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Servant Leadership as Impetus for Teachers' Organisational Citizenship and In-role Behaviours: The Mediation of Felt Obligation

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ABSTRACT

Based on the premises of social exchange theory, this study examined servant leadership as an impetus for teachers' organisational citizenship and in-role behaviours through the mediation of felt obligation. Although several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and employees' performance behaviours, it is unclear why servant leadership would significantly induce employees' performance behaviours. Data were collected from the teachers working in franchise schools. This study collected primary data using a 5-point Likert survey questionnaire (N=201), ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A random sampling technique was applied. Results showed that servant leadership is positively associated with teachers' organisational citizenship behaviour and in-role behaviour. The effect of servant leadership was more on organisational citizenship than in-role behaviour. Further, felt obligation was found as a bridge that mediates the relationship between servant leadership and both behaviours. However, like the total effect, the indirect effect of servant leadership was found more on organisational citizenship than in-role behaviour. Overall, based on the social exchange theory, this study offers a mechanism that how the principals of the schools, following the premises of servant leadership theory, induce the teachers through a sense of felt obligation to reciprocate by displaying positive work behaviours.

The influential role of leadership in organisational behaviours is one of the most rigorously studied areas. Several leadership styles have been applied in the workplace, but what makes servant leadership unique is to serve others selflessly, not only within the workplace but extending that service to home and the community (Liden et al., 2008). In order to meet the modern workplace challenges, the servant leadership (SL) approach can be followed (Eva, et al., 2018). It focuses on the followers from different dimensions. On one hand, sub-ordinates are given personalized attention to fulfil their needs, but on the other hand, it does not ignore the performance dimensions of individuals (Eva et al., 2018). Although many leadership theories overlap with servant leadership (SL)(Van Dierendonck, 2011), what makes it unique from others is its altruistic style of leadership (Greenleaf et al., 2002), which puts the follower first, organisation second, and themselves third (Sendjaya, 2015). Such potential traits of servant ship are found to have a significant effect on employees' attitudes, i.e., employees' satisfaction (Netemeyer et al., 2005), career adaptability, job embeddedness, and lateness (Safavi & Bouzari, 2021); and employees' behaviours, i.e., job performance (Kadariusman & Bunyamin, 2021). Although organisational citizenship (OCB) and in-role behaviour (IRB) has been investigated as the potential outcomes of SL, the investigation of relationship between SL and OCB and IRB in the context of current study related to the teachers of franchise schools is rare. According to Organ (2018), "OCB represents the informal modes of cooperation and contributions that participants render as a function of job satisfaction and perceived fairness" (p. 297), whereas IRB can be described as the behaviour governed by the formal reward system and is required to fulfil the job description given to an individual by an organisation (Williams & Anderson, 1991). The principals working in the franchise school are not outsider. They are usually from within the teachers' community. They are teachers first and then principals. If they act like a servant leader, then they set high standards of performance for those (i.e., teachers) who are served (Jennings & Stahl-Wert, 2016). Teachers, as serving leaders, are the leaders of character, and they hold others being served to the same standard (Bowman, 2005). It is plausible to conceive that the teachers modelling the character of their servant leader are likely to show high performance at their individual level (i.e., IRB) as well as helping out their fellow teachers (i.e., OCB). Therefore, first purpose of this study is to examine the positive influence of SL on teachers' OCB and IRB.

Although SL is found as the potential outcome of OCB and IRB, the underlying mechanisms through which SL affects employees' OCB and IRB are given little attention (Bavik et al., 2017; Walumbwa et al., 2010). The SET (Blau, 1964) provides a solid and sound mechanism to this question. Social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) is the most widely incorporated theory to comprehend social interactions in the workplace. The basic premise of this theory is based on the sense of reciprocation or obligation felt by individuals due to the social rewards offered to them (Blau, 1964). Such exchange of social rewards in the shape of interpersonal relationships and interactions in the employees results in many beneficial consequences in the workplace (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In other words, a social exchange relationship is a mediating or intervening variable (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET establishes a reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers. Therefore, following the premise of SET, we establish that the SL behaviour of principals influences the teachers in a way that develops the felt obligation in the teachers and in turn, they reciprocate by showing positive workplace behaviours, i.e., OCB and IRB in their schools. The concept

of felt obligation refers to the extent to which an individual cares about the wellbeing of an organization and helps the organization achieve its goals (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Although felt obligation has already been tested as a mediator (Arshadi, 2011; Basit, 2017; Eisenberger et al., 2001), building on SET (Blau, 1964), we propose felt obligation as a mediator in the positive relationship between SL and teachers' OCB and IRB.

Literature Review

The servant style of leadership is not a new concept. It has been practised by monarchs and religious leaders for several thousand years (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Although servant leadership is based on an ancient concept with biblical foundations, the idea of servant leadership in organisations went unutilized for centuries until Greenleaf (1970) and Greenleaf et al. (1977) renewed interest in the theory of servant leadership. Later, Ehrhart (2004) and Liden, et al. (2008) have done extensive work on servant leadership theory by identifying the different constructs of servant leadership styles. Greenleaf (1970) stated that servant leaders are servants first and then the leader second. Servant leadership is a combination of two words 'servant' and 'leader', and can be defined as a leadership style in which a leader makes employees loyal and develops employees by focusing on employees' care (Greenleaf et al., 1977). Servant leadership not only promotes the employees' development but also contributes to the whole organisational growth. A close analysis of servant leadership theory attributes show that the major strength of the servant leadership style is its contribution to the all-round development of the employee (Brewer, 2010; Russell & Stone, 2002). Many studies have shown that servant leadership is a theory for organisational development. Servant leadership has remarkable positive changes in the organisational context (Brewer, 2010). One of the discretionary behaviour that is strongly influenced by servant leadership is OCB (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Smith et al., 1983; Vondey, 2010). Many potential antecedents of OCB have been studied which can rouse an individual to perform OCB in the workplace such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Williams & Anderson, 1991); career satisfaction and support (Jawahar & Stone, 2015); and performance appraisal process (Zheng et al., 2012). According to Walumbwa et al. (2010), SL facilitates OCB in the workplace. When servant leaders attribute value and worth to an employee, they try to reciprocate the attached value in terms of positive work-related attitudes and behaviours, i.e., OCB (Elche et al., 2020). This context has been further supported by the reciprocation mechanism offered by SET (Blau, 1964), which postulates that individuals reciprocate the social rewards (i.e., help, support) they receive from others. We intend to validate the association between SL and OCB in the context of the franchise school teachers. We argue that the servant behaviour of the principals of schools is likely to influence teachers and in turn they are likely to reciprocate by helping their colleagues and performing beyond their job description in the workplace. Therefore, we propose that:

H₁: *Servant leadership is positively associated with organisational citizenship behaviour of the teachers.*

Employees consider a manager as the representative of an organization (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Zhen et al., 2002). Therefore, considering the servant leader as the representative of an organization, we argue that the service provided by the servant leader can influence them to

reciprocate towards the organization by displaying IRB in the workplace. Another aspect of servant leaders is that they set high standards of performance and hold others being served to the same standard (Bowman, 2005). Therefore, it is argued that the teachers modelling the character of their servant leader are likely to show high performance at their individual level (i.e., IRB). Further, many potential antecedents of IRB have been found in the workplace such as work-family organisational support (Kumar et al., 2018); job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. The positive association between SL and IRB is also evident in the various studies (Mayer et al., 2008; McCrimmon, 2010; Sun & Wang, 2009). Thus, based on these studies and the organisational agent as well as servant leadership role of principals, we hypothesise that;

H₂: *Servant leadership is positively associated with in-role behaviour of the teachers.*

There has been insufficient evidence of why servant leadership would be related to employees' performance behaviours. Then, there are certain premises based organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 2001) and norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) which postulates that an individual morally feels obligated to reciprocate contingent upon what they have been offered. Based on these premises, Eisenberger et al. (2001) proposed and found felt obligation as the effective mediator. The felt obligation is a type of belief (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Although it provides solid mediation mechanism based on SET (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Gouldner, 1960), it has been underrepresented in research. Following these premises, we argue that the servant leader behaviour of the principals of the schools can develop such belief in the teachers and, in turn, teachers are likely to perform OCB in the workplace. In other words, a sense of obligation works as the mechanism through which SL is likely to positively and significantly impact employees' OCB. Although felt obligation has been used as the significant mediator such as between POS and organisational commitment, in-role performance, and turnover intention (Arshadi, 2011; Eisenberger et al., 2001); between trust in supervisor and job engagement (Basit, 2017), its role as the mediation mechanism in the relationship between SL and OCB has hardly been investigated. Therefore, we intended to unpack this untested bridge and hypothesised that:

H₃: *Felt obligation mediates the positive relationship between servant leadership and teachers' organisational citizenship behaviour.*

Wayne and Green (1993) argued that the sense of obligation to reciprocate would motivate the subordinates to perform better. Based on SET (Blau, 1964), considering the manager as the organisational agent (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Zhen et al., 2002), employees are likely to feel obligated towards their organization. Further, teachers are also bound to feel obligated and demonstrate performance at the individual level due to the role model behaviour of the principals as servant leaders. Furthermore, regarding the empirical evidence, although, felt obligation has been tested as a mediator (Arshadi, 2011; Basit, 2017; Eisenberger et al., 2001), its role as the mediation mechanism in the relationship between SL and IRB has hardly been investigated. Therefore, we propose that:

H₄: *Felt obligation mediates the positive relationship between servant leadership and teachers' in-role behaviour.*

Method

Measures

This study used a five-point Likert type of survey questionnaire. We also collected the respondents' general demographic data, i.e., gender, age, experience, and education. SL leadership was measured using the 28 items scale of Liden et al. (2008). We used seven items scale of Eisenberger et al. (2001) to measure felt obligation. OCB and IRB were measured through the 13 items and seven items scales of Williams and Anderson (1991).

Sample

This study used the primary data collected from the private franchise school teachers, working in the city municipal area of district Khairpur Mir's of the Sindh province of Pakistan. A simple random sampling technique was applied. The total population consists of 260 teachers. The researchers personally visited the schools and distributed the questionnaires to the respondents. In order to have maximum representation, we distributed a questionnaire among all teachers as the target population was not very big. But 201 correctly filled questionnaires were returned by the respondents, which is the final size of the sample for this study. According to Saunders et al. (2011), a sample size of 168 is considered representative of the population of 300, at a 95 percent confidence level. As our total population consists of 260 teachers, 201 can be considered a sufficient sample for the current study. Overall, the response rate was around 77%. Further, the details regarding the schools, the number of teachers working in each school and the representative sample selected from each school are given in Table 1. Furthermore, regarding the respondents' demographic information related to gender, 21% were male while 79%. The mean age of the respondents was 25 years, while the mean experience was 3.23 years. Regarding the education of respondents, only 0.5 % (1 respondent) was found with 18 years of education, and there were 2.5 % (05 respondents) with 12 years of education. The largest group in the education background was 73%, consisting of 16 years of education, whereas 23.9% of the respondents comprised 14 years of education.

Table 1

Total Population and Sample Size

School Name	Total Number of Teachers in Each School	Sample Selected
Allied school	50	45
Air foundation school	30	28
The smart school	10	10
The savvy school	10	9
The Knowledge School	10	7
The Spirit School	30	26
The Educator School	30	27
Pak Turk School	50	30
The City School Khairpur	30	13
The City Nursery Khairpur	10	6
Total	260	201

Data Analysis Techniques

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) techniques were applied to test the propositions. The mediation analysis was conducted following the guidelines of Rucker et al. (2011) and Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). According to Rucker et al. (2011), we basically look at the three effects in mediation analysis. First, the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable without any intervening or mediating variable. Second is the indirect

effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through some intervening or mediating variable. Third, is the total effect, which is the sum of direct and indirect effects. Mediation holds when the indirect effects are significant; even direct and total effects are significant or insignificant.

Results

Initially, all the data screening tests (i.e., missing and aberrant value analysis, outliers, normality through skewness and kurtosis, and trimmed mean) (Pallant, 2010) were applied. Further, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were applied to check the model fit in the context of the current study. The model fit indices along with their respective general rule for acceptable fit included were, i.e., CMIN/DF: 2-5; Comparative Fit Index (CFI): $>.90$; Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI): $>.90$; Root-Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): $\leq .08$ (Hair et al., 2010). In the initial CFA results, model fit indices were below the acceptable level (i.e., CMIN/DF = 3.2; CFI = .79; TLI = .78; RMSEA = .10). One item of the felt obligation scale with low factor loading was removed, and then the model showed an acceptable fit to the data (i.e., CMIN/DF = 2.0; CFI = .91; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .07).

Further, we checked all the measures' reliability and validity (i.e., convergent and discriminant). Hair et al. (2010) stated .7 as the acceptable level for reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of a minimum of .5 as the acceptable level for convergent validity. And if average shared and maximum shared variances are less than the AVE, then we have discriminant validity of a measure. As shown in Table 2, all our measures showed acceptable levels.

Table 2

Reliability and Validity

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Servant Leadership	.99	.72	.25	.15
Felt Obligation	.97	.85	.32	.20
Organisational Citizenship Behaviour	.96	.65	.46	.35
In-role Behaviour	.95	.72	.16	.14

Further, we checked the Common Method Variance (CMV), following the procedure of Podsakoff et al. (2003). The Common Latent Factor (CLF) test showed that items of all the variables have a shared variance of 14%, which means that CMV is not a big deal in our data set.

Further, we conducted a descriptive analysis. A positive relationship was found between SL and mediator, i.e., felt obligation. SL also showed a positive relationship with employees' OCB and IRB. However, the demographic variables, i.e., age, experience, and education, did not show any relationship with OCB, whereas gender showed a positive relationship with OCB. The demographics, i.e., gender, age, and education, did not show any relationship with IRB, whereas experience showed a positive relationship with IRB. The results of descriptive analysis, i.e., mean and correlations, are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	N.A	N.A	1							
Age	25.57	25.57	-.06	1						
Experience	3.23	3.23	.00	.64**	1					
Education	2.72	2.72	-.16*	.62**	.44**	1				
Servant leadership	3.93	3.93	.18**	-.01	-.05	-.04	1			
Felt Obligation	3.35	3.35	.12	.03	.01	-.03	.32**	1		
OCB	3.89	3.89	.16*	.08	.09	.00	.50**	.57**	1	
In-Role Behaviour	4.25	4.25	.10	.13	.15*	.08	.34**	.40**	.67**	1

Note. OCB = Organisational Citizenship Behavior, N.A= not applicable, N= 201, **= $p < 0.01$ level, * = $p < 0.05$ level

Further, we tested our propositions through the Structural Regression (SR) model. The SR model showed acceptable fit to the data (i.e., CMIN/DF = 2.11; CFI = .90; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .07). In H₁, we proposed a positive relationship between SL and OCB. Our results also showed the significant positive effect of SL on OCB ($B = .70, p < .00$). Therefore, H₁ is fully supported by the results. Further, in H₂, we proposed a positive relationship between SL and IRB. Our results also showed the significant positive effect of SL on IRB ($B = .33, p < .00$). Therefore, H₂ was fully supported by the results. Further, the effect of SL on OCB was much stronger than its effect on IRB. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4
The Effect of Servant Leadership on Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) and In-role Behaviour (IRB)

	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>p</i>
OCB	.70	.08	.45	.97	.00
IRB	.33	.06	.17	.47	.00

Note. Biased Corrected 95% Confidence Intervals with 5000 bootstrap were used; S.E = Standard Error; N = 201

In H₃, we proposed felt obligation as a mediator in the positive relationship between SL and OCB. The results showed SL had a significant indirect effect on OCB through felt obligation (unstandardized $B = .20, SE = .05, p < .00$). Therefore, H₃ was supported. The results are given in Table 5.

Table 5
Felt Obligation as Mediator in the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour

	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>p</i>
Total Effect	.70	.13	.45	.97	.00
Direct Effect	.50	.11	.30	.75	.00
Indirect Effect	.20	.05	.10	.34	.00

Note. Biased Corrected 95% Confidence Intervals with 5000 bootstrap were used; S.E = Standard Error; N=201

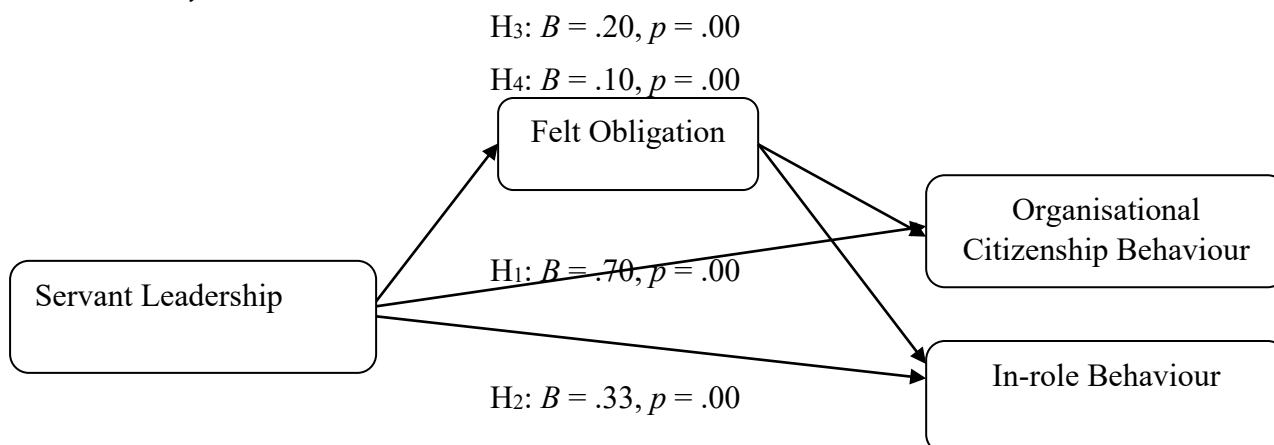
In H₄, we proposed felt obligation as a mediator in the positive relationship between SL and IRB. The results showed SL had a significant indirect effect on IRB through felt obligation (unstandardized $B = .10, SE = .03, p < .00$). Therefore, H₄ was also supported. The results are given in Table 6. Further, Figure 1 shows the overall summary of results.

Table 6
Felt Obligation as Mediator in the Relationship between Servant Leadership and In-role Behaviour

	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>p</i>
Total Effect	.33	.07	.17	.47	.00
Direct Effect	.23	.07	.08	.37	.00
Indirect Effect	.10	.03	.04	.19	.00

Note. Biased Corrected 95% Confidence Intervals with 5000 bootstrap were used; S.E = Standard Error; N=201

Figure 1
Results' Summary



Discussion

This study examined the relationship between SL and employees' OCB and IRB and the mediating role of felt obligation. In H1, it was proposed that SL is positively related to OCB. Consistent with other studies (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Walumbwa et al., 2010), we found a positive and significant role of SL of principal in developing OCB among the teachers, working in the franchise schools. In H2, it was proposed that there is a positive relationship between SL and IRB. Consistent with other studies (Liden et al., 2008; Sun & Wang, 2009), and the organisational agent role of the servant leaders (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Zhen et al., 2002), our results have supported the positive association between SL and teachers' IRB. In H3, we proposed felt obligation as a mediator in the positive relationship between SL and OCB. The results showed SL had a significant indirect effect on OCB through felt obligation. Based on SET (Blau, 1964), these results validated the felt obligation as the mechanism through which servant leader's behaviour of principals of schools can induce the teachers to reciprocate the help and support provided to them by helping their colleagues and going the extra mile with their own performance behaviour beyond their job description. Finally, in H4, we proposed felt obligation as a mediator in the positive relationship between SL and IRB. The results showed SL had a significant indirect effect on IRB through felt obligation. Based on SET (Blau, 1964), and the organisational agent role of the servant leaders (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Zhen et al., 2002), these results validated the felt obligation as the mechanism through which servant leader's behaviour of principals of schools can induce the teachers to reciprocate in the workplace by displaying their positive IRB. Our results for the felt obligation as mediator are also consistent with other studies, investigating felt obligation as mediator (Arshadi, 2011; Basit, 2017; Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research incorporated the role of SET (Blau, 1964) in the relationship between servant leader behaviour of principals of the school and the performance OCB and IRB of the teachers, through the mediation of felt obligation.

Practically, the findings of this study suggest that such selfless servant leader style of the principals of schools can be very helpful to induce the teachers, working under their supervision, to pay back to their schools by helping their coworkers and fulfilling not only their job descriptions but showing their improved work role performance beyond their job

description. Further, this study establishes felt obligation as the black box, which works like a bridge in the social exchange mechanism between servant leaders and their subordinate employees. Based on the findings of this study, we endorse the SL as the leadership trait to be adopted by principals of the schools to motivate the teachers to improve their performance.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like all studies, this research is not beyond certain limitations such as this research may offer limited generalizability in the context of the current research. It is recommended to replicate the study with a larger sample size and area. Further, the principals as servant leaders can also be investigated as the stimulus for administrative staff working under their supervision. As we used cross-sectional data, the use of longitudinal data may help to develop causal effects. We used a general measure of SL while other studies may test the separate effect of the different dimensions of SL. Liden et al. (2008) argued that what makes the servant leadership style unique is serving others selflessly, not only within the workplace but also extending that service to home and the community. Therefore, the SL approach can be applied in work-family interface research.

Declarations

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