Servant Leadership: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

A new research area in the leadership is promising a future of hope to the learning organizations. Servant leadership is deeply rooting itself around ethical, spiritual and value based philosophy in our organizations. The aim of this study is to identify the researches that are presenting servant leadership as a theoretical concept, as a leadership model and as a predictor of behavioral factors at individual, group and organizational level. To coduct study a systematic, structured and replicative technique used for reviewing literature. Finally studies on servant leadership from 2006 to 2017 were selected. The findings of study revealed: (a) servant leadership is defined by different authors by considering 'self-less service' as a main element, (b) majority of researches are available in Western cultural context, (c) servant leadership theory is exhibiting significant relationship with individual psychological and cognitive level factors i.e. servant leaders are unique to other type of leaders (d) Servant leadership implications and applications are at individual, group and organizational level in the form of well-being, mental health, satisfaction and higher performance. It is concluded by summarizing servant leadership as a holistic and futuristic way to manage our organizations. This paper will provide insight regarding study and development of servant leadership as a philosophy in modern organizations.

Keywords: Leadership, Servant Leadership, Systematic Literature Review (SLR), Servant Leadership Models, Organizations.

Introduction

The concepts of leadership are omnipresent on this Earth right from beginning. The humans' evolution process poses number of challenges to the leadership in term of its adoption. The word 'leadership' incorporated into the technical vocabulary of organizational theory without any scientific enquiry (Yukl, 2009). Leadership studies in the past covered wider human and organizational aspects to define leadership. In these studies, leadership is defined as a capability to influence a group toward accomplishment of goals (Robbins et al., 2013), it is a result of social processes (Yukl, 2009), arises from the formal structure in the organizations (Drafke & Kossen, 1998), defined as a constructive & dynamic force in the organizations, and a transactional event in which leaders affect and are affected by followers rightly or wrongly (Rowe & Gurrero, 2013). Greenberg (2011) described leadership as a process which involves non-coercive

influence by the leader on the followers for the accomplishment of desired goals. This means the followers willingly follow their leader. According to Blanchard (1998) leadership exists covertly in relationships, imagination and perception of involved parties. The process of leadership involves leader as a key element. These leaders are pivotal part of our society .leader define the reality and nurture a vision for new better reality to come (Taylor et al., 2007). Leaders are present in every walk of our lives. Rowe and Guerrero (2013) defined leader as a person who exercises leadership. The leader should have desire to lead, should be flexible, focused, cognitive and emotionally intelligent. Leader is not a person with official designation but the person who run things (Greenberg, 2011). Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, and many more contributed to the mankind and society profoundly.

The different approaches of leadership described different attributes, behaviors, situations and power roles of leaders. Leadership as a function of trait emphasize on person's qualities and characteristics. Ghiselli and Porter (1963) identified supervising ability, intelligence, decisiveness, initiative, self-assurance, maturity, affinity for working class and masculinity-feminity as personality traits of leader. The leaders like Napoleon, Mao, Churchill, and Buddha are known by their traits. This approach emphasize that one should learn and adopt the traits of successful leaders. On the other hand, the scholars also explored the leadership as a function of behavior. The behavioral attributes of leader differentiate leaders from non-leaders (Robbins et al., 2013). The behavior of leader generates satisfaction on the end of followers, so the followers recognize the person as their leader. While, in case of power influencing approach the leadership depends upon the ability of leader to command resources. Moreover, the situational approach distinguishes the leaders on the basis of attributes exhibit by leaders in different situations (Yukl, 2009).

Theory of Servant Leadership

The servant leadership is not any longer a new term in leadership theory. The most important task of present time is to nurture and develop leaders who are people centric, relational, flexible and ethical (Avolio et al., 2009). The servant leadership originates from the positive philosophy but in the recent studies scholars are stressing on negative organizational terminology for generating background and defining relevance of servant leadership (Sendjaya et al., 2008; Donia et al., 2016). The scandals, malpractices and decreased confidence in leadership are pointing toward the application of ethics and values in leadership. Society is looking for leaders who built a better future for coming generations. People want and prefer leaders, who focus on

their needs. Leadership is at the center of all developmental issues; even leaders are working on controlling external factors for sustainable growth of organizations and society as a whole. This is possible when leaders serve followers with selfless desire of service. The emphasis of leadership studies are shifting toward the servant leadership theory and its application. This change is evident from the increasing conceptual and empirical investigation of servant leadership by leadership scholars (Greenleaf, 2002; Neubert et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2014; Spears, 2004; Taylor et al., 2007; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Verdorfer, 2016; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

The 'servant leadership' is a paradoxical (Block, 1993) and oxymoronic term coined purposefully by Robert Greenleaf in 1977 after reading Hermen Hesse's 'Journey to the East'. The Greenleaf provided a pause to leadership scholars to thinks leadership by turning it upside down (McClellan, 2010). This is an attempt to change the direction of organizational pyramid with respect to leader and followers relationships. The notion of servant leadership was introduced by (Greenleaf, 1977), who described it as follows: "The servant-leader is a servant first. It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then the conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p.27). Servant leadership is about finding satisfaction and motivation by prioritizing and serving other's needs. In servant leadership leader holds the values of love, care compassion and positivity in work and life for accomplishment of desired goals (Spear, 2004). Here, servant leader doesn't mean person who follow orders and submissive to others, but a leader who find motivation in 'leading by serving'. Servant leader is a guiding spirit, head and act as a noble leader (Greenleaf, 1970). Yukl (2009) describe integrity, altruism, humility, empathy & healing, personal growth, fairness & justice and empowerment as main key elements of servant leader's behavior. While, Spears and Wagner-Marsh (1998) extracted ten main characteristics for the development of servant leadership; and termed these as "listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community". All characteristics mentioned above are not exhaustive but act as promise and power for those who have the intention to adopt the concepts of servant leadership.

The servant leader work beyond their level and out of comfort zone to generate humility. Servant leaders devote themselves toward followers. The servant leadership helps to develop a complementary team to overcome weaknesses at individual and organizational level. In case of servant leadership leader adopts life principles for achieving life astonishing results. The servant leadership works on the

aspects of courage, humility, integrity and reduces the fear of followers by realizing them that there are more important things than fear. People release rather than holding. People start believing that people around them are important for them and for their organization. Servant leadership leads to development of moral authority; employees believe in development of core values and principles. All this is possible because servant leaders connect with others by giving them freedom of choice (Covey, 2006). The potential benefits of servant leadership are loyalty, trust and satisfaction with the leader (Spear, 2004). Servant leadership creates culture of communi-cation, increase trust and loyalty between members of organization (Amy and Honeycut, 2011). The belief in service of others' and giving attitude of servant leader envision and embed service culture into organizational culture.

The servant leadership is a milestone in the way of value based leadership. This widely acceptable approach of leadership is promising a bright future of leadership in modern organizations. Servant leadership is about accepting the reality and envisioning a future reality which is people centric and growth oriented. The studies on servant leadership will provide direction to leaders and organization for their future.

Dimensions of Servant Leadership

- Voluntary subordination: It is a willful, conscious and deliberate submission to the others. Servant leader consider others' needs and interests above own. The word 'voluntary' describes the leader's innate attitude and feeling of serving other; servant leaders subordinate themselves "because they want to, not because they have to" (Sendjaya, 2015).

- Authentic self: Servant leader work silently behind the scenes and accepted criticism in positive way. Servant leader does not act defensive when confronted (Sendjaya et al., 2008). When one is true to oneself in all aspects of life he or she experience authentic self. It is a self-reflective and emotional experience. "It's

people's idea about what their true self is" (Vannini & Franzese, 2008).

- Covenantal relationship: The environment of organization enriched with strong interpersonal relationship by servant leader. People realize their full potential and start experiments at their levels. This leads to growth by self-expression. Servant leader treats people as equal partners in the organization (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

- Responsible morality: Servant leader takes a moral stand for ends and means and establish these throughout the organization. This helps to establish the culture that accepts and follows the strong values (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

- Transcendental spirituality: Servant leader help followers to develop meaningful work and a healthy workplace. This promotes interconnectedness between inner self and outer world. It generates sense of identity and purpose in people life (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

- Transforming influence: Servant leadership starts multiple changes in followers, organization and in society. To implement these changes successfully servant leadership minimize barriers that inhibit success (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

The agapolove, patience, kindness, gentleness, empathy and persuasion as dimensions of servant leadership were given by (Covey, 2006). While, Carroll and Patterson (2014) termed altruism, humility, trust, vision, empowerment, service and agapolove as different dimensions of servant leadership.

Method

The different databases were explored for finding studies related to servant leadership theory. For conducting this study the databases' used and accessible through the authors' university library system are included in table 1

Table 1. List of Databases Used in the Study

S. No	E-Resources	Website Link
1.	Emerald	http://www.emeraldinsight.com/
2.	JSTOR	http://www.jstor.org/
3.	Springer Link	http://link.springer.com/
4.	Taylor & Francis	http://www.tandfonline.com/
5.	Wiley-Blackwell	http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/

Source: http://www.cuhimachal.ac.in/library.aspx

The research papers should be in English language, published in peer review journals and has servant leadership as a key word selected initially to conduct review. Duplicate articles from different databases were excluded from the study. Then the studies were differentiated as: (a) empirical studies; (b) servant leadership model development studies; (c) discuss the servant leadership as main theme (d) quantitative and qualitative studies related to servant leadership. For this study, the information from articles extracted for servant leadership concepts and themes discussed under research, type of research, context of research, area of research and methodology used to examine servant leadership was evaluated. In these studies the methodology and tool development process is presented. The findings from these studies were summarized and placed into matrixes. The discussion and conclusions include thematic presentation of facts extracted from different studies.

Synthesis of Review Result

Table 2 included research papers describing servant leadership from theoretical and practical viewpoint. The researchers focused on theory development of servant leadership in light of different organizational and human behavioral concepts. Majority of the studies conducted in Western context, while recent studies are also available on Asian context. Majority of the studies in the present research paper are empirical and mostly used factor analysis techniques of data analysis.

Table 2. Servant leadership Studies

Themes of study	Author(s)	Study	Study Sampling	Technique	Area
Servant leadership, trust, employee creativity	Jaiswal, et. al. (2017)	Empirical Research	Conducted in 26 private organizations	Factor analysis	India
Servant leadership, self - other agreement, Under - estimation	Sousa & van Dierendonck, (2017)	Empirical Research	Middle management professionals from different companies	Regression and 3D surface analysis	Portugue se Republic
Servant Leadership, Job Satisfaction, Se lf-impression, organizational Citizenship Behavior	Donia, et. al. (2016)	Empirical Research (Time Lag data)	92 supervisor - subordinate dyads (Communications and Banking)	Factor analysis	Pakistan
Servant Leadership, Mindfulness, Humility, Standing Back	(Ver dorfer, 2016)	Empirical Longitudin al Research	Leader and Non leaders sample drawn from different industries	Factor analysis	Germany
Servant Leadership, Work - family Balance, Identification	(Wang, Kwan & Zhou, 2016)	Empirical Research	200 persons from an insurance company	Factor analysis	China
Servant leadership, Identification, Organizational Citizenship Behavior toward coworkers	Zhao, et. al. (2016)	Empirical Research	293 subordinate - supervisor dyads from hospitality industry	Factor analysis	China
Servant Leadership Behavior attributes	(Winston & Fields, 2015)	Empirical Research	Students, faculty, university alumni and colleagues in a variety of organizations	Factor analysis	USA
Servant Leadership, Employee engagement, Customer satisfaction, Loyalty	(Carter & Baghurst, 2014)	Qualitative Research Method	Restaurant Employees	Phenomenolog y study	USA
Servant Leadership, trust, Job satisfaction, Job tenure	(CHChan & Mak, 2014)	Empirical Research	Service oriented private firms employees	Factor analysis	China
Servant Leadership, Psychological Contracts, Extraversion, proactive, Collectivism	Panaccio, et. al. (2014)	Empirical, Longitudin al Research	Supervisors and Subordinates of 101 private companies	Factor analysis	USA

Servant Leadership, Education, Transact ional Leadership	(Stoten, 2013)	Mixed Method Research	Teachers associated with sixth form colleges	Descriptive Statistics	United Kingdom
Servant Leadership, Volunteer motivation, Vision, Empowerment	(Linda Parris & Welty Peachey, 2012)	Qualitative Research	Non-profit organization members	Case study method	USA
Servant Leadership, Role Performance, Outcome Performance, Customer orientation	Jaramillo, et. al. (2009)	Empirical, Cross-sectional Research	Salespersons associated with private organizations	Factor analysis	Cross-Cultural
Servant Leadership, Leadership Effectiveness	Taylor, et. al. (2007)	Empirical, Longitudin al Research	School Principals and teachers associated with state schools	Multivariate analysis	USA

Discussion

The continuous exploration of servant leadership by different scholars helped to generate theoretical base for practicing and implementation of servant leadership in modern organizational context cross-culturally. Servant leadership can be used as a philosophy or as a working model of leadership in the organizations (Spear, 2001). Jaramillo et al., (2009) examined the construct of servant leadership cross-culturally by measuring its impact on multiple interpersonal relationships. Researchers examined the "servant leader produce servant leader" theory implication in practical sense by analyzing the transference behaviors in multiple interpersonal relationships. CHchan and Mak (2014) measured the satisfaction and trust as a consequence of servant leader's behavior in the organization. Servant leaders in the organization generate trust in the environment which is leading to higher satisfaction. Jaiswal et al., (2017) advocated the generation of trust at interpersonal and group level under the influence of servant leadership. The trust generated at individual level is increasing their creativity and leading to achieve extra-ordinary results at every level in the organizations. The study inquired the influence of servant leadership at interpersonal and group level in the organizational context. The authors described trust as a consequence of servant leadership and creativity as a consequence of trust in the leadership. Most of the researchers tried to find and built servant leadership background in the transformational, ethical, authentic and spiritual leadership theories (Sendjaya et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2014). Sendjaya et al., (2008) embedded the servant leadership in spiritual leadership theory and elaborate it as a future of learning organizations. According to Sendjaya spirituality acts as a source of motivation for servant leader. Yukl (2009) incorporated and described servant leadership as a value based leadership.

Leadership is a psycho-social process. Researchers are trying to extract deep behavioral patterns associated with application of servant leadership. Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017) provided an interpretation about under-estimation of own abilities by servant leader for providing psychological empowerment to followers; servant leader develop self-awareness about his or her limitations; the psychological acceptance results in less inflicted sense of self in relation to others. This psychological complexity in leader's mind is helping to recognize the followers' intrinsic value. Servant leadership is fulfilling the psychological contract of leader and followers as the leaders-member exchange and transformational leadership theories are fulfilling. But the identification of boundaries in which servant leadership operates is necessary. Panaccio et al., (2014) evaluated the role of personal attribute, psychological resources in the form of psychological contracts. The servant leadership is working best for the followers with low mental resources. The people who lack on extraversion, collectivism and pro-activeness can work better under a servant leader. Because servant leader focus and prioritize the followers needs and interests first. Verdorfer (2016) established the relationship of individual consciousness and awareness of present thoughts and actions with servant leadership. Similarly, Donia et al., (2016) investigated the different conditions for servant leadership working in the organizations. The followers' selfless desires of service or creation of self-impression are significantly contributing to the success of servant leadership. Servant leadership works in the environment of selfless service at leaders and followers parts. This will leads to higher job satisfaction for people having self-less motives under a servant leader.

Carter and Baghurst (2014) observed employees in a restaurant working under servant leader showed higher commitment, loyalty and increased satisfaction at customer level. The people lead by servant leader has higher chances of developing identification with their leader. This sense of identification will results in transfer of experience generated at workplace to the family. Servant leadership indirectly promotes work-family balance (Wang et al., 2016).

Future Scope

Servant leader produce servant leader. The transference of service attitude form one relationship to other relationship in formal and informal social structures could be explored in light of individual's psychological resources. Further, the servant leadership cultural role can be explained in term of cultural expectations established by a servant leader as a founder of culture in the organization. Moreover, in West studies on servant leadership are numerous while in other cultural context the studies on servant leadership are rare. This study will guide future researchers to develop understanding about the work on servant leadership and studies available on the topic.

Conclusion

This study was started with an aim of understanding servant leadership theory. Servant leaders are present in every walk of life. Since, its inception continuous exploration by leadership scholars leads to a well-established servant leadership theory development across the globe. The studies were conducted cross-culturally to measure and validate servant leadership. Most of the measures developed shows leaders' behavioral consequences faced by followers in the form of well-being, mental health and positive emotional state toward their work (Page and Wong, 2000). The different dimensions are signaling toward role of leader in development of healthy environment for leadership. Servant leadership motivation resides within servant leader; this feature gives uniqueness to servant leadership model. Servant leadership model includes an ongoing feedback to the followers for continuous development. But still servant leadership lack a universal model with universal applications. Majority of the researches conducted on servant leadership are in the service sector organizations and their employees. The service sector relies on the employees' attitude about work and customers. Servant leadership in this sector is effectively working in controlling of individual and organizational factors.

Servant leadership is directly and indirectly working on the behavioral factors of followers in the organization for achievement of desired goals at individual and organizational levels. The people accepting servant leadership are experiencing higher satisfaction, trust, creativity, recognition and autonomy in their work. Servant leader focuses on individual job level; this approach that every unit is equally important generating transparency, loyalty at work place. Without the use of positional and authoritative power one can achieve the desired goals by using servant leadership.

Servant leadership is not only working at individual level, but also at interpersonal level. The relationship between dyads and group members is strengthening and people in the organization are adopting the attitude of service towards peers, subordinates and customers. Servant leadership is acting as an important antecedent of trust, care and confidence in the behavior of followers. At organizational level servant leadership is envision the vision that is sustainable, people centric and growth oriented. Servant leadership is working to enhance organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention at organization level by increasing employees' identification with their leader and organization. In society when Service becomes a natural instinct of people the society work and live a life full of values. Servant leadership is a democratic form of leadership for the people and by the people. The organizations adopted and adopting servant leadership philosophy are exhibiting a future promising growth at every level.

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