



SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR AT STATE OWNED HEI'S IN SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AS MEDIATOR

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Abstract

This article's primary focus is on servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior at state owned HEI's in southern Ethiopia: organizational commitment as mediator. Servant leadership is an approach of thinking and acting as a leader that puts the needs of the people they are responsible for ahead of their own. This reveals that servant leadership has a significant effect on the commitment of employees in the organizations. Servant leadership and OCB share a common foundation to support organizations to function properly. Servant leadership is vital in creating good relationships between leaders and employees. The three main variables: servant leadership, OC, and OCB are the ones that come to mind. Therefore, servant leadership is believed to be an independent variable influencing OC and OCB. Organizational commitment is seen as an independent variable that forecasts OCB and serves as a mediator between servant leadership and OCB. OCB is thought to be the dependent variable that Servant Leadership and OC forecast. To gain a better understanding of quantitative results from qualitative data, this study employed a mixed survey technique, particularly explanatory sequential mixture designs (QUAN-qual). Researchers employing explanatory sequential mixed designs, which are heavily quantitative-oriented, first gather and analyze quantitative data before using the data to guide the qualitative components of their study. The subsequent testing of the structural model confirmed all hypothesized relationships. The findings revealed that Servant Leadership is a significant positive antecedent of both Organizational Commitment and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Organizational Commitment was confirmed to be a powerful predictor of OCB and a significant partial mediator of the relationship between servant leadership and employee citizenship. The overall model demonstrated impressive explanatory power, particularly for OCB.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, Mediator, Organizational Commitment, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Servant Leadership,

1. Introduction

As defined by Hale and Fields (2007), servant leadership is an approach of thinking and acting as a leader that puts the needs of the people they are responsible for ahead of their own. It also lessens the prominence of the leader's personal exaltation. Going beyond self-interest is the primary trait of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002). Developing the best qualities in people is the primary goal of servant leadership. Through trust, collaboration, and flexibility, servant leadership may promote the workplace culture and environment (Latham, 2013). Because of this, servant leadership has gained more theoretical and practical support. Servant leadership

emphasizes the value of prioritizing the needs of others over one's own, which inspires followers to emulate the actions of the leader. When workers view their managers to be committed to service, empowerment, and a shared vision, they are more likely to perceive the organization as embracing servant leadership (Beck, 2014). Concepts of moral, human-centered leadership, including servant leadership, are receiving increased attention from researchers and practitioners. A substantial amount of empirical research has shown that servant leadership is associated with a number of favorable employee outcomes, positive job attitudes, and lower rates of workplace deviance. Organizational commitment can be understood as an emotional, ongoing and normative obligation that is interconnected (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Emotional commitments are understood as emotional attachment and involvement of employees related to the organization, while continuous commitments are understood as expected costs for employees related to leaving the organization (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). A normative commitment is an employee's sense of responsibility. Servant leader always attempts to realize what his/her employees need to be effective in attaining organizational goals. This implies that leaders that exhibit higher levels of employee consideration to a certain critical point retain more of their employees. This reveals that servant leadership has a significant effect on the commitment of employees in the organizations. Servant leadership and OCB share a common foundation to support organizations to function properly. Cerit (2009) also claimed that servant leadership is vital in creating good relationships between leaders and employees. This indicates that individuals are more likely to show extra-role behavior if the leader exercises servant leadership.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Servant Leadership

The term "servant" is distinct from "slave" who follows orders of others, but in the context of servant leader, a servant refers to a person who voluntarily serves others. Smith (2005) states that "Greenleaf deliberately sought descriptors that would make people stop and think, questioning all longstanding assumptions about leader-follower relationships within organizations". Greenleaf (1977) recognized the negative historical connotations associated with the term 'servant', but felt that seeking a new perspective on leadership that overturned and strengthened established relationships about the organizational pyramid was a necessary decision.

Emotional healing is related to the ability to recognize when and how to prompt healing (Barbuto & Hayden, 2011). Servant leaders must listen carefully to understand the needs of their followers and be empathetic in order to build a good relationship with them. Leaders who create value for the community set an example for those they lead. In Mutia (2016), Greenleaf concludes that service-providing leaders create value for society by providing targeted support. They do this by participating in community activities and encouraging their subordinates to volunteer in community activities. Servant leader has a duty not only to serve the community, but also to encourage this kind of activity and help their followers understand the value of community building. Conceptualization is the capacity of leaders to comprehend an organization's objectives, intricacies, and mission. This allows leaders to think through and creatively address different issues in accordance with organizational goals. Empowerment refers to situations in which individuals are free to exercise some power and experience a sense of empowerment and effectiveness (Lashley, 1995). Stated differently, it can be characterized

as the level of autonomy and liberty that permits a community to sufficiently attend to their requirements. The concept of helping employees grow and succeed involves understanding their personal and professional goals and helping them achieve those goals (Sendjaya et al., 2008). This behavior is illustrated when the leader serving understands the professional and personal goals of the followers and how they can help them achieve those goals. One crucial component of servant leadership is prioritizing subordinates, which comes from close leaders helping their subordinates directly (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Nevertheless, putting the needs of others before your own is a requirement of being a servant leader. Servant leaders strive to be loyal to their subordinates and prioritize their needs. There is a growing need for ethical, people-oriented leaders. Servant leaders tend to behave ethically, including being opened, honest, and rational with subordinates.

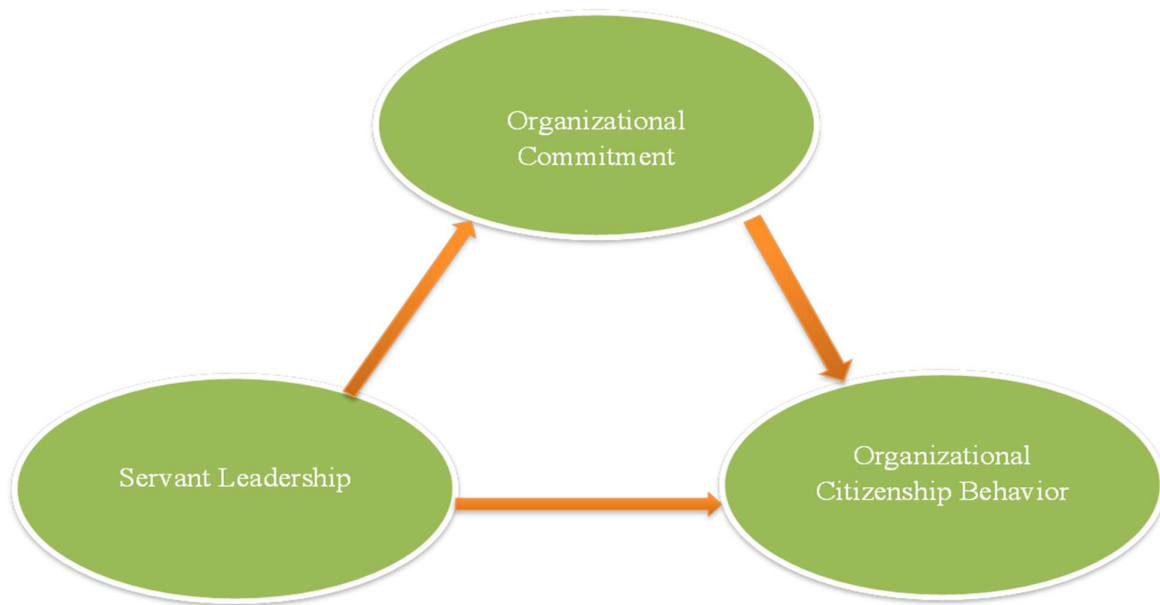
2.2 Organizational Commitment and its Dimensions

Several outcomes related to work are analyzed in relation to other variables, and one of them is organizational commitment. It is described as the mentality that ties an employee to a company and affects their choice to stay there (Allen & Meyer, 1990; 1997). OC is defined by Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1979) as a clear confidence and appreciation of values, a willingness to commit a substantial amount of energy to the organization, and a desire to be involved with a specific organization and the goal of the organization. This illustrates how dedicated employees contribute their time to the business and have a sense of community. Comparably, organizational citizenship (OC) denotes that employees are conscious of the organization's objectives, firmly believe in them, and go above and beyond to continue as members of the organization (Nazari & Emami, 2012; Saglam, 2003). It has to do with how committed staff members are to the company and how they relate to its objectives (Lambert, Hogan, & Griffin, 2007). Allen and Meyer (1990) claim that three dimensions can be used to quantify OC. H. Emotional, continuous and prescriptive, corresponding to emotional and perceptual costs and obligations respectively.

2.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior and its Dimensions

OCB has been described as a multifaceted concept that encompasses work-related outcomes and has attracted the attention of many scholars in the field of management. It is a voluntary behavior that does not directly affect formal reward systems but supports organizational functioning (Hoffman et al., 2007; Organ, 1988; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). Discretionary behavior is defined as behavior that is not allowed by any official compensation plan and is not included in the job description. H. In expressly defined terms of employment agreements with people and businesses. Instead, since the behavior is a matter of personal preference, it is typically not regarded as unlawful to supervise it. To put it another way, an OCB is described as an optional extracurricular behavior that goes above and beyond official duties, like: B. Working extra hours, supporting coworkers, and suggesting changes to management for improved performance (Organ, 1988). Employees were more likely to participate in voluntary behavior that was not legally allowed or expressly required at work, even if they did not show involvement in OCB (Organ, 1997; Organ et al., 2006). Employee prosaically behavior refers to sudden, intentional behavior that helps an employee or organization to work effectively. OCB, according to Yılmaz and Bokeoglu (2008), is prosaically behavior that takes many different forms and is freely given to the organization and its workers without any expectation of compensation for going above and beyond.

2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Developed by Researcher, 2022

There are three main variables, such as servant leadership, OC, and OCB, and three categories: independent variables, mediating variables, and dependent variables. Thus, it is thought that servant leadership is an independent factor affecting OC and OCB. OC is regarded as an independent variable that predicts OCB and acts as a mediating variable between OCB and servant leadership. It is believed that OCB is the dependent variable that Servant Leadership and OC predict.

3. Material and Method

This study used a mixture survey approach, specifically explanatory sequential mixture designs (QUAN-qual), to gain a deeper understanding of quantitative outcomes from qualitative data. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Designs have a strong quantitative orientation, where researchers first collect quantitative data and analyze the results, then utilize the quantitative data to inform the planning of the study's qualitative phases. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Designs are predicated on the idea that integrating qualitative and quantitative methods leads to a deeper comprehension of the issue than when employing just one of the two methods.

3.1 Data Analysis

Mediation Analysis (specifically testing the indirect effect): Determines if the effect of an independent variable (Servant Leadership) on a dependent variable (OCB) is transmitted through a third variable (Organizational Commitment). It helps us to answers: Is there a significant indirect effect of Servant Leadership on OCB that operates via OC? /SL -> OC -> OCB pathway analysis/. This analysis specifically investigates the hypothesized indirect effect where Servant Leadership (SL) impacts Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) via its influence on Organizational Commitment (OC). Testing this pathway (SL → OC → OCB) is crucial for understanding the mechanism linking SL to OCB.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

With the overall structural model fit confirmed, the analysis proceeded to the critical stage of testing the individual hypotheses. This was accomplished by examining the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance of the path coefficients within the structural model. The final model, displaying the standardized path coefficients (β) for all hypothesized relationships, is presented in Figure 4.1. The detailed unstandardized and standardized regression weights, along with their associated statistics, are provided in Table 4.1.

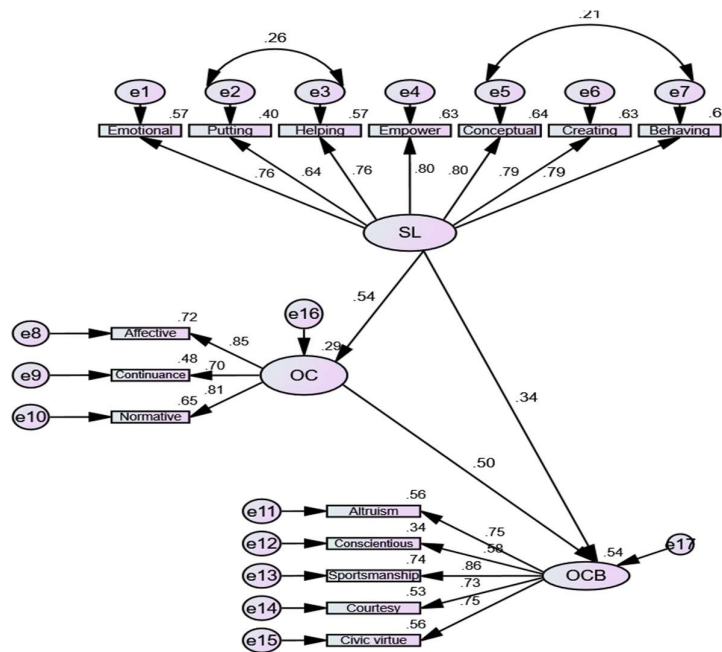


Figure 4.1: The Final Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients.

This diagram illustrates the final tested model, showing the causal relationships between Servant Leadership (SL), Organizational Commitment (OC), and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Table 4.1: Regression Weights for the Structural Model

Hypothesized Path	Unstandardized Estimate (B)	Standard Error (S.E.)	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	P-value	Standardized Estimate (β)
Servant Leadership → Org. Commitment	0.657	.091	7.202	***	.54
Servant Leadership → Org. Citizenship Behavior	0.322	.072	4.466	***	.34
Org. Commitment → Org. Citizenship Behavior	0.386	.063	6.125	***	.50

*Note: *** $p < .001$. Values derived from the final structural model.*

Source: Primary data, 2024

Hypothesis 1: The Effect of Servant Leadership on Organizational Commitment

The first hypothesis posited a positive relationship between Servant Leadership and Organizational Commitment. The results from the structural model provide robust empirical support for this proposition. The standardized regression coefficient (β) for the path from SL to OC was **.54**, a large and statistically significant effect ($p < .001$). This finding indicates a strong and meaningful predictive relationship, suggesting that when employees perceive their leaders as demonstrating servant-oriented behaviors—such as prioritizing employee needs, fostering personal and professional growth, and acting with ethical integrity—they are significantly more likely to develop a stronger sense of attachment, loyalty, and psychological obligation to the organization. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was unequivocally supported by the data.

Hypothesis 2: The Effect of Organizational Commitment on Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Next, the analysis assessed the influence of Organizational Commitment on Organizational Citizenship Behavior. The results revealed a powerful and positive relationship between these two constructs, with a standardized path coefficient of $\beta = .50$ ($p < .001$). The magnitude of this coefficient highlights the critical role of employee commitment as a direct antecedent to discretionary, pro-organizational actions. This finding implies that employees who feel a strong emotional bond and sense of obligation to their organization are not merely content to fulfill their formal job requirements; they are also significantly more motivated to "go the extra mile" by engaging in helpful, supportive, and conscientious behaviors that benefit their colleagues and the organization as a whole. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 received strong empirical support.

Hypothesis 3: The Direct Effect of Servant Leadership on Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The third hypothesis proposed that Servant Leadership has a direct positive influence on OCB, independent of its effect through any mediating variables. The structural model confirmed this hypothesis, revealing a positive and statistically significant path from SL to OCB ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$). While this coefficient is more moderate compared to the other direct paths, its statistical significance is theoretically important. This result suggests that servant leadership does not rely solely on fostering commitment to encourage citizenship behaviors. Instead, servant leaders may directly inspire OCB by acting as powerful role models for altruistic behavior, creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel comfortable taking initiative, and fostering a climate of mutual trust and support that directly prompts discretionary effort. As such, Hypothesis 3 was fully supported, establishing that servant leadership has a multifaceted influence on OCB.

Hypothesis 4: The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

Finally, Hypothesis 4 proposed that Organizational Commitment mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and OCB. To test this, both the direct and indirect effects of SL on OCB were examined. As established in H3, the direct effect was significant ($\beta = .34$). The indirect effect, transmitted through OC, was calculated by multiplying the paths from SL to OC and from OC to OCB ($.54 * .50$), resulting in a significant indirect effect of $\beta = .27$. According to the causal steps approach established by Baron and Kenny (1986), the presence of both a significant direct effect (the c' path) and a significant indirect effect (the a*b path) confirms the presence of partial mediation. This finding suggests that while servant leadership directly

encourages citizenship, a substantial portion of its positive influence is channeled through its ability to first build organizational commitment. Therefore, **Hypothesis 4 was supported**, clarifying the mechanism through which SL influences OCB.

5. Conclusion

The subsequent testing of the structural model confirmed all hypothesized relationships. The findings revealed that Servant Leadership is a significant positive antecedent of both Organizational Commitment and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. A strong and meaningful predictive relationship, suggesting that when employees perceive their leaders as demonstrating servant-oriented behaviors—such as prioritizing employee needs, fostering personal and professional growth, and acting with ethical integrity they are significantly more likely to develop a stronger sense of attachment, loyalty, and psychological obligation to the organization. This finding implies that employees who feel a strong emotional bond and sense of obligation to their organization are not merely content to fulfill their formal job requirements; they are also significantly more motivated to "go the extra mile" by engaging in helpful, supportive, and conscientious behaviors that benefit their colleagues and the organization as a whole. Servant leadership does not rely solely on fostering commitment to encourage citizenship behaviors. Instead, servant leaders may directly inspire OCB by acting as powerful role models for altruistic behavior, creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel comfortable taking initiative, and fostering a climate of mutual trust and support that directly prompts discretionary effort. Furthermore, Organizational Commitment was confirmed to be a powerful predictor of OCB and a significant partial mediator of the relationship between servant leadership and employee citizenship. The overall model demonstrated impressive explanatory power, particularly for OCB.

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