RESEARCH ARTICLE

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence, Motivation, Integrity, Spirituality, Mentoring and Servant Leadership Practices

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Abstract

Servant leadership is the practice of creating a serving relationship with others to provide vision, develop, influence, gain credibility and trust while staying focused on achieving results that are consistent with the organization's values. This paper investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality, mentoring and servant leadership practices among selected executives in Malaysia. Servant leadership practices in this study comprise the five servant leadership factors of altruism, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping and organizational stewardship. This study adopts the systematic random sampling survey approach to gather empirical data. Subjects of the study comprise 480 executives who attended leadership training programs. Six measuring instruments were adapted to obtain the various measures and a questionnaire was designed to utilize the measuring instruments and to collect demographic background information about the participants' age, gender and working experience. The results from the analysis indicate that the three independent variables of spirituality, mentoring and emotional intelligence have a strong and positive relationship with servant leadership practices. Spirituality is the best predictor for servant leadership practices ($B = 0.342$), mentoring is the second highest predictor ($B = 0.295$), followed by emotional intelligence ($B = 0.170$). The findings from this study may serve as a useful starting point for enhancing leadership training programs.

Keywords: Servant leadership; leadership; emotional intelligence; motivation; integrity; spirituality; mentoring.

1. Introduction

In recent decades there has been a great interest in research on leadership. This interest in leadership is driven by many factors such as the desire to understand how effective leaders can help their followers navigate successfully in times of tumultuous change. There has been keen concern to understand leadership characteristics and great leaders' abilities to lead and influence others to achieve certain agreed goals. Knowing more about what constitutes excellent leadership may help organisations and institutions identify and develop potential leaders. Multiple research efforts have been engaged to identify and understand factors that may contribute towards nurturing good leaders whom others would follow without hesitation [1–4]. Previous studies have also focused on attempts to groom leaders who will be effective in impacting others through their leadership [5–7].

The concept of servant leadership is not new and has been practicing for centuries [8]. A servant leader is defined as one who emphasises the good of his followers over the self-interest of the leader [9]. Servant leadership promotes the development of people through the sharing of power, community building, leadership authenticity and the leader's focus on the good of his followers and the organisation [9].

Greenleaf, first introduced the concept of servant leadership and defined the servant leader as one who facilitates achievement of a shared vision via the personal development and empowerment of followers and leadership must primarily meet the needs of others [10]. Several other authors have also advocated servant leadership in their books [11–13].

Researchers and authors who advocate servant leadership have emphasized the leader's role as a custodian or steward of the resources (human, financial and otherwise) provided by the organisation. Servant leadership requires the leader to serve others while staying focused on achieving the results which are consistent with the organisation's values. According to McMinn [14], servant leaders develop people by helping them to strive and flourish. Other researchers [15] are of the view that servant leaders provide vision, gain credibility and trust from followers and influence others.

The literature [16] indicates that servant leadership is espoused as a valid theory of organisational leadership. However, some researchers [17] have noted that although many successful companies such as Southwest Airlines have emphasized servant leadership practices, there is a lack of empirical evidence in the research literature about servant leadership practices in Malaysia.

A study by Ambali *et al.* [18] indicates a positive relationship between servant leadership attributes and organisational commitment of staff among Malaysian civil servants. Integrity was identified as an important attribute that influenced the quality of leaders in the Malaysian public service department. Another study by Al Haj *et al.* [19] among Malaysian civil servants focused on the difference between the servant leadership style and employee perceptions of the leader based on four demographic factors – gender, age, tenure and job rank. Findings from this study [19] reveal that gender had no impact on how employee perceived their leaders servant leadership style. However, age, tenure and job rank made a small difference on how the employee perceived their leaders. This is in contrast to Salleh's [20] findings that demographic factors of gender, age and marital status had no effect on servant leadership in a Malaysian University setting.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Effective leadership is very important to the success or failure of any organisation. In recent years, there has been keen interest in servant leadership. However, research literature indicates a lack of empirical evidence to validate the importance of servant leadership. Servant leadership requires the leader to create serving relationships with others to develop others, provide vision, influence, gain credibility and trust while staying focused on achieving results which are consistent with the organisation's values [14, 15]. However, leadership skills can only be taught and individuals cannot be forced to practise it. A servant leader is one who shows:

> An understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self interest of the leader. Servant leadership promotes valuing and development of people, building of community, practice of authenticity, providing leadership for the good of those who led and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the total organization and those served by the organization [21, p. 7].

Research on leadership has also focused on the antecedents which contribute towards building a leader, who cares and serves others in a sacrificial manner. Many factors have been found to be essential for effective leadership and some of these factors are also expected to be related to servant leadership. Research on leadership factors such as integrity [22], spirituality [23], team commitment [24], mentoring [25] and emotional intelligence [26] indicate that these factors may determine the level of servant leadership practices. Understanding the nature of servant leadership itself poses a challenge. Some studies have indicated research evidence that certain leadership factors such as altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping and organisational stewardship may contribute significantly towards servant leadership [27].

Although there have been many attempts to study servant leadership in countries such as the United States of America (USA), there is a paucity of research to investigate servant leadership practices in Asian countries such as Malaysia. This study yields empirical data by measuring the level of servant leadership practices among executives in Malaysia.

This study extends the theoretical framework from the work of Barbuto and Wheeler [27] by looking into the possible antecedents or influencers of servant leadership such as emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality and mentoring that affect the extent to which servant leadership is practised among selected Malaysian executives.

2. Methods

This is a correlational study to determine the influence of the independent variables of emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality and mentoring on the servant leadership practices among selected Malaysian executives. The literature review established the background for this study and thus the following hypotheses were proposed:

> H_A1: Emotional intelligence is positively related to servant leadership practices.
> H_A2: Motivation is positively related to servant leadership practices.

H$_A$3: Integrity is positively related to servant leadership practices.
H$_A$4: Spirituality is positively related to servant leadership practices.
H$_A$5: Mentoring is positively related to servant leadership practices.

This study adopts the systematic random sampling survey approach to gather empirical data. In this study, a modified version of the systematic random sampling whereby a list of leadership development training course dates was obtained from a training provider. From this list, every alternate training course date was selected for the survey. A total of 15 training dates were selected leading to a sample size of 480 executives. These executives are white-collar workers that perform professional, managerial or administrative work in their respective workplaces. Six measuring instruments were adapted to obtain the various measures and a survey questionnaire was designed to include the measuring instruments and to collect demographic background information about the participants' age, gender and working experience.

Data in this study was drawn from the survey questionnaires. For the purpose of gathering data in this study, the following instruments in Table 1 were administered. The data was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses using IBM SPSS version 19.

Table 1: Measuring instruments used in this study.

Instrument	Purpose
Genos emotional intelligence short inventory [28]	Measure self-perceived emotional intelligence
Motivation sources inventory (MSI) [29]	Measure self-perceived motivational level
Adapted from servant leadership assessment (SLA) [30]	Measure self-perceived integrity or moral character of the leader
Adapted from spirituality at work (SAW) [31]	Measure self-perceived spirituality at work
Adapted from mentorship effectiveness scale (MES) [32]	Adapted to measure self-perceived mentoring at work
Servant leadership questionnaire (SLQ) [27]	Measure the self-perceived five factors of servant leadership
Adapted from burnout of correctional staff survey [33]	Measure self-perceived organisational commitment

The internal consistency for the variables in this study was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for wisdom (0.78), persuasive mapping (0.79), organisational stewardship (0.76), emotional intelligence (0.75), motivation (0.76), integrity (0.80) and organisational commitment (0.70) fall within the acceptable range. The results for emotional healing (0.83), spirituality (0.86) and mentoring (0.91) fall within the very good range. Only, altruism (0.64) is in the undesirable range.

3. Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistical analyses of the means, standard deviations, medians, minimums and maximums were conducted for the five independent variables emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality, mentoring and the dependent variable servant leadership practices which are presented in Table 2.

The results of the analysis for the independent variables in Table 2 indicate that motivation has the highest mean score of 5.98 with a standard deviation of 0.65. The second highest mean score of 5.80 and standard deviation of 0.72 was with integrity, the third highest mean score of 5.66 and standard deviation of 0.75 was with mentoring and the fourth highest mean score of 5.63 and standard deviation of 0.80 was with spirituality. The independent variable with the lowest mean was emotional intelligence which had a mean of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 0.44. The first four means appear to be quite close to each other with values within the range of 5–6.

The relationship between emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality, mentoring and servant leadership was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality and linearity. Since there

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality, mentoring and servant leadership practices.

Descriptive statistics	Variables					
	Servant leadership practices (Y_1)	Emotional intelligence (X_1)	Motivation (X_2)	Integrity (X_3)	Spirituality (X_4)	Mentoring (X_5)
Mean	3.04	3.55	5.98	5.80	5.63	5.66
Median	3.00	3.54	6.10	5.89	5.75	5.75
Standard deviation	0.33	0.44	0.65	0.72	0.80	0.75
Minimum	2.00	2.21	3.40	3.56	2.83	2.75
Maximum	3.91	4.79	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Interquartile range (IQR)	0.43	0.64	0.90	1.00	1.08	1.00
Skewness	0.07	0.05	−0.76	−0.48	−0.69	−0.61
Kurtosis	−0.15	−0.22	0.59	−0.27	0.17	0.64

were five (5) bivariate pairs, the Bonferroni adjusted alpha of 0.01 (0.05/5) was used to test null hypothesis of the bivariate correlations.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient reveal that the strongest linear relationship was found to exist between mentoring and servant leadership ($r = 0.53$, $p = 0.0001$). The positive correlation coefficient of 0.53 indicates a moderate positive linear relationship, that as the score for mentoring increases so does the rating for servant leadership. The second highest was found between spirituality and servant leadership ($r = 0.51$, $p = 0.0001$) and the correlation coefficient of 0.51 indicates that there was moderate positive linear relationship between spirituality and servant leadership. The third highest correlation was found between emotional intelligence and servant leadership ($r = 0.42$, $p = 0.0001$), a value of 0.42 indicates a low positive linear relationship. The fourth highest linear relationship was found between integrity and servant leadership ($r = 0.34$, $p = 0.0001$), a value of 0.34 indicates a low positive linear relationship. Finally, the lowest relationship was found between motivation and servant leadership showing a little or negligible correlation ($r = 0.19$, $p = 0.0001$).

Although this study was not designed to determine whether an increase in one variable caused an increase in the value of a second variable, it would seem logical to say that servant leadership is more apt to increase when emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality and mentoring increase.

Overall, there is a strong positive relationship between mentoring, spirituality, emotional intelligence and servant leadership practices. This is in agreement with Lo and Ramayah [34] study that showed a positive relationship between career mentoring and job satisfaction. Individuals who were satisfied with their mentoring experience had greater job satisfaction and displayed servant leadership practices in their workplace. Hence, mentoring led to better workplace performance.

It is not surprising that spirituality has a strong relationship with servant leadership practices in Malaysia since, the local culture places emphasis on mutual collaboration to attain a shared goal. This collective or community spirit is ingrained from childhood days in the villages and throughout school life and is an example of meaningful work and shared values.

Ngah *et al.* [35] findings concur that emotional intelligence is positively related to work attitude and performance in Malaysia. Servant leaders need to have a good attitude and regulation of emotion, therefore emotional intelligence is an important predictor of servant leadership practices.

Integrity and motivation show a surprisingly low relationship with servant leadership practices. One of the possible reasons for the low integrity score could be the proliferation of nepotism in the Malaysian workplace. Familial relations are very important to Malaysians and this could have led to some conflict of interest. In addition, a study by Islam and Ismail [36] revealed that high wages is the top ranking reason for employee motivation among Malaysians. Therefore motivation to exemplify servant leadership practices may not be a priority among Malaysian executives hence leading to the low score.

4. Conclusion

Mentoring, spirituality and emotional intelligence have a strong positive relationship with servant leadership practices. Mentoring and servant leadership have the strongest positive relationship, followed closely by spirituality and emotional intelligence. The findings from this study show that servant leaders are good mentors who view spirituality as an important value and are emotionally intelligent. The study shows that Malaysian servant leaders display qualities as good mentors offering effective mentoring to their employees. Servant leaders also see spirituality as an important value. In addition, servant leaders are emotionally intelligent being able to display intrapersonal skills as well as interpersonal skills. The results from this study indicate that integrity and motivation show a much weaker relationship to servant leadership. Leaders tend to place low emphasis on demonstrating integrity in their leadership practices and may not focus on motivating their employees. Results from this study suggest that Malaysian leadership training programs may need to give more emphasis on developing integrity and motivation in leaders.

Competing Interests

None declared.

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