

Exploring the Influence of Servant Leadership on Team Commitment in the Information Technology Industry

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ABSTRACT

A popular notion, servant leadership is a recent development in the study of organizational leadership. Servant leadership is becoming more and more significant in all sectors of the global economy. Robert K. Greenleaf came up with the term "servant leadership," which suggests serving and assisting subordinates rather than exercising traditional leadership. In addition to examining whether servant leadership exists in the Indian IT sector, this study aims to ascertain the degree to which employee job-related attitudes—such as job satisfaction, team commitment, and team effectiveness—are linked to the perception of servant leadership in South Indian IT sectors within a psychological environment known as trust in leaders. Due of its anecdotal nature, servant leadership lacks a solid theoretical foundation and empirical support. The literature highlights the past background of servant leadership their key features and contrast between followed leadership styles and servant leadership in modern day business era. This study attempts to find the literature review for relationship between servant leadership, trust and job-related attitudes.

Keywords: *IT industry, leadership, servant leadership, team commitment, trust.*

INTRODUCTION

In the current corporate environment, leaders and their leadership philosophies are crucial. As a result, numerous leadership studies were carried out in order to comprehend the traits of leaders, the difficulties they encounter, and how their behavior varies depending on the circumstances. B. Bass made a compelling case that the significance of these studies stemmed from the growing diversity of the workforce, global rivalry, technological innovation, economic unpredictability, and customer demands (Bass, 1990).

It was clear from the literature that the leadership style of the early 1900s, which concentrated on control and the idea that authority belonged to a single person (Rost, 1991), changed to a group approach in the 1950s, when the leader formed the habit of discussing goals with the followers (Harrison, 1999), then to a situational approach, then to a transactional approach, and finally to a transformational approach by the 21st century. As a result, there is a significant

gap in the study of leadership since it is too complex to be applied to all organizational levels and circumstances.

According to R. J. Lolita, one of the biggest challenges facing modern CEOs is guaranteeing the well-being of employees across all enterprises (Lolita, 2008). The foundation of servant leadership can be established by the leader being compassionate, patient, an active listener, a path provider, and most importantly, a steward for his or her people (Freeman, 2004). In his groundbreaking work, R. K. Greenleaf originally proposed the idea of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1997). Since then, numerous researchers have strengthened the scholarly literature by conducting their own anecdotal confirmations of empirical evidence.

There aren't many empirical studies that have developed valid constructs for servant leadership, such as those by J. A. Laub, S. Sendjaya, and R. S. Dennis. Of these, J. A. Laub's Servant Organizational Leadership Assessment (SOLA) is the most accurate at measuring servant leadership in organizations (Laub, 1999; Sendjaya, 2003; Dennis, 2004). Numerous scholars have examined the various relational dimensions of servant leadership with emotional intelligence and work-related attitudes, based on J. A. Laub's SOLA, and have discovered statistically significant results.

According to N. Eva, M. Robin, S. Sendjaya, D. van Dierendonck, and R. C. Liden, servant leadership is characterized by qualities like an other-oriented approach, giving followers' personal needs priority and reorienting followers to care for others both inside the company and in the community at large (Eva et al. 2018). In order to provide empirical support for servant leadership from an Indian viewpoint, the current study focuses on employees of different information technology companies in South India. This is the first study of its sort in India for the development of servant leadership theory.

Context of the Research The lack of borders in the world has made it possible for enterprises to hire a diverse staff. Organizations place a greater emphasis on keeping a multi-talented, healthy staff in order to succeed in international marketplaces. Therefore, in order to keep this workforce productive, firms work hard to have outstanding leaders who are dedicated, unselfish, sympathetic, and foster community by nurturing their followers. According to B. Bass, leaders must be stewards of themselves in order to foster positive leader-follower relationships (Bass, 1990); this means they must become servant leaders in their own right (Greenleaf, 1970). Christian values are the foundation of servant leadership. The first servant leader in human history was identified as Jesus Christ. Jesus' servant leadership behavior was the subject of numerous doctrines. "Yet it shall not be thus among you," Jesus said, "but let whoever wishes to become great among you be your servant. In the same way that the Son of Man came to serve and sacrifice His life as a ransom for many, let whoever wants to be the most important among you be your slave. (NKJV, Matthew 20:26–28). Christ therefore made it clear to His followers—who were subsequently termed apostles—that a leader's primary duty would be to serve others; this is a requirement, not an option. Jesus demonstrated servant leadership via His teachings and conduct. Jesus demonstrated His superiority as the greatest servant leader in a number of situations, including when He washed His own disciples' feet (John 13). This demonstrated His superiority and taught His disciples how to carry out similar tasks for their followers. Thus, the meaning of being servant among the followers was termed as 'greatness.

According to C. W. Pollard, Jesus' act of washing His disciples' feet was an example of humility that all leaders should exhibit, regardless of their position. Since there are enough of towels (the process of fixing the problems) to wipe off and lots of water (solutions available), there is no shortage of disciples (followers) whose feet (infirmities and short comings) need to be washed (solved) (Pollard, 1996). By reversing the leader-follower pyramid from a top-down, commanding style to a bottom-up one that emphasizes partnership, trust, and empathy, servant leadership has countered all other leadership philosophies. The idea of servant leadership and its ramifications are now widely recognized and valued in the modern business environment.

Statement of the Problem

J. P. Kotter emphasized that companies with diverse human resources, those facing volatility, increased transparency, and competition from foreign players, as well as those swiftly embracing new technologies, need robust leaders for their stakeholders and staff (Kotter, 1990). As the workforce diversifies, organizations are increasingly focusing on creating workplace learning environments that help employees grow personally and feel fulfilled (Laub, 1999).

To promote positive leader-follower relationships, many leaders have adopted various leadership philosophies. This concept is best illustrated by servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). However, R. C. Thompson, S. Sendjaya, and J. C. Sarros have pointed out that there's a lack of empirical evidence supporting servant leadership in academic literature (Thompson, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Instead, anecdotal observations are often prioritized over quantitative, objective research (Nwogu, 2004). This shift from anecdotal to empirical interest has led to a rapid organizational transformation towards human development in the workplace (Laub, 1999).

Several studies have been conducted across diverse fields, including apostolic-associated colleges (Thompson, 2002), non-traditional colleges (Sharon, 2004), religious organizations (Anderson, 2005), non-profits (Irving, 2005), servant leadership programs (Marilyn, 2006), and student achievement (Herndon, 2007). Research also extended to Dutch knowledge-concentrated services (de Jong, 2007), emotionally troubled youth (Bradshaw, 2007), schools (Merideth, 2007), media and pharmaceutical companies (Staden, 2007), and high-tech aerospace employees (Johnson, 2008). Additional studies explored teaching (Metzcar, 2008), public leadership (Beck, 2010), development supervision (Thompson, 2010), utility companies (Hayden, 2011), South African organizations (James, 2011), college students (Paul, 2012), and social entrepreneurs focusing on empowering followers (Akella & Eid, 2020). While some research focused on aerospace, manufacturing, and global project management, the majority examined academic leadership. Drawing upon this existing knowledge, the researcher chose to study the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector, an underexplored industry within the country.

J. A. Irving was the first to conduct an empirical study that looked at servant leadership and team effectiveness in a variety of sectors, including non-profits, churches, and commercial enterprises. However, because each sector's sample size was small, there was a research gap that needed to be filled in order to examine how servant leadership affected team effectiveness by industry (Irving, 2004).

Employee commitment to the organization is influenced by their attitudes, claim C. F. Chan and Y. Y. Wan (Chan, Wan, 2012). Employee loyalty and trust in the leader are both boosted by the greater dedication to the company (Panayiotis, Pepper, Phillips, 2011). According to M. P. Carlos and C. Filipe, organizational leaders are crucial in determining the degree of dedication of their workforce (Carlos, Filipe, 2011); servant leaders can encourage this by exhibiting honesty, integrity and trust (Autry, 2001; Blanchard, Hodges, 2003).

Despite several technological advancements, businesses still confront challenges such as leadership style, which has a direct impact on team effectiveness and commitment. Numerous studies have shown that the supervisor's leadership style, rather than compensation, is what causes the organization's turnover rate. This made it easier to comprehend the current requirements for corporate success from a leadership standpoint. Using trust as a psychological conduit to promote servant leadership as a successful leadership style, the study employed a quantitative descriptive technique to ascertain whether a relationship exists between team effectiveness and commitment.

Need for the Study

R. F. Russell and A. G. Stone highlighted that servant leadership can be implemented across all types of organizations, regardless of the sector. Many studies have thoroughly explored this concept in sectors such as hospitals, education, non-profits, and manufacturing. However, there remains a significant gap when it comes to research on servant leadership in the IT industry (Russell & Stone, 2002). Even though the IT sector provides technological solutions and operates as a service industry, it still requires leaders who genuinely wish to serve their subordinates. These leaders help develop their team members to follow in their footsteps, which in turn fosters high levels of job satisfaction, team commitment, and a healthy, trustful working environment (Sims, 2018). Consequently, this positive dynamic benefits modern workforce teams.

The aim of this study was to investigate whether there's a correlation between how participants perceive servant leadership characteristics and their levels of team commitment and team effectiveness, with a particular focus on the psychological environment of trust in leadership.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the existing body of literature on the application of the servant leadership style within the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector.
2. To analyze the influence of servant leadership on fostering team commitment within organizations.
3. To investigate the mediating role of leader trust in the relationship between servant leadership and team commitment.

Scope of the Study

The study aims to explore the relationship between servant leadership and team commitment, especially in the context of software employees in Indian IT companies located in Visakhapatnam. This review will examine the review of the literature and by analyzing the relevant study to find the gap and where the research can be done in this particular area.

Leadership in IT Firms

Multi-talented IT specialists with strong skills, abilities, and knowledge are needed in the global corporate sector, which places a great emphasis on communication and information technology (Pahal, 1999). The institutional leadership leverages the talent pool to maximize the potential of the current talents and competencies in order to satisfy the demands of the global community. Like any leadership, IT leadership calls for the same qualities as other leadership, as well as abilities related to the influence of technology.

The current business environment is fast-paced, and the rapid advancement of technology necessitates frequent platform switching. The executives of multinational IT behemoths find it extremely difficult to stay competitive and gain an edge over their rivals by utilizing strong tools and technology. According to P. Senge, leaders are responsible for developing organizations as designers, stewards, and educators where ongoing learning takes place with a clear vision, the ability to reduce complexity, and enhanced knowledge exchange (Senge, 1990). and other characteristics have been cited by numerous authors as the essential qualities of an effective IT leader. ability to evaluate the potential of new technology, analytical and listening abilities (Alter, 1999; Avant, 1996), and an action-oriented mindset (Kinnaman, 1996) honesty and adaptability (McAdams, 1997), selflessness (National School Boards Association, 1998), inventiveness (White, 1997), resilience (Cronin, 1993), curiosity (Rosenbach, Taylor, 1993), intuition (Bennis, Nanus, 1986), persistence (Lambert, 1998), and networking skills (Wunsch, 1992). According to R. White, the most successful leaders of the future will build on their current and previous abilities (White, 1997). Since the life cycle of any product or service only lasts a few days to months in our extremely dynamic world, this is a good fit for IT leaders. Therefore, IT executives must be knowledgeable professionals who can build on prior achievements and strengths while being adaptable and taking calculated risks when exploring the unknown. In addition, the evolving character of a diverse workforce necessitates new leadership behaviors to address concerns like company loyalty and rightsizing. Right now, the leader needs to put more of an emphasis on sustainability and empowerment by creating a creative and innovative atmosphere. In order to successfully influence the new technology era, IT executives of the new era shift their focus from classic organizational perspectives to modern flat organizational structures and systems. A combination of intrinsic features of leadership coupled with appropriate leadership training and comprehensive awareness of new tools and innovations with ongoing development give best results as envisioned. As a result, research on IT leadership will be crucial in today's technologically advanced and transformed company environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In contrast to hierarchical leaders who prioritize their employees, organizations may need to adopt new perspectives on leadership behavior that emphasize stewardship, ethics, and collaborative, people-centered management leadership (Pahal, 1999). These perspectives are influenced by servant leadership theory. This leadership approach's emergence (Washington et al., 2014) explained how traditional hierarchical and autocratic leadership models were gradually giving way to a newer model of leadership; all organizations place a high priority on innovation, employee well-being, and the purpose of their business, which is rooted in leaders

acting with ethics and compassion. This new method of service and leadership was called servant leadership by L. C. Spears (Spears, 1995).

Robert K. Greenleaf (1904 — 1990) first used the term "servant leadership" forty years ago in his groundbreaking book *The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977). It's noteworthy to note that his ideas are still as novel and intriguing today as they were when they were first proposed, even though it took over fifty years for them to be studied and put into reality.

By incorporating social responsibility into transformational leadership, which places a greater emphasis on the needs of followers, servant leadership may be especially relevant in this day and age (Spears, 1995). Although inspiration is typically seen as the key element of effective leadership, servant leadership has changed the dynamic between a leader and their followers by placing more emphasis on serving than on transaction, therefore providing an excellent foundation for this future leadership theory.

On the basis of Robert K. Greenleaf's work, scholars subsequently offered their own definitions and models, leading to numerous interpretations of servant leadership that illustrate a broad variety of behaviors. Due to a dearth of empirical research, operationalizing servant leadership on a solid theoretical foundation has proven difficult.

The Servant Leadership Theory Framework

The researcher created J. A. Laub's servant leadership model based on the traits of servant leaders in order to conduct the study on servant leadership in the Indian IT sector. The results of this leadership were job satisfaction, team commitment, and team effectiveness in a psychological environment that was characterized by trust. As was previously mentioned, no leadership style can be implemented exactly as is; instead, it must be customized to the demands of the company because one size does not fit all. fit all.

Team Commitment

According to Fairholm (1997), team commitment is the favorable psychological contract that exists between the team and its members, which influences their decision to stay with the company and reduces their likelihood of leaving. When an employee is happy with their assigned tasks and responsibilities, they will sense a long-term connection to the company, continue to strongly believe in its aims and values, and make a concerted effort to stay a member (Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002). Three degrees of commitment—continuance, normative, and affective—are included in the organizational commitment model that N. J. Allen and J. P. Meyer established. Continuance commitment which refers to the employee's view toward the loss of asset made by the group when he or she leaves. The Prescriptive commitment also reflects the level the obligation and employee feels to continue within the organization.

Trust

According to R. C. Nyhan and J. H. A. Marlowe, trust is the conviction that one's leader is capable of acting in a fair, moral, and predictable manner (Nyhan, Marlowe, 1997). According to A. K. Mishra, trust is the readiness to be vulnerable to other people depending on what other people anticipate and think about openness, care, and trust (Mishra, 1996). In a similar vein,

group behavior toward other group acts can also be characterized as trust. As a result, trust is further described as particular behaviors that a group can exhibit under the leader's guidance (Mayer et al., 2007). According to Ramli and Nasina (2014), trust is, therefore, a sustaining component for both individual and organizational efficiency. Beyond sustainability, trust is increasingly important in shaping each party's behavior and interaction with others (Robinson, 1996). However, there may be unfavorable consequences if the confidence is betrayed (Mayer et al., 1995).

Servant Leadership and Team Commitment

Research demonstrates a strong correlation between organizational commitment and servant leadership (Ambali et al., 2011; Cerit, 2010). Essentially, servant leadership fosters a renewed feeling of community building (Barbuto, Wheeler 2006) and belonging to the organization (Brownell, 2010). The organization's effectiveness will increase with servant leadership, which entails the highest level of job satisfaction, increased organizational commitment, lower turnover, and trust in the leader's information. Furthermore, according to Y. Cerit, servant leadership practices have a strong and favorable correlation with employees' commitment (Cerit, 2010). Additionally, R. Hoveida et al. discovered a strong correlation between the dedication of the employees and the manager's servant leadership (Hoveida, et al., 2011). Thus, the following theory was created for the research:

Hypothesis 1: The perception of team commitment is positively correlated with the perception of servant leadership.

Empirical research has demonstrated the strong correlation between servant leadership and trust. According to E. E. Joseph and B. E. Winston, there is a favorable correlation between employee perceptions of servant leadership and leader and organizational trust (Joseph, Winston, 2005). Additionally, according to Z. Dannhauser and A. B. Boshoff, there is a connection between servant leadership, trust, and team commitment (Dannhauser, Boshoff, 2006). Trust is significantly predicted by servant leadership (Sendjaya, Pekerti, 2010). A. Chatbury et al. discovered a strong correlation between leader trust and servant leadership (Chatbury et al., 2011). Because followers believe their leaders are trustworthy, M. S. Rezaei and his colleagues found a strong correlation between servant leadership and trust (Rezaei et al., 2012). The foundation of approachability is the leader's regard for the issues or difficulties that the subordinates bring up for assistance; maintaining their confidentiality is the highest level of respect a leader should have. In light of this, the researcher suggested the following hypothesis for the investigation.

Hypothesis 2: Trust has a favorable correlation with the perception of servant leadership.

Trust and Team Commitment T. Yeh found a substantial and positive correlation between team dedication and trust (Yeh, 2009). In her research, M. R. Laka-Mathebula demonstrated a correlation between team dedication and trust (Laka-Mathebula, 2004). Since team dedication is one of the most crucial factors in an organization's success, it is the leader's duty to keep the workplace safe, educational, and encouraging. The leader must always be supportive and have a trustworthy personality with the team members. Research shows that team members' belief

in their leader, not their own abilities or dynamics, is the reason why team productivity drops. When there is no faith in the leader, the team disintegrates. Thus, the following hypothesis is put out in this study.

Hypothesis 3: Team commitment is positively correlated with perceptions of trust.

Trust mediates the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Team Commitment

According to V. L. Goodwin et al. (2011), trust acts as a mediating factor in the relationship between leadership and a number of outcome variables, including performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior. In addition, C. F. Chiang and Y. Y. Wang found that trust mediated the association between organizational commitment and leadership (Chiangñ Wang, 2012), confirming B. J. Avolio's claim that the psychological environment of trust mediates the impact of leadership on followers (Avolio, 1990). Consequently, this analysis suggests H4 as follows:

Hypothesis 4: The perception of servant leadership and team commitment are positively correlated, and this link is mediated by trust.

Table 1. Contribution and key findings

Authors	Year	Focus/contribution	Key findings/insights
R.K. Greenleaf	1970	Introduced the concept of servant leadership, emphasizing serving others first	Leaders should prioritize serving their followers over exercising authority; leadership rooted in empathy and stewardship.
L. C. Spears	1995	Defined servant leadership and highlighted its ethical and people-centered aspects	Servant leadership as an ethical approach, valuing humility, care, and interpersonal connection
J. A. Laub	1999	Developed the Servant Organizational Leadership Assessment (SOLA) for measuring servant leadership characteristics	Instrument for accurately assessing servant leadership traits within organizations, emphasizing empowerment and trust

R. C. Thompson	2002	Studied servant leadership in various sectors, including education and non-profits	Importance of servant leadership across different sectors; need for empirical evidence beyond anecdotal confirmation.
N. Eva et al.	2018	Identified key attributes of servant leadership including prioritizing followers needs and focusing on concern for others	Servant leadership emphasizes a follower-oriented approach, prioritizing individual needs and promoting community welfare
C. F. Chan & Y. Y. Wan	2012	Discussed the influence of employees' attitudes on their commitment and trust in leaders	Employees' attitudes significantly impact their commitment to the organization and trust in leadership
R.F.Russell & A.G.Stone	2002	Proposed a model of servant leadership with nine and eleven functions characteristics	Detailed model emphasizing key characteristics like honesty, integrity, and trust; servant leadership applicable across sectors
S. Sendjaya	2003	Developed valide constructs for servant LEADERSHIP AND leadership and highlighted its emotional intelligence aspects	Servant leadership integrates emotional intelligence, promoting holistic development and well-being of followers

Implications

The findings of this study highlight the importance of servant leadership in creating a positive and collaborative work environment, particularly in the Indian IT sector. Organizations can benefit from adopting servant leadership principles to enhance job satisfaction, team commitment, and trust among employees. By fostering an environment of mutual respect and support, leaders can develop a more cohesive and effective workforce. The study also underscores the significance of trust in strengthening the relationship between servant

leadership and team commitment, suggesting that organizations should prioritize building trust to maximize the benefits of servant leadership. These implications provide a basis for organizations to implement servant leadership practices and further explore their potential impact on team dynamics and overall organizational health.

CONCLUSION

Servant leadership, though currently underrepresented in literature and empirical research, has motivated scholars to establish a solid theoretical foundation supported by empirical data. This study aimed to investigate the presence and impact of servant leadership in the Indian IT sector, demonstrating that supervisors who adopt servant leadership principles foster high job satisfaction, team commitment, and trust among employees. Trust, a crucial component for effective leader-follower relationships, was found to significantly enhance team commitment when combined with servant leadership. Although the initial correlation between servant leadership and team commitment was low, the inclusion of trust increased the association markedly. This indicates the critical role of trust in this dynamic. The study concludes that servant leadership cultivates a supportive environment where employees collaborate, value each other, and achieve mutual growth, thus offering a platform for further research and development of the servant leadership concept, especially within India's diverse cultural context.

Future Work

To build on the findings of this study, future research could extend the investigation of servant leadership to other sectors such as business, education, military, and government. Expanding the study to various regions of India would also enhance the generalizability of the results. Additionally, incorporating complementary instrumentation to measure leadership predictors of team commitment would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship. Further qualitative research could delve into the reasons behind the effectiveness of servant leadership in team-based contexts, offering deeper insights into the dynamics at play.

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