

EFFECTS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON FOLLOWERS' JOB PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The current study is aimed at investigating the impact of servant leadership on followers' job performance. The effects of five servant leadership dimensions, namely Agapao Love, Empowerment, Vision, Humility and Trust, on employee's job performance have been measured in this study. Data has been collected from 400 engineering employees of a defense organisation. Respondents have been approached personally for filling-up a well-structured questionnaire consisting of different measurement item statements. After the data was collected, it was entered into SPSS 17 and different statistical tools such as Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Reliability Analysis and Structural Equation Model were applied to analyse the data and test hypotheses. It has been reported that vision has insignificant contribution in increasing employee's job performance. The study provides significant implications for technical management organisations to get benefits from servant leadership in order to enhance morale of their employees, aimed at improving their work performance.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Job Performance, AMOS, SPSS.

1. Introduction

Leadership is the very heart and soul of organisational management. The role of leaders has been critical ever since olden times, including Sun Tzu's time in prehistoric China, during the ministership of Hazrat Yusuf in Egypt or the Gandhi and Jinnah era in India; leaders have gracefully survived through their ordinary lives by virtue of their remarkable actions. Hence, this is pretty normal for us to deliberate on who servant leaders are and how they inspire their team members to get the desired response.

Recently, Indianapolis Business Journal stated that Servant leadership has come out as one of leading philosophies which is being discussed around the world today. According to Northouse (2009) and Yukl et al. (2002), the research on Servant Leadership, being in its early development stage, requires a powerful body of conventional results for its validation and effectiveness. However, for better understanding and subsequent implementation of servant leadership phenomena, consistent efforts are being made (Bryant, 2003; Contee-Borders, 2002; Dennis and Winston, 2003; Dennis and Bocarnea,

2005; Drury, 2004; Farling et al., 1999; Greenleaf and Spears, 1998; Irving, 2005; Joseph and Winston, 2005; Laub, 2003; Patterson, 2003).

While there has been an extensive understanding in the construct of servant leadership, pragmatic research is required for enhanced perception of this construct (Farling et al., 1999; Northouse, 2009; Yukl et al., 2002). An integrated model showing the causal relationships between variables was developed by Patterson (2003) and Winston (2004), which provides a course of action for servant leadership. Particularly, the Patterson-Winston model speculates that followers of a servant leader would exhibit a higher-level of loyalty to their leaders than others. Patterson, (2003) refers servant leaders as the ones who guide the organisation with a focus on followers, taking them as the main concern while placing organisational concerns secondarily.

Servant leadership is considered to be fairly new in the field of leadership study and has relatively less empirical research to support its philosophy (Farling et al., 1999; Laub, 2003; Russell, 2001). There is no study available in

which the effects of servant leadership on follower's job performance have been analysed. Hence, this research gap needs to be fulfilled by investigating the effects of servant leadership on follower's commitment and motivation toward organisation and their level of job performance.

McGregor (1976) suggested that leadership is not an individual's personality trait; rather, it is interaction of leadership's traits with the needs, attitudes and behaviours of followers. As per findings of Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), servant leadership has been generally studied in the literature of leadership but it has not been adequately examined in context with public organisations. To address this gap, an urgency is felt to implement servant leadership in public organisation and to measure its fruitfulness in terms of employee's attitudes and behaviours towards organisation.

Furthermore, the concept of leadership needs to be explored with respect to Pakistani cultural context, where other styles of leadership have been studied but servant leadership is still an ignored area. The need to explore servant leadership phenomena becomes more vital if we consider cultural differences between Western and Asian cultures as Hofstede (1984) puts stress on the consideration of cultural variance in studying people attitudes and behaviours. The reason for this notion is that the organizational behavioural theories developed in one country cannot be applicable in another in an equally effective fashion due to major cultural differences such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, nurturing/achievement, etc. Pakistan is known to have a collectivist and high power distance culture according to the findings of Hofstede and McCrae (2004). It is to be noted that most of the studies on servant leadership have been conducted in western culture which are known as individualist and low power distance culture. Thus, it can be argued that cultural difference may be a potential justification to study servant leadership and its possible attitudinal consequences in the Pakistani cultural context.

Moreover, the concept of servant leadership has not been studied with respect to the public sector institutions of Pakistan. Public sector employees feel pretty insecure due to ruthless and bossy attitude of authorities. Workers in various

government departments are showing lack of interest in their jobs through their overt and covert behaviours. Not only civil organisations, but the disciplined forces, police services, law enforcing agencies and uniformed personnel are becoming equally lethargic and casual. Shambled state of affairs pertaining to Railways, PIA, Steel Mills, PNSC and various other departments is a clear reflection of an overall national downfall. Amongst so many other factors, self-centeredness seems to be an evident cause of our national disaster which has absolutely dominated collectivism. There is a rising tendency amongst workers losing faith in their supervisors and the bosses lacking trust in their subordinates. The prevailing situation necessitates an investigation into potential causes vis-à-vis an appropriate therapy which would bring about revival of the organisational spirit by augmenting worker's morale.

Subsequently, a case study is urged to look into such areas where absence of servant leadership adversely affects an overall job performance. In order to address theoretical and contextual gaps, the current study is aimed at exploring the effects of love, empowerment, vision, humility and trust on followers' job performance in technical workforce of a defense organisation. The study provides significant implications to understand the concept of servant leadership and its potential contribution in employees' performance. Moreover, the study also provides strong insight to management to improve leadership.

The next part of the study focuses on hypotheses development. Third part discusses the research methodology; fourth part consists of results and discussion following the conclusion part which consists of implication, limitations and future area of the servant leadership to be explored.

2. Literature Review

According to Greenleaf (1970), servant leaders possess moral fiber strength, which is more powerful than their lust for authority, possessions or position. Servant leadership might suggest a reply to dilemma of leadership where leader's ethics, morals and standards are fundamental to overall success (Graham, 1991; Laub, 2003; Russell and Stone, 2002). Servant

leader's character is composed of independent variables like humility, integrity and service (Wong and Page, 2003). A leader overcomes selfish motives through such traits and intends to accord priority to his people. The force behind a leader's character encourages him to move away from the inducement to capture authority, promotion, prestige or other benefits which could restrain his commitment to ethical virtues and ultimately bring about his collapse.

A follower is developed by the servant leader who presents himself as a role model so as to inspire followers, thereby enhancing his trust, information and feedback (Liden et al., 2008). In order to inculcate feelings of ownership in organisational decision making process and employee's commitment, follower's autonomy is also encouraged. In addition, creative and innovative atmosphere is also endeavoured by servant leaders (Neubert et al., 2008).

Moral Love: Moral love (also termed as *agapao*) and deep care for employees are at the core of servant leadership. Winston (2002) described moral love as the force which a leader adopts to regard his followers in an effective manner, prioritising their desires, needs and wants. Moral love plays a significant role in follower's development and growth (Blanchard et al., 1997; Winston, 2004).

Humility: Conventionally viewed as the defiance of one's self or related self-centered tendency, humility is conceived with respect to the modesty level, in which one observes himself (Hare, 1996). According to Covey (2002), servant leadership warrants meekness of character and core capability built upon latest skills. Winston (2002) inserts that humility refers to the fact that a single person may not know everything and a substantial scope exists for the input from others. Bell (2001), however, maintains that humility may not be taken as an act of apology or submissiveness. Being humble implies that one is egoless and balanced, acting with true spirit without exaggerating anything. While illustrating humility, Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) affirmed Crom's (1998) declaration that good leadership exercises humility by respecting their followers and recognising their input to the organisation.

Altruism: Kaplan (2002) reported altruism as the care for others which exists without prioritising one's own interests and may sometimes warrant

personal sacrifice, too. Patterson (2003) described altruism as a method for facilitating and caring for others. This characteristic of altruism directly flows from moral love. In certain cases, altruism may be referred to as surrendering one's own interests for others.

Vision: Vision may serve as a hypothetical basis for undertaking empirical research into servant leadership (Farling et al., 1999). Vision refers to that extent in which leaders prepare and look forward to upcoming needs, develop definite task and vision statements, keeping in view situations and problems (Reinke, 2004). According to Bennett (2001), team performance could be augmented by linking personal values with servant leadership attribute of vision. Russell and Stone (2002) reported vision as a key component of servant leadership on the basis of their empirical findings.

Trust: Trust stems from the congruence between our words and actions. Greenleaf (1977) stated that a servant-leader leads the organisation in conviction to his followers. Agarwal and Shankar (2003) submit that an individual's behaviour is principally determined by his morals and more visible than his personality. Problematic behaviours like meanness and exploitation could also be improved by changing one's unbecoming conduct of greed and egoism. According to Wright and Tenny (2004), integrity refers to the alignment of our words and actions, the consistency of our deliberate and open character and intending to become what we dream to be. Trust builds up when leaders demonstrate honesty, sincerity and reflect values through their actions (Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Yukl et al., 2002).

Greenleaf (1977) stated that servant leadership improves organisational performance because it cultivates trusting relationships. Fairholm discussed the model of "culture of trust" by explaining the relationship between values, performance, trust, leadership and organisational culture (1994, pp. 56). Leadership facilitates joint action by accommodating differences and redirecting it to joint action (Fairholm, 1994). According to him, building such an organisational culture on the basis of trust and belief, which can enhance the organisational performance, is the responsibility of the leaders. However, in the concept of servant leadership, the

leader has authority to dismiss those employees who are negatively affecting the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation in any manner. Kahl and Donelan (2004) have argued that in some cases, leaders are not always “sweet” and “weak”.

Taking inspiration from leadership becomes important to increase the level of performance by organisational followers. Dasborough (2006) revealed that there is a connection between leadership and followership in terms of getting inspiration and motivation from leadership.

Specifically, those followers are motivated to work harder and have higher levels of citizenship behaviour, whose leadership portray motivational and inspirational values. Servant leaders are reported to be consistent and committed enough to serve their followers. Development of a trustworthy relationship between leaders and followers results in improved job satisfaction (Jenkins and Stewart, 2010). From the above mentioned theoretical and empirical discussion, the following hypothesised research model and research hypotheses have been developed:

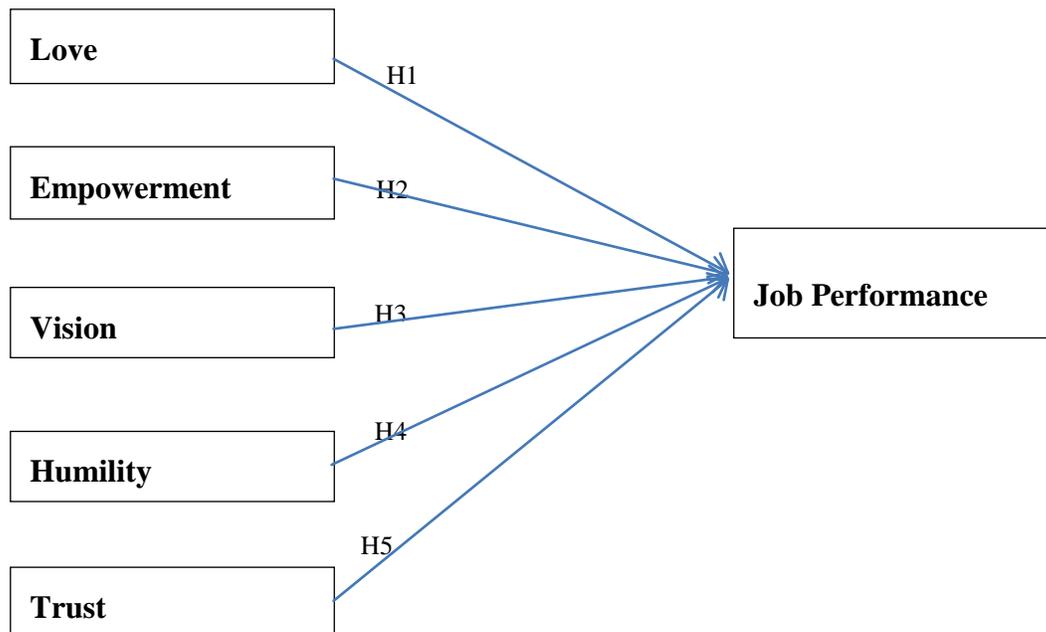


Fig. 1. Research Model

Hypotheses of the Study

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership dimension “love” (agapao) has positive relationship with employee performance.

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership dimension “empowerment” has positive relationship with employee performance.

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership dimension “vision” has positive relationship with employee performance.

Hypothesis 4: Servant leadership dimension “humility” has positive relationship with employee performance

Hypothesis 5: Servant leadership dimension “trust” has positive relationship with employee performance.

3. Research Design

3.1 Target Population

Technicians working in engineering branch of an aviation set up were selected as the target population. The performance of employees in private sector is found to be far better than a conspicuously sluggish and poor performance in the government sector. This is because of the application of latest leadership strategies as compared to the government sector. On the other hand, updated HRM policies and strategies have

not been applied in an effective manner to improve employees' commitment and satisfaction. Although employees of public sector feel that their jobs are secure as compared to the private sector, yet their performance is not commendable due to discourteous and rude attitudes of their supervisors. However, organizations related to the defense forces have started practicing new leadership styles to improve the performance of their employees. In order to compute the effects of leadership styles, this sector has been selected as target population for the current study.

3.2 Sampling Techniques

Data was collected from 400 technicians working in different sections of an engineering unit. Seven sections, namely Aircrafts, Electronics, Avionics, Ground Engineering, Mechanical Transport, Logistic and Control sections, have been taken into account. First, simple cluster sampling technique was used to classify sub-departments. After classification of sub-departments, target respondents were selected through systematic random sampling technique. For this purpose, list of employees working in different sections was obtained and every 5th employee from the list was selected for this study. In this way, 500 (25%) employees out of a total 2000 were selected for this study. Thus, we selected 81, 70, 63, 74, 93, 50, 70 respondents from the seven respective sections.

3.3 Measurement and Instrumentation

Data for the current study has been collected through measurement scales developed by different scholars. Following sections describe the measurement scales to collect data for different variables used in this study.

3.3.1 Servant leadership has been measured by twenty-three items scale and seven dimensions. These dimensions include Love, Empowerment, Vision, Humility, Trust, Altruism and Service. First five dimensions are measured by SLAI, developed by Dennis (2004). To measure Love, Empowerment, Vision, Humility and Trust, three, three, three, three, and four items, respectively, have been adopted. These scales have already been used in the study of Irving (2005) and all found to be highly reliable (Cronbach alpha scores range from 0.89 to 0.95). Three and four items have been used to measure Altruism and

Service, respectively. These items have been adopted from the literature of servant leadership. Altruism items focus upon the status attained by the leaders, whereas service items focus upon the facilities provided by the leaders. Four items scale has been used to measure employees' performance. These items have been developed by extensive analysis of previous literature on job performance and keeping in view the context of the study. Items of job performance focus on employees' level of accomplishment and achieving individual and organisational goals.

Above mentioned scales have been measured using five point Liker-type scale, i.e., Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

A questionnaire has been designed incorporating all measurement scales, mentioned in section 3.3. First, permission was obtained from respective department. After that, target employees were called in a class room and they were informed about the objectives and methodology of the study and its potential individual and organisational benefits. They were requested to provide the accurate data. Target-respondents were also briefed about the questionnaire and each item. Any question by the respondents was answered at the spot. Total 500 questionnaires were distributed amongst which we received 400 questionnaires which were completed in all respects and could be used for data analysis purpose. The response rate was 80%.

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

After the data was collection, it was entered into Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS 17) and AMOS 17 for analysis. Various statistical tools have been applied to compute the results. Frequency analysis was applied first to calculate the sample composition. At the second stage, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to check the validity of items used in different scales. At this step, reliability analysis has also been performed to check the Cronbach Alpha scores of all measurement scales used in this study. At third level, means and standard deviations were calculated and correlation analysis was performed. At the fourth step, Structural Equation Model (SEM) has been

applied to test the hypotheses and hypothesised research model.

4. Results and Discussion

This section exhibits the data analysis and discusses the results. It describes the validity and reliability analysis of measurement scales used in the study, descriptive analysis on the basis of different demographics, correlation between variables and hypotheses testing using SEM and regression analysis. SPSS 17 and AMOS 16 were used to perform the data analysis.

4.1 Validity and Reliability Testing

Following previous studies, CFA has been applied to compute the validity of measurement scale. In this analysis, factor loading of all items

in their respective measurement scales has been computed. CFA was found to be a good fit model since CMIN valued 447.586, the degrees of freedom were 155, CMIN/DF was 2.89, GFI 0.90, NFI 0.74, GFI 0.81 and RMSEA was calculated to be 0.70. It is reported that all items of all measurement scales have been significantly uploading as factor loading of all items are greater than 0.50. Thus, no item was deleted from the respective scale. After finalising the scale, Cronbach alpha scores of all scales were computed using reliability analysis through SPSS 17 and noted that Cronbach alpha scores of all scales were greater than 0.60 which yielded a good reliability score.

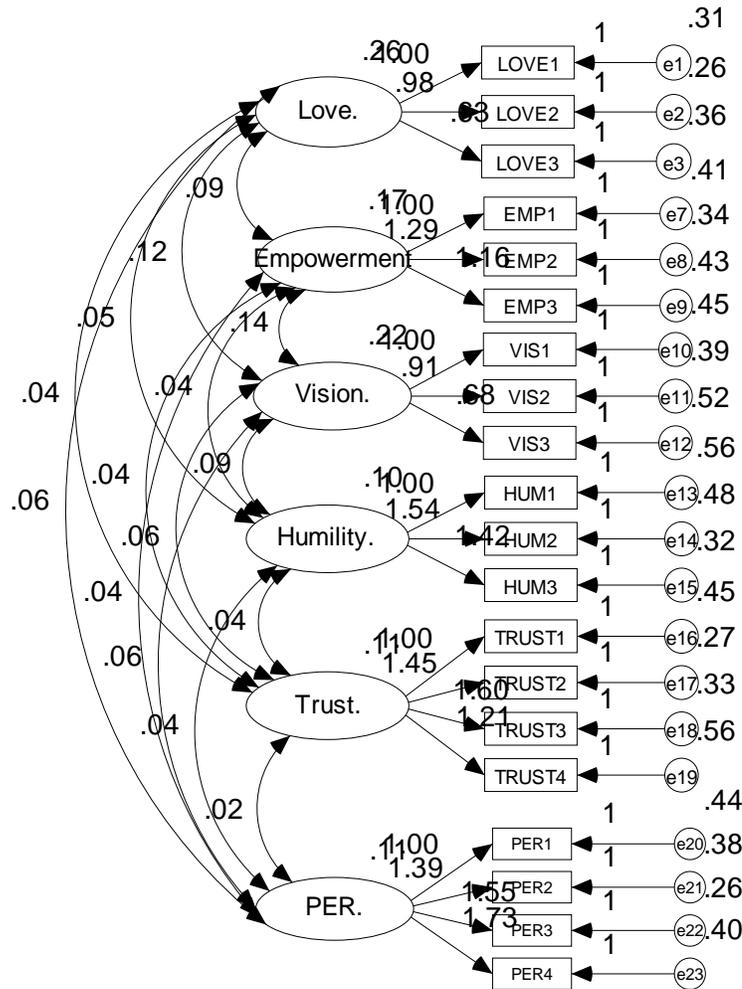


Fig. 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

Structural Equation Model has been applied using AMOS 17 to test the hypotheses. The model is found as a good fit and appropriate to test the model. Chi-square of the model is 34.696,

degrees of freedom (DF) is 8 thus Chi-square/DF is 4.34, GFI is 0.92, CFI is 0.87, NFI is 0.83, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation is 0.08.

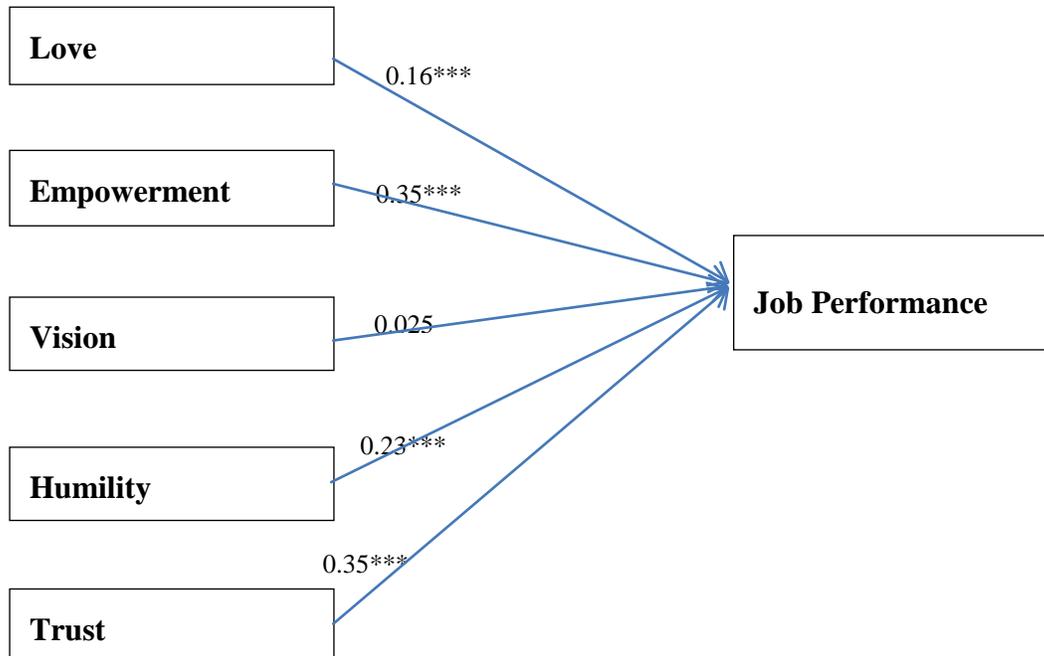


Fig. 3. Structural Equation Model

Figure 3 shows that SEM is related to the effects of servant leadership dimensions on job performance. It is reported that first dimension of servant leadership viz. love has strong and positive influence on employee's performance. The coefficient of this relationship is 0.16 and it is significant at 0.01 level which leads to the acceptance of hypothesis 1. The positive and significant effects of love on employees' performance reveal that if a leader's attitude and behaviour towards his or her followers is filled with love and care and if he or she is well aware of the followers' needs and demands and shows sympathy for his or her followers, then the followers, in return, achieve higher level of performance. They would be more interested and focused on performing their duties; their performance would be upto the desired level; they would not spoil workplace environment; accomplish the job despite all hardships and will be ready to acquire unique skills to improve their job performance.

According to the SEM and regression model results, empowerment, the second dimension of servant leadership, has positive and significant variance in the level of employees' performance. The followers will perform more if they are empowered by their leaders as the coefficient for this relationship is 0.35 (significant at 0.01 level). The positive significant variance in employees' performance caused by empowerment can be explained as follows: if employees are authorised with sufficient authority, power, autonomy and independence to make decisions related to their job, they would be more willing to achieve higher level of performance. With such an authority, the followers will not create problems at workplace, would address the job place problems efficiently and would be willing to develop their skills to improve their performance. Thus hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Contrary to the other dimensions of servant leadership, vision has no effects on employee's performance. The insignificant coefficient for the

relationship between these two variables (0.025 and insignificant) shows that leader's vision cannot play a significant role to improve employees' performance. Thus, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

While fourth dimensions of servant leadership, humility has significant and positive role to improve employees' performance. The beta coefficient for this relationship is 0.23 significant at 0.01 level, hence hypothesis 4 is accepted, reasoning that if the leaders are sufficiently humble to consult each other in organisational decision-making and are disinterested in self-glorification, the followers would focus on achieving higher level of performance. They will demonstrate higher level of readiness to develop their personal skills and capabilities to increase their performance level.

Similar to humility, trust is found to have positive significant effects on employees' performance. The coefficient for this relationship is 0.35, which is significant at 0.01 level, thus leading us to the acceptance of hypothesis 5. The significant coefficient for this relationship reports that if the leaders display trust in the decision-making ability, ethics, integrity and honesty of their followers, the followers respond in the same manner and utilise this best effort and energy to increase their performance level. Such a trust worthy relationship between leaders and followers promotes a conducive culture in which employees are always willing to improve their performance level. In such an environment, employees would not bother about individual and organisational level problems and they take necessary measures for smooth functionality of their workplace. Such types of servant leaders also encourage employees to improve their capabilities which would ultimately be beneficial for them and their organisation.

5. Conclusion

The study provides an understanding to engineering management to foster new leadership practices, in order to enhance organisational performance. Moreover, the study reported which dimension of servant leadership is comparatively more significant than others in improving job performance. Engineering/ technical management should formulate the strategies keeping in view the findings of this study if they really want to

adopt new leadership practices and get rid of status quo. The findings of the study can also be well applied and generalised in other job providing sectors of Pakistan, especially in public sector such as police and civil services. Keeping in view the natural similarities, the results of this study can also be applied in many other developing countries.

The current study also has some limitations. Firstly, all the data has been collected through a single questionnaire from engineering department of an aviation set-up. Secondly, as most of the respondents are diploma holders and associate engineers so they might have faced problems in understanding the questionnaire. The researcher also faced problems due to non-availability of research culture in which respondents were scared while giving information about their leadership in spite of giving the assurance of anonymity. Thirdly, since the data has been collected through self-reported response, there is a chance of social desirability where employees hesitate to give information about their job performance and falsely report themselves as high performers.

For future research in the area of servant leadership, further exploration is required whilst including top level management as well as daily wages employees from multiple job providing sectors. Training of servant leadership can also be a major determinant of practicing servant leadership effectively. Thus, variable of leader's training should also be included in the model in future research. Moreover, training of followers about stress management and leader-member relationship management can also be a good area of research in future. As servant leadership is relatively a new concept, different attitudinal and behavioural variables such as organisational citizenship behaviours, turnover intentions, trust in organisation and perceived organisational support should be studied as a consequence of servant leadership to understand its role in the organizational performance. Finally, data should also be collected from supervisors about the performance and commitment of employees in order to improve the accuracy of data.

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