company I currently work with.	3.43	1.411	0.939
	I would recommend to friends to work in this company.	3.15	1.345	
	I am honoured to be part of this organization.	3.42	1.331	
	I am ready to make an extra effort to make the organization I work with successful.	4.01	1.130	
	I am interested in the business and success of the organization I work with.	3.99	1.104	
	I'm very glad I chose this organization over the others that were on the table at the time.	3.75	1.206	
	Working in this organization inspires and motivates me to do my job as well as possible.	3.46	1.310	

Source: Authors' calculation based on the survey

4. Research Results

Further in the analysis of collected data, correlation and simple regression were used. The correlation analysis was implemented to identify the degree of interdependence of the given variables, followed by simple regression analysis. The statistical tool SPSS 23v was used to analyse the data.

The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 2. According to the value of the Pearson coefficient, the degree of dependence between the variables was determined. The obtained results show a high degree of correlation between the given variables. Interestingly, the highest degree of correlation was identified between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (0.801). In addition, a higher degree of dependence was found between servant leadership and job satisfaction (0.777) than between servant leadership and organizational commitment (0.682). The given results of the correlation matrix show that all correlations are statistically significant.

Table 2: Correlation matrix					
Servant leadership Job satisfaction Organizational commitment					
Servant leadership	1				
Job satisfaction	0.777**	1			
Organizational	0.682**	0.801**	1		
commitment					

Note: ** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level Source: Authors' calculation based on the survey

Two simple regression analyses were performed later. The first regression analysis was implemented in order to determine the impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction. The results of the analysis, shown in Table 3, confirm the statistically significant influence of servant leadership on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.714$, t = 12.346), which implies that the first given hypothesis was confirmed. In addition, it is important to note that the independent variable describes a total of 77.7% of job satisfaction variability (R2 = 0.777).

Table 3: Simple regression analysis (dependent variable: job satisfaction)

Variable	ß	t	Sig.	R ²
Servant leadership	0.714	12.346	.000**	0.777

Note: ** The result is significant at the level of 0.01 Source: Authors' calculation based on the survey

In the second step, we observed how servant leadership affects organizational commitment. The results of simple regression (Table 4) confirm the statistically significant influence of servant leadership on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.702$, t = 9.332), which confirmed the second hypothesis of the paper. In doing so, the independent variable describes a total of 69.2% of the variability of organizational commitment (R2 = 0.692)

Table 4: Simple regression analysis (dependent variable: organizational commitment)

Variable	ß	t	Sig.	R ²
Servant leadership	0.702	9.332	.000**	0.692

Note: ** The result is significant at the level of 0.01 Source: Authors' calculation based on the survey

Conslusion

The servant leadership theory emphasizes that a leader serves the people he leads. Servant leaders are committed to the necessities of the members of the organization, developing employees so that they are the best at what they are, supporting them to show their talents and realize their full potential, and encouraging their personal and professional development. The advantages of applying this model of leadership are multiple, and they are reflected in increased innovation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, trust, self-efficiency, and a balance between business and private life.

To learn more about the influence of servant leadership on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, a survey of 102 respondents was undertaken in this research. Survey participants gave moderately high marks to the findings contained in the questionnaire which relate to their attitude and experience of the work they do, cooperation and relationship with leaders, as well as the degree of commitment and identification with the organization in which they work. The highest marks were given to the findings related to the relationships they have with colleagues, the additional efforts they are willing to make for the benefit of the organization, and their general interest in the success and destiny of their organization. On the other hand, the respondents rated the claims related to the chances for promotion, honesty of leaders, and fairness of rewarding their efforts with the lowest marks, which unequivocally points to the conclusion that these are the areas that represent space for improvement of job satisfaction. In that sense, leaders should be more honest with their followers, more aware of their engagement to support, praise, and reward the efforts made most fairly, and based on them provide space and opportunities for their progress and further development.

The results of the research using a simple regression analysis confirmed a statistically significant influence of servant leadership on job satisfaction, which confirmed the first hypothesis of the paper. The coefficient of determination (R2) of 0.77 shows that job satisfaction in 77% of cases depends on the leadership style, i.e. servant leadership. The implemented second simple regression suggests that there is a statistically significant impact of servant leadership on organizational commitment. Therefore, the conducted research confirmed the second research hypothesis of the paper. A coefficient of determination (R2) of 0.69 shows that commitment to an organization in 69% of cases depends on servant leadership. In doing so, servant leadership has a stronger impact on job satisfaction than on organizational commitment. In this regard, this result can be partly explained by the fact that almost half of the respondents (43%) are engaged in an organization that has been the subject of analysis for less than 5 years. Namely, organizational commitment is a much more stable measure in relation to job satisfaction because it develops slowly, over time, so in that sense employees need more time to identify themselves with the organization in which they work, to dedicate themselves to it, and feel proud they are part of it. The obtained research results and confirmation of both hypotheses are in the accordance with the results pointed out by Hamideh and Mahmood Zare (2012); West and Bocarnea (2008); Mohammad, Hussein and Mohammad (2011); Ebener and O'Connell (2010); Hu and Liden (2011) and Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008).

The contribution of the research is reflected in the provision of information and guidance that organizations can use as inputs in the process of making future decisions and strategies. The conclusions reached by the study can be applied in organizations, by implementing a model of servant leadership that results in satisfied and committed employees, which ultimately leads to an improvement in the overall performance of the organization.

In further research, it is desirable to include more constructs in the questionnaire and to increase the number of respondents, i.e. the sample size. Also, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are very complex areas of research on organizational behaviour and leadership, which show certain specifics depending on the size of the organization itself and the duration of the employment in the organization. Namely, future researchers can analyse the relationship of these variables in small, medium, and large organizations, and depending on the period of employee's work experience in the organization in order to provide relevant and more detailed scientific implications.

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