

Original Article

Designing a servant leadership model on mental health and motivating public service in Kerman municipality employees

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Abstract

Background: The success of government organizations depends on the ability of employees and managers to provide optimal services. The present study was undertaken with the objective of formulating and understanding the servant leadership model on mental health and creating motivation for public service in the employees of Kerman municipality.

Methods: This study used the intentional snowball sample technique, wherein individuals were deliberately chosen by the researcher using the snowball method, which is a non-probability sampling method, was used to identify other experts. This sampling continued with maximum fluctuation until reaching theoretical adequacy, i.e. until adding data did not change the final pattern. The statistical population was the employees of Kerman Municipality with the number of 154 people. The tools used include standard questionnaires with reliability above 0.8 and Smart PLS3 software was used for data analysis.

Results: A major factor in enhancing mental health and fostering public service motivation is servant leadership, which has a favorable impact on both things. This leadership style strengthens the motivation by improving and growing mutual trust between the leader and the employees and makes the employees able to provide better services while maintaining their mental health.

Conclusion: Considering the importance of the servant leadership style as one of the influencing factors on public service motivation, it is necessary to pay attention to this issue in motivating municipal employees in micro and macro management planning.

Keywords: Cities; Leadership; Mental Health; Motivation; Urban Health Services.

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Introduction

Nowadays, organizations face many dynamics and complications due to the interaction of factors such as globalization, the emergence of advanced technologies, the information technology revolution, and the intensification of competition. Thus, they are forced to show proper performance to survive and play their desired role in society. In this regard,

beyond the physical and technological capital, the human factor maintains and develops the existence and survival of the organization. Therefore, the success of the organization hinges on the exceptional performance of its human resources, surpassing all other contributing factors (1). In other words, human resources are the most crucial and the most complex

component of the value creation process in an organization. If they perform their tasks with motivation, they will cause the success and progress of the organization and society. Accordingly, many studies have been performed to theorize about motivation in organizations. Regarding this matter, the theory of public service motivation has gained significant attention in recent years as a crucial aspect of contemporary public administration. This theory is based on the fact that the motivations of public sector employees and managers are very different from those in the private sector (2). Stated differently, the definition of public motivation is an individual setting that caters to the incentives that are found solely and mostly in organizations and institutions that provide public services (3). It is a motivating force that forces people to provide valuable services to the people of society (4). Also, in public service, public organizations employees are motivated under the effect of various factors. Leadership style in the organization is one of the most significant of them. In this regard, servant leadership seems to be effective since it is an approach to leadership and service in which the manager first plays the role of a servant and then the role of a leader (5). Servant leadership is a free and human philosophy of leadership that emphasizes serving others (6). Thus, it can be claimed that the servant leadership style is based on public service motivation. Nevertheless, the literature study reveals that scholars have yet to develop a model of servant leadership that is grounded in the public service motive of workers. The objective of this research was to develop and examine the impact of the servant leadership model on the mental well-being and motivation of workers in Kerman Municipality.

Methods

Study design

This study was applied research in terms of orientation and purpose. It also had an

exploratory nature. It was conducted qualitatively using a grounded theory strategy based on the systematic approach of Strauss & Corbin (7), which was based on the collection and continuous comparison of data and the formation of concepts simultaneously. In this study, purposeful, snowball and theoretical sampling methods were used. Accordingly, the subjects were selected by the researcher purposefully. Then, the snowball method, which were a non-probabilistic sampling method, was used to identify other experts. This sampling was continued with the maximum fluctuation (selecting a few cases but with the greatest possible difference so the range of fluctuation and difference in the research was revealed) until reaching theoretical adequacy (until adding data does not change the final model. In other words, theoretical sampling was a repetitive process until we reach content adequacy. Guba & Lincoln, stated that in a carefully guided study in which the sample was selected evolutionarily and sequentially, we will reach the theoretical saturation point with about 12 participants. Thus, the sample size of this study was 12 people considering was sated (8).

Research environment and population

The statistical population of the present study included 154 experts from Kerman Municipality.

Examining the research measurement model

Since all the variables of the model are reflective structures, the evaluation of the measurement model includes the evaluation of the validity of the structure and the reliability of the variables, which was done with the SmartPLS software. Reliability is measured by Cronbach's alpha index and composite reliability and construct validity are measured by two indices of divergent validity and convergent validity.

Data collection method

In this study, to collect primary data, an open-ended preliminary interview was used first. Then, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with people who could provide richer information regarding the research topic, until theoretical saturation was reached and the researcher was sure that the research had reached theoretical adequacy. These interviews were conducted face-to-face and each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes. Also, the initial interview questions were developed based on the research background and the intended goals. They were presented to the sample members in different sequences. Also, other questions were added depending on the conditions of the interview. Also, data were recorded in the form of voice recording and note-taking.

Statistical analysis

The texts from the interviews were analyzed, and open coding (generating concepts and categories), axial coding (determining the dimensions of the central category, causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and implications), and selective coding (generating theory) formed the basis of the data analysis process. The servant leadership model based on the public service motivation of Kerman Municipality employees was used.

1- Open coding: The interview analysis process began with open coding. In order to complete the study, the data had to be thoroughly examined, named, and

categorized. Each idea was labeled after separation in order to ensure an appropriate classification of the data. The raw data were conceived by closely scrutinizing the interview transcript and contextual notes. To facilitate the identification of commonalities and differences, the interviews' data was coded.

2- Axial coding: the purpose of this stage was to identify the relationship between the categories and subcategories created in the open coding stage. Axial coding connects categories and their subcategories based on their characteristics and dimensions. To discover how the categories were related to each other, the researchers used the paradigm as an analytical tool. The primary components of the paradigm included conditions, actions, reactions, and implications. During the axial coding process, the researchers used the analytical tools of asking questions and constant and theoretical comparison between the categories, subcategories, and their characteristics that appeared in the open coding to develop the relationships between the categories and subcategories and to adjust the categories based on the paradigm model.

3- Selective coding: During this step, researchers formulated ideas on the correlation between the categories derived from the axial coding model. Selective coding utilizes the outcomes of preceding coding phases, identifies the principal category, and establishes systematic links with other categories. It verifies the associations and enhances the categories that need more refinement and growth (7).

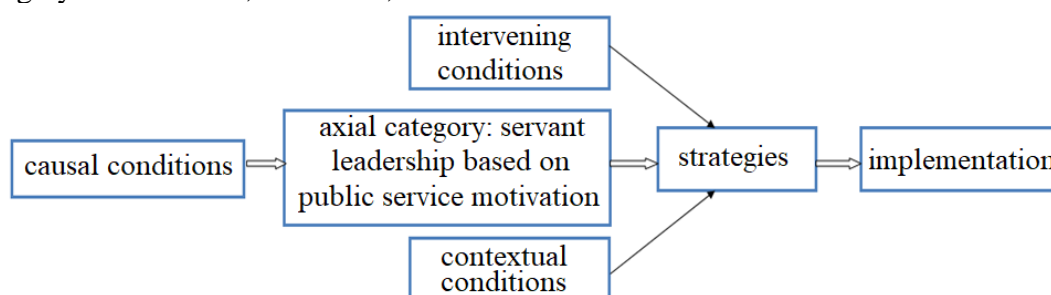


Figure 1. Research paradigm model based on the Strauss & Corbin approach (7)

Given the study paradigm model, the researcher identified the concepts and categories related to the axial phenomenon (servant leadership based on public service motivation in the Kerman Municipality employees), causal conditions (motivating factors that form the axial phenomenon, namely servant leadership based on the public service motivation in Kerman Municipality employees), intervening conditions (general factors that are effective in the selection of various servant leadership mechanisms based on public service motivation in Kerman Municipality employees and can facilitate and accelerate the implementation of mechanisms and affect strategies), contextual conditions (Intra-organizational and extra-organizational characteristics of implementation of servant leadership based on the public service motivation in the Kerman Municipality employees and identifying the factors that affect the selection of appropriate strategy in the current status), strategies (plans and actions that must be taken by the municipality of Kerman for the successful implementation of servant leadership based on the public service motivation in the employees, and implications (concepts and categories related to the expected outcomes and consequences resulting from the application of servant leadership strategies and actions based on the public service motivation in the Kerman Municipality employees). Accordingly, the theoretical servant leadership model based on the public service motivation in the Kerman Municipality employees was developed based on the dimensions of the research paradigm model to finally achieve a suitable model of servant leadership based on the public service motivation in the Kerman Municipality employees.

Data collection tools

Since 36 questionnaires included incomplete information, they were removed and 190 questionnaires were returned. Finally, 154 completed

questionnaires were analyzed. Gholipour & Hazrati (9), 28-item questionnaire which includes dimensions of servicing (6 items), humility (7 items), trust (10 items), and kindness (5 items) was used to measure servant leadership on a 5-point Likert scale with options very low to very high. Kim (10), 14-question questionnaire was also used to measure public service motivation. It measures the dimensions of attraction to policy making (3 items), commitment to public interest (3 items), compassion (4 items), and self-sacrifice (4 items). It is scored on a 5-point Likert scale with options from very low to very high. Standard questionnaires and the opinions of experts and professors were used to check content validity. To check the construct validity, confirmatory factor analysis was used. Its results indicated the appropriate validity of these questionnaires. Its results are presented in this part of the model measurement examination.

Results

Table 1 and 2 shows Demographic characteristic and the descriptive statistics of research variables such as mean, standard deviation, variance, and their dimensions.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

variable		Mean±SD
Age		37.21±7.47
Gender	Female	33
	Male	121
degree of education	Associate degree	24
	Masters	130
Field of Study	Accounting and financial management	137
	Others	17
type of employment	Official	120
	Contractual	19
	others	15
Native	Yes	128
	No	26
work experience	Under 5 years	22
	Upper 5 years	132

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the research

Variable	Dimension	Mean	SD	Variance
Servant leadership	Serving	3.95	0.952	0.907
	Humility	3.89	1.02	1.057
	Trust	3.90	0.994	0.990
	Kindness	3.89	0.782	0.613
	Total score of servant leadership	3.91	0.989	0.978
Public service motivation	Attraction to policy making	3.88	0.831	0.692
	Commitment to public interest	4.21	0.736	0.543
	Compassion	4.10	0.759	0.577
	Self-sacrifice	4.05	0.805	0.649
	Total score of public service motivation	4.06	0.633	0.402

Testing the normality of research data

In this section, the normality of the data was checked using the Smirnov-Kolmogorov test. The outcomes of this examination will serve as the foundation for ascertaining the software used in the structural equations model component of the study. The test findings showed a significant relationship between the study variables of servant leadership (with a significance level of 0.000) and public service motivation (with a significance level of 0.000). All study variables have a significance level below 0.05, indicating that the assumption of normality of the data is not validated. Thus, it is not allowed to use covariance-based software. Due to the non-normality of the data and the not very high sample volume, Smart Pls 3 software, which is component-based software, has been employed in the current investigation.

Table 3 presents the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

Acceptable reliability of the measuring instruments is shown by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ratings, both of which are more than 0.7. Additionally, the scales' convergent validity is validated, with the average variance recovered for the structures being greater than 0.5.

Table 4. Examining the model divergent validity at the structural level based on the Fortel-Larker criterion

Variable name	Servant leadership	Public service motivation
Servant leadership	0.847	0.708
Public service motivation	-	0.731

Table 3. Convergent validity and reliability of variables

Variable name	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Servant leadership	0.985	0.986	0.717
Public service motivation	0.903	0.920	0.534

The correlation between a structure and its indicators and the correlation between that structure and other structures is referred to as a divergent validity comparison. Fornell-Larker criteria are used for this. It is evident from the intra-structural correlation table and the square root of AVE in the matrix diameter that all AVEs exceed the intra-structural correlation square. The model's structural divergent validity is validated based on the Fornell-Larker criteria, as shown by the correlations and square root of AVE values. *Testing research hypotheses*

To examine the significance of the coefficients of the path, t-statistic value of each path should be shown. If the t-statistic value is greater than ± 1.96 at the 0.95 percent confidence level, the impact coefficient is significant. Table 5 presents the results of significant numbers and confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses.

Table 5. Values of path coefficients and significance tests of hypothesis testing

hypotheses	Path coefficients	t-statistic	P Value	Result
Servant leadership \rightarrow public service motivation	0.585	5.068	<0.001	Confirmed
Interactive effect of structure and servant leadership \rightarrow Public service motivation	-0.125	0.794	0.428	Rejected

The findings support the hypothesis that servant leadership has a positive impact on public motivation. On the other hand, it is disregarded that structure and servant leadership interact to influence public service motivation.

The R2 value for the public service motivation variable in the model is 0.616. The model's coefficient of determination is deemed acceptable based on the three values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67, which are considered the threshold for weak, medium, and strong values of R2, respectively.

According to the results Table 6, servant leadership and public service motivation variables are abnormal, and a binomial test was used to examine their current status.

The findings in Table 5 demonstrate that the null hypothesis, which posits an agreement ratio of 0.05, is rejected at a significance level of 5%. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Put simply, the average level of both servant leadership and public service incentive factors is higher than the norm.

Overall model fit

The GOF criteria is used to assess the overall adequacy of the model. This criteria is derived from the square root of the average of latent variables in the coefficient of determination of endogenous hidden variables:

$$GoF = \sqrt{\text{communalities} \times R^2}$$

The AVE is 0.646 and the mean coefficient of determination (R2) of the latent endogenous variable is 0.616. Thus, the GoF value is 0.398. Given that the values 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 are categorized as weak, medium, and strong values, respectively, for Goodness of Fit (GoF), a value of 0.398 reflects the level of fit for the study model.

Discussion

Based on Table 5 and the binomial test, the mean of the variables of servant leadership and public service motivation are higher than the theoretical mean. Thus, both variables are above the average level in the organization (Kerman Municipality) and they have a desirable status. The variable of servant leadership was analyzed by the components of servicing, humility, trust, and kindness. The significant effect of servant leadership on public service motivation (a significant number of 5.068) was confirmed. The confirmation of this relationship with the path coefficient of 0.585 indicates that the organization can pay attention to strengthening the implementation of servant leadership components in Kerman municipality to promote and improve public service motivation. The dimensions of serving and trust are one of the primary components of Iran's religious democracy system in social affairs.

Table 6. Binomial test results

Variable		N	Test ratio	Observed ratio	sig
Servant leadership	Group 1 (<=3)	33	0.50	0.21	<0.001
	Group 2 (>3)	121	-	0.79	-
Public service motivation	Group 1 (<=3)	9	0.50	0.06	<0.001
	Group 2 (>3)	145	-	0.94	-

Modeling the characteristics of servant leadership among managers is a method for developing this leadership style in Kerman municipality. Kavand et al., also conducted a research entitled "Providing a model of public service motivation in public organizations based on the opinions of the Supreme Leader" according to the leaders' statements from 1989 to 2009. In this study, a model was presented with the causal conditions (including value and belief factors, environmental and social factors, individual factors), facilitating and limiting intervening factors (including culture development, rule of law, anti-corruption, occupational and organizational obstacles, redundant administrative bureaucracy), contextual conditions (organizational contexts including organizational system, management style, organization dynamics, pragmatism of managers, meritocracy, and job contexts including job values and job attitudes), axial category (public service motivation with dimensions of altruism, self-sacrifice, commitment to public interests, service), strategies (improving the human resource management system, management and jihadi work, and promoting social responsibility) and implications (including individual progress, perseverance, individual peace, organizational success, national progress, spreading justice, public satisfaction, public presence and participation (11). The mentioned study was in line with the present study.

The present investigation's findings are consistent with those of prior studies conducted by Sadeghi Tirabadi (12), who explored the impact of servant leadership on employee motivation; Schwarz et al. (13), which looked into the influence of leadership style on public service motivation; and Ugaddan & Park (14), which examined the impact of leadership quality on public service motivation. These findings demonstrate that the implementation of servant leadership styles in Kerman municipality can have a notable effect on employees' public service

motivation within the organization. Servant leadership emphasizes ethical and altruistic behavior, which determines public service motivation and strengthens the desire for altruistic behavior in employees. Public service motivation is underpinned by altruism in several senses. The idea of public service motivation is fundamentally based on an individual's inherent inclination to help others. Davis & Stazyk (15) discovered a favorable correlation between public service motivation and ethical convictions, which are based on principles of honesty and piety. Similarly, servant leaders are known for their ethical and self-sacrifice behavior, compassion for others, and their ethical nature. Liden et al. (16) argue that followers learn to serve others through a downward influence, which is created by the leader's desirable behavior and encourages employees to imitate such behavior. The findings of the current research support the implementation of a servant leadership style by managers in a business. This leadership approach fosters a culture of serving others inside the firm, which in turn enhances the quality of service provided to society by workers.

Based on the social learning theory, followers seek to imitate the behavior of leaders when they believe that leaders have positive and attractive characteristics, as one of the characteristics of servant leaders. Previous studies have indicated that followers who see their leaders' service to society and the development and strengthening of employees are encouraged to imitate this behavior and help society (17, 18). Also, leaders become appropriate role models for their subordinates, and they provide criteria for judging accepted behavior and attitudes or adjust their behavior that employees expect through formal orders and reward systems (19, 20). The present study, like other studies, suffers some limitations that future research should pay attention to. Since the statistical population of this study is limited to Kerman Municipality employees, the

results are not necessarily generalizable to all organizations with different characteristics. Also, previous studies about the relationship between leadership and service motivation were limited and only the organizational structure was investigated in this study, emphasizing the need to investigate these variables in future studies.

Conclusion

In this study, servant leadership style had no impact on public service motivation. It may be because the established and accepted organizational structure in Kerman municipality is mechanical, and since the structure of the studied statistical population was mechanical, it could not play a significant role in this regard. The objective of this research was to develop a servant leadership model that takes into account the presence of public service motivation among workers in the Kerman Municipality. Additionally, the study attempted to examine the impact of servant leadership on the public service motivation of these employees. Consequently, the understanding of the limits of information about the variables of study, and specifically the influence of servant leadership style on public service motivation, has broadened. The study partially fulfilled its purpose and uncovered the function of the variable under consideration in public service motivation. The research findings significantly improved the understanding of the policymakers and administrators of Kerman Municipality about the optimal and indisputable level of the studied variables, as well as the link between these factors. This knowledge can help plan public organizations and the policies of the entire administrative system of Iran.

Authors' contribution

Morteza Afsahi and Mohammad Jalal Kamali developed the study concept and design. Ameneh Firozabadi and Morteza Afsahi acquired the data. Morteza Afsahi

and Mohammad Jalal Kamali analyzed and interpreted the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the intellectual content, manuscript editing and read and approved the final manuscript.

Informed consent

Questionnaires were filled with the participants' satisfaction and written consent was obtained from the participants in this study.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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