Impact of Servant Leadership Style on Employee's Intentions to Stay in Indian

Organizations

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Abstract

The research paper attempts to study Servant leadership (SL) style in Indian organizations and its impact on employee's intentions to stay with particular organization. The finding of the study indicates that there exists significant positive correlation between the dimensions of SLS (Servant Leadership Scale) and intentions to stay. The regression analysis of the eight factor model on Servant Leadership and dependent variable intentions to stay indicates that out of the eight dimensions (Empowerment, Standing Back, Authenticity, Forgiveness, Accountability, Humility, Courage and Stewardship) of SLS, empowerment and forgiveness significantly explains variance in dependent variable intentions to stay. It is evident from the study that characteristics of servant leadership help in enhancing staying intentions of employees with particular organization.

Keywords: empowerment, forgiveness, courage, humility, stewardship, intentions to stay

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Organizations

With the continuous change in the expectations of the 21st century employees, employee

retention becomes a critical challenge in front of organizations. The organizations today are

struggling with devising the best possible human resource policies which help them retain the

skilled workforce to achieve competitive edge. Apart from the changing expectations of the

employees, global competitive pressure also forces the organizations to take necessary steps in

building trust and confidence in their employees and provide them leadership support, so that

they remain working with them for longer. At the same time, in the dynamic business

environment and confidence shake in business leadership, the traditional theories of leadership

are emerging on the surface to help organizations improve superior subordinate relationships to

attain better performance. One such theory is the theory of Servant Leadership (SL) which is

characterized by teamwork, involving subordinates in decision making, helping people grow and

creating the caring organizations (Spears, 1996, 2010).

Concept and Definition: Servant Leadership

The concept of "Servant Leadership" was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 in an

essay entitled, "*The servant as Leader*".

Definition:

"The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve.

Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as

persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more

likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society;

will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 27)

The concept Servant Leadership was practised even thousand years ago before Greenleaf identified it formally (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The narration from Bible clearly depicts this notion. Jesus Christ's teachings to his disciples are clear examples of servant leadership theory. The findings from the research work done by (Spears, 1996, 2004, Farling, et al. (1999), Blanchard (1999), Russell (2001), Russell, et al. (2001), Sendjaya & Sarros (2002), indicate that the concept servant leadership is more of anecdotal nature which lacks empirical evidence of its influence. The focus of these studies was to develop the strong foundation of the concept and giving it a shape for empirical investigation. Looking at need of traditional leadership theories in 21st century, the authors described the applications of servant leadership style in organizations. The various models have been developed by the research to test its practical implications. The research also focused upon the distinctive attributes of servant leadership. Although it was found that primary intent and self concept differentiate servant leadership from transformational and charismatic leadership styles, yet some researchers proved these leadership styles to be same. Authors found that although most of the great companies to work for have servant leadership as their core value of culture, yet there is a strong need to make its presence felt by further research. Vision, credibility, trust, service, appreciation for others and empowerment proved to be the most important basic values of servant leadership. *1. Listening, 2. Empathy, 3. Healing, 4. Awareness, 5. Persuasion, 6. Conceptualizing, 7. Foresight, 8. Stewardship, 9. Commitment to growth, 10. Community building* are identified as ten basic characteristics of servant leadership. The studies criticized the managerial style of being more coercive, judging and critic in comparison to managers those are cheerleaders. Depending upon the extensive literature review the studies proposed three conceptual models of servant leadership.

The various researchers (Laub (1999), Sendjaya, S. (2003), Ehrhart (2004), Dennis & Bocarnea (2005), Barbuto & Wheeler (2006), Wong & Davey (2007), Liden, R.C et al., (2008), Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011)) have developed and validated the construct to measure servant leadership. The construct's dimensions were developed on the basis of the ten characteristics defined by Spears (2004). Some   constructs are unidimensional and some are multidimensional. First scale to measure servant leadership was developed by Laub (1999) and was named as OLA (organizational leadership assessment). Recent scale on servant leadership is developed by Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011) and named it as SLS (Servant leadership scale). It is the first measure of its kind where the underlying factor structure was developed and across several field studies in two countries. The result of the study conducted by Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011) includes development an eight dimensional measure of 30 items as: 1. *Standing Back, 2. Forgiveness, 3. Courage, 4. Empowerment, 5. Accountability, 6. Authenticity, 7. Humility and 8. Stewardship.* The findings from the literature study indicate that so far servant leadership was examined with a range of other organizational variables like, extra effort, satisfaction, organizational effectiveness (Barbuto & Wheeler (2006), procedural justice climate, organizational citizenship behavior Ehrhart (2004), leadership effectiveness Hale & Fields (2007), team effectiveness Irving & Longbotham (2007), organizational commitment, turnover intentions, job stress, job satisfaction Jaramillo, et al. (2009), organizational commitment, community citizenship behavior Liden, et al. (2008), organizational justice Mayer, Bardes & Piccolo (2008), helping behavior Neubert, et al. (2008), perceived organizational support Sun &Wang (2009), integrity, competence Washington, et al. (2006), role clarity West, et al. (2009), trust Reinke (2003), extra role behavior, commitment, Bobbio, et al. (2012),

turnover intentions, disengagement Hunter E.M., et al. (2013).etc. varied correlation with these variables indicate that servant leadership is impacting the organizations.

Rationale of the Study

Literature review from the studies of Dirk Van Dierendonck (2011), Gupta, et al. (2002), House, et al. (2004), Liden, et al. (2008), Bobbio, et al. (2012), supports the fact the most of the studies conducted on the concept of servant leadership focused upon scale development and validation of the servant leadership construct. Although there is a little evidence on the research on servant leadership of construct and other organizational variable of interest, yet it is important to note here that most of the studies on Servant leadership are conducted in the regions of the world with Lower power distance. The countries where the servant leadership scores are high are scoring low on power distance, which means that the country where power is distributed equally in the society. The examples of the countries are Netherlands, UK and Italy. It is evident from the study of Bobbio, et al. (2012) in their study titled "Servant leadership in Italy and its relation to organizational variables" found that servant leadership expressed by Italian leaders turned out to be lower than in the Netherlands and in UK. The power distance index of these countries in GLOBE study also indicated that the power distance index in Italy is more than the Netherlands and UK; it is because of this reason that Italy scored low on servant leadership in comparison with these countries. The status of servant leadership in the countries with high power distance is unexplored still. India according to the study of House, et al. (2004) is a country that is characterized by high power distance. Literature clearly identifies the gap of studying the servant leadership in the countries with high power distance as it remains an unanswered empirical question Liden, et al. (2008). This research paper attempts to study servant leadership in Indian and its impact of employee's intentions to stay with their organizations.

Objectives

1. To study the relationship between servant leadership style and intentions to stay.

2. To study the level of servant leadership in Indian organizations.

Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1(a): There exists a significant positive correlation between Empowerment and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(b): There exists a significant positive correlation between Accountability and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(c): There exists a significant positive correlation between Standing Back and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(d): There exists a significant positive correlation between Humility and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(e): There exists a significant positive correlation between Authenticity and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(f): There exists a significant positive correlation between Courage and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(g): There exists a significant positive correlation between Forgiveness and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 1(h): There exists a significant positive correlation between Stewardship and intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 2: All the dimensions of (Empowerment, Accountability, Standing Back, Humility, Authenticity, Courage, Forgiveness and Stewardship) predict the variance in intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 3: The level of servant leadership style practised by Indian leaders will be lower than leaders in Italy, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Methods

Participants

The data was collected from 60 respondents working in Indian organizations. From total 60 respondents, 38 (63%) were males and 22 (37%) were females, working in 7 (12%) and 53 (88%) service organizations. The number of private and public organizations participated in survey was 49 (82%) and 11 (18%) respectively. Most of the respondents 36 (60%) were less than 25 years of age, followed by 21 (35%) falls between 26-30 years of age and 3 (5%) were above 30. The majority of responds 53 (89%) were post graduate followed by 5 (8%) graduate and 2 (3%) higher than post graduate. The hierarchical level on which respondents were working comprises of 14 (23%) at junior level, 40 (67%) at middle level and 6 (10%) at senior level. In terms of experience, most of the respondents 50 (83%) have less than 5 years of experience, 8 (13%) have experience between 6 to 10 years and 2 (4%) have experience more than 15 years. The majority of respondents had a male leaders 49 (82%) in comparison to female leaders 11 (18%). The majority of respondents 25 (42%) had their leaders in the age bar of 36-45 years, followed by 23 (38%) between 25-35 years of age, 9 (15%) between 46-55 and 3 (5%) above 55 years of age. The demographic profile of respondents is also summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic profile of respondents*

Sr. No.	Demographic	Category	No. and Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	38 (63%)
		Female	22 (37%)
2.	Industry	Manufacturing	7 (12%)
		Service	53 (89%)
3.	Organization Type	Public	11 (18%)
		Private	49 (82%)
4.	Age	Less than 25 years	36 (60%)
		26-30	21 (35%)
		Above 30	3 (5%)
5.	Education	Graduate	5 (8%)
		Post Graduate (PG)	53 (89%)
		Higher than PG	2 (3%)
6.	Hierarchical Level	Junior level	14 (23%)
		Middle level	40 (67%)
		Senior Level	6 (10%)
7.	Experience	Less than 5 years	50 (83%)
		6-10 years	8 (13%)
		Above 10 years	2 (4%)
8.	Gender of leader	Male	49 (82%)
		Female	11 (18%)
9.	Age of the leader	25-35	23 (38%)
		36-45	25(42%)
		46-55	9 (15%)
		Above 55	3 (5%)

Survey Instruments

The data was collected with the help of standardised questionnaires. The servant leadership

scale (SLS) developed by Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) was administered to collect

data for the assessment of servant leadership style in Indian organizations. The instrument

consists of eight factors and these factors are: 1. Empowerment (7 items), 2. Standing back (3

items), 3. Accountability (3 items), 4. Forgiveness (3 items), 5. Courage (2 items), 6.

Authenticity (4 items), 7. Humility (5 items), 8. Stewardship (3 items). The total items in SLS

are 30. All the participants were instructed to answer each item keeping in mind the behaviour

of their immediate supervisor. Intentions to stay had been studied with (11 items) scale given

by Kyndt, et al. [18]. The participants were instructed to answer each item keeping in mind

the employer with whom they are working. The data was collected on a five point likert scale

(1-Strongly Disagree to 5- strongly agree). The questionnaire was administered online.

Data analysis and Discussion

The data was analysed by using SPSS 20.0. First of all the reliability of items in the

questionnaire was tested. The value of cronbach's alpha (α) (reliability coefficients) for 30

items of SLS and 11 items of intentions to stay comes out to be *.917* and *.650* respectively

which depicts the reliability of the data as the value more than 0.6 generally indicates

satisfactory internal consistency reliability Malhotra, N.K. & Dash, S. (2009). Correlations

and regression statistics were performed to test the hypotheses. The assumptions of normality

of data for regression were tested, in order to avoid any violation of these assumptions. One

sample K-S test was also applied to test the normality of data and test confirmed that the data

is normally distributed. The kurtosis and skewness for all the individual items was also

calculated. The Kurtosis and skewness for all the SLS items ranges between -1 and +1 which

are acceptable as values that falls between -1 and +1 assume to be fit Malhotra, N.K. & Dash,

S. (2009).

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation among dimensions of Servant Leadership and Intentions to stay.*

SLS Dimensions and Retention	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Empowerment	.552**	.769**	.692**	.544**	.428**	.151	.770**	.489**
2. Accountability		.468**	.273**	.238	.270**	.288*	.366**	.459**
3. Standing Back			.723**	.559**	.366**	.142*	.702**	.443**
4. Humility				.622**	.419**	-.034	.767**	.351**
5. Authenticity					.393**	-.033	.666**	.377**
6. Courage						-.067	.472**	.375**
7. Forgiveness							.058	.362**
8. Stewardship								.386**
9. Intentions to Stay								

Pearson's correlation statistics between SLS dimensions and intentions to stay were calculated and are summarised in (Table 2). Out of the eight dimensions of SLS, empowerment is the one dimension which shows the highest positive correlation (.489) at .05 significant level, that depicts that higher the level of empowerment, higher will be the intentions to stay in the organizations. The high positive correlation found above is well understood with the notion that India stands high on Human orientation as per GLOBE study by Dorfman, et al. (2012). It is followed by a positive correlation of Accountability (.459), standing back (.443), stewardship (.386), Authenticity (.377), Courage (.375), Forgiveness (.362) and Humility (.351) with intentions to stay. The result indicates that all the dimensions of SLS have positive correlation

with intentions to stay. This means all the SLS dimensions help in increasing the staying intentions of employees in the organizations It may also important to note here that as per the GLOBE study India belongs to Southern Asia cluster which is characterised by high power distance, human orientation and low on gender egalitarianism Gupta, et al. (2002). This may be a possible reason that why Indian managers are low on Humility and forgiveness dimension of SLS as the power is unequally distributed because of high power distance in the Indian society. A possible reason for the high power distance in the Indian society can easily be traced by the presence of historically very rigid and hierarchical organization of society into various socio-economic classes Gupta, et al. (2002). So, therefore Hypothesis 1 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g) and (h) are accepted.

To understand the relationship between the SLS dimensions (independent variables) and intentions to stay (dependent variable), a series of multiple regression (stepwise) analysis was conducted to check the most important predictors of dependent variable. The results of the analysis are summarized in the Table 3 below.

Table 3: *Model Summary*

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE of estimate	Change Statistics					
					R square Change	F change	Df 1	Df 2	Sig. F change	Durbin Watson
1.	.489[a]	.240	.226	.42038	.240	18.275	1	58	.000	1.753
2.	.570[b]	.324	.301	.39972	.085	7.151	1	57	.010	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empowerment
b. Predictors: (Constant), Empowerment, Forgiveness
Dependent Variable: Intentions to stay

In the analysis it was found that out eight dimensions of SLS intentions to stay was positively influenced by only two dimensions (Empowerment and forgiveness). The model that includes two dimensions of SLS was deemed fit at the adjusted R square value of .301, which means that

2 independent variables explain 30.1% of variance in the intentions to stay (dependent variable) at a significance level of 0.05. Durbin Watson statistics with a value of 1.753 indicates that there is no autocorrelation in the residuals. Table 4 below shows the coefficients of intentions to stay. The standardized beta coefficients of empowerment and forgiveness indicates that empowerment (β=.445) is influencing the intentions to stay positively and is the most important predictor of intentions to stay in the analysis and is supported by the literature support (Schneider & George, 2011) followed by forgiveness (β=.295) indicates that intentions to stay is also positively influenced by forgiveness.

Table 4: *Coefficients* [a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.472	.381		3.860	.000					
Empowerment	.313	.077	.445	4.042	.000	.489	.472	.440	.977	1.023
Forgiveness	.208	.078	.295	2.674	.010	.362	.334	.291	.977	1.023

   a. Dependent Variable: Intentions to stay

The result of the regressions analysis proves that all dimensions of SLS does not predict variance in dependent variable. Only two dimensions (Empowerment and forgiveness) of SLS out of eight predict variance in dependent variable, so therefore hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Table 5: *SLS scores in samples from India, Italy, The Netherlands and United Kingdom.*

SLS Dimensions	India		Italy		The Netherlands		United Kingdom	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Empowerment	3.81	0.47	3.97	1.07	4.39	0.90	4.06	1.12
2. Accountability	3.62	0.72	4.95	0.85	4.86	0.70	4.84	0.81
3. Standing Back	3.16	0.77	2.92	1.14	3.67	0.95	3.61	127
4. Humility	3.22	0.75	3.30	1.14	4.13	0.93	3.56	1.12
5. Authenticity	3.06	0.60	3.25	1.05	3.62	0.94	3.50	1.23
6. Courage	3.19	0.80	3.57	1.30	3.86	1.08	3.61	1.23
7. Forgiveness	2.37	0.66	3.33	1.09	3.87	1.05	2.81	1.33
8. Stewardship	3.52	0.76	4.15	1.06	4.43	0.91	3.90	1.14

Source: Data for comparison extracted from Andrea Bobbio, Dirk Van Dierendonck & Anna Maria Manganelli (2012)

To study the level of servant leadership in Indian organizations, a comparative analysis is conducted with the samples from Italy, The Netherlands and United Kingdom. The mean score for the SLS dimensions such as empowerment, accountability, humility, authenticity, courage, forgiveness and stewardship comes out to be less in Indian sample in comparison with Italy, The Netherlands and United Kingdom. The comparative data of servant leadership dimensions is summarised in Table 5 above. Within Indian sample the mean scores of empowerment and stewardship comes out to be higher as it is expected to be displayed by the leaders in people oriented culture Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). In case of standing back the Indian sample scores

higher than Italy, but lesser than The Netherlands and United Kingdom, which indicates that

Indian leaders enjoy the success of their followers more than leaders from Italy, but less than

leaders from The Netherlands and United Kingdom. The Indian leaders scored lowest on the

dimension forgiveness means that Indian leaders cannot forget the mistakes of their subordinates

easily in comparison with the leader's attitude from Italy, The Netherlands and United Kingdom.

Out of the total eight dimensions of SLS, Indian leaders scored lowest in seven dimensions

(empowerment, accountability, humility, courage and stewardship), only in case of standing back

Indian leaders scored higher than leaders of Italy, so there Hypothesis 2 cannot be rejected.

Conclusion

The paper aims at studying the current literature on servant leadership and its relationship with

other organizational variables of interest. Literature review supports the fact the most of the

studies conducted on the concept of servant leadership focused upon scale development and

validation of the servant leadership construct. Although there exist a little evidence on the

research on servant leadership of construct and other organizational variable of interest, yet it is

important to note here most of the studies on Servant leadership are conducted in the regions of

the world with Lower power distance as per GLOBE study by Dorfman, et al.(2002). The

countries where the servant leadership scores are high are scoring low on power distance, which

means that the country where power is distributed equally in the society. The examples of the

countries are Netherlands, UK and Italy. This paper attempts to assess the servant leadership

style in India, which is characterized by high power distance as per GLOBE study Dorfman, et

al. (2002). As expected the score of servant leadership style in India is lower than the countries in

comparison. It is evident from the study of Bobbio, et al. (2012) in their study titled "Servant

leadership in Italy and its relation to organizational variables" found that servant leadership

expressed by Italian leaders turned out to be lower than in the Netherlands and in UK. The power distance index of these countries in GLOBE study also indicated that the power distance index in Italy is more than the Netherlands and UK, it is because of this reason that Italy scored low on servant leadership in comparison with other two countries. The organizational variables which are studied with the servant leadership construct in the above mentioned literature reviews are not diverse. Same variables are studied with SL construct but with different samples, so there exists a strong need to explore the other organizational variables of interest. The current study focused on finding the relationship between Servant Leadership and Intentions to stay and concluded that several characteristics of Servant Leadership can help enhance the staying intentions of employees working in Indian organizations. The study also found that the servant leadership style exhibit by Indian leaders is quite low in comparison with other countries under study. The literature available so far does not indicate any cause and effect relationship between SL construct and other organizational variables, because there is no evidence of longitudinal study on servant leadership in literature. Literature also suggested that still the concept of servant leadership is in confusing state as multiple scale produce varied results for the studies.

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