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## The Relationships between Servant Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the present paper was to study the relationship between servant leadership style of managers and Physical education teachers' organizational commitment. The research was descriptive and correlational. The population of the research consisted of all physical education teachers of Bushehr province (n=429). 205 subjects were selected as sample, using Morgan sample size estimation formula. Sampling was conducted randomly using classification method. Questionnaires were used as a tool for the purpose of data collection. Library and field methods were also used for data collection. Reliability of questionnaires was determined using Cronbach's Alpha method and in order to measure the validity of research content validity was used. To analyze the collected data, descriptive and inferential statistics indicators (Pearson correlation coefficient, multiple regressions) were used. Obtained results showed that there is a significant relationship between all components of servant leadership and organizational commitment and components of servant leadership are able to predict organizational commitment.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Style, Servant, Commitment, Organization

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### INTRODUCTION

In the current era, education is an important part of social and individual activities, in such a way that as UNESCO reports: "one person out of five persons living in the world is either student or teacher in formal education system" [2].

Educational organizations of any society form the essence of self-sufficiency and autonomy of that society and among all effective roles in an educational organization, teachers as human resources play the most important role. Therefore, considering their needs by management could result in teachers' satisfaction and organizational commitment.

In the present situations, managers should be in search of creative and flexible methods, which are not restricted by predetermined methods. Post-modernism is an approach in organization and management to observe the current situation of organization, and to criticize and improve it. Post-modernist organizations emphasize features like dynamism, continuous improvement, team working, and creativity and in leadership they value service, teaching and learning. Leadership in Post-modernism is of servant type[28].

Drucker believes that future organizations emphasize equality, Justice and equity. Organizations in which boss and subordinate is not so important and staffs are given the same value as managers[13].

Organizations with developing strategies know that development be started with human resources, since humans are the principle capital of organizations. Meanwhile, successful organizations are those whose managers mobilize such valuable capitals and flourish their eligibility and commitment[7]. No organization could ever succeed unless members and staffs have some sort of commitment to it and move toward achieving its goals[8]. There are several reasons highlighting the importance of organizational commitment: Firstly, organizational commitment is a basic and important concept which is totally different from dependence and job satisfaction. Secondly, as researches have shown, there is a positive relationship between organizational commitment and consequences such as job satisfaction, presence, extra-social organizational behavior and job performance and there is a negative relationship between organizational behavior and leaving job[30].

Servant leadership theory as an effective ethical style in leadership and management is very important among leadership styles and we can regard it as one of the ideal styles in attending human resources. This theory was first proposed by Greenleaf (1904-1990). Individuals are considered as servants of leadership in traditional structures, while in Reverted Pyramid model leaders are servants of followers. Servant leadership can be regarded as a view of a long history, which has been gradually revived, and it has been ultimately brought up as an ideal and transformational approach in order to respond to growing needs of developing human resources in business environment[18].

Servant leadership is perception and action in such a way that leader prefer others' benefits to his own[24]. The primary motivation for servant leadership is tendency to serve others in order to achieve group goals.

Greenleaf defines leadership as firstly, it begins with natural felling service in person, and then informed choice encourages the person to leadership. The difference lies within care manifested by servant. The servant at first stage tries to make sure that essential needs of employees are met. The best test for servant leadership is to analyze whether served peoples grow as human, or whether they are healthier, wiser, free, and more independent and are more likely to become a servant after being served[11]. Servant leaders prioritize others' needs over their own. Graham (1991) describes future leaders as knowledgeable, pragmatic and inspiring leaders. Ideal leadership is based on serving followers and respecting their authority. Such leaders constantly show a strong tendency to train employees and progress the organization in order to achieve the maximum capacity of staffs[15].

Moreover Spears (1998) introduces 10 characteristics for servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, anticipating the future, service and supervision, commitment to individual growth and group making[22]. Patterson (2003) proposes a functional theory concerning servant leadership and Patterson and Russel believe that transformational leadership, which refers to leader's focus on organization, is not sufficient for explaining altruistic behaviors, while, servant leadership focuses on followers and highlights such behaviors. According to Patterson servant leadership structures include: divine love, humility and modesty, altruism, reliability, perspective, service and empowerment[16].

Efficiency and development of any organization depend largely to correct application of human recourse. As organizations get bigger, naturally the problems of human resources increase. Managers constantly attempt to control the employees regarding different issues. Managers think that when a person is employed in an organization, they should accept all conditions of the organization. Organizational commitment is one of the most important motivational issues, which has developed greatly in industrial and organizational psychological studies.

Organizational commitment like other organizational behaviors has been defined in various ways. The most common approach is to consider organizational commitment as a kind of emotional attachment to the organization. According to this approach, an individual who is strongly committed takes his identity from the organization, participate in it, and while being incorporated into the organization, enjoys being a member of it[6].

Porter defines organizational commitment as the acceptance organizations' values and involvement in it and considers measurement criteria as including motivation; desire to continue working and accepting organization's values[20]. Ranjbaran also defines organizational commitment as negative or positive attitudes of individuals

towards the whole organization. In organizational commitment, individuals have a strong feeling of loyalty towards organization, and identify themselves through that organization[8].

Allen & Meyer (1993) define organizational commitment as kind of psychological state, indicating desire, need and necessity of continuing service in an organization[14]. They introduce a three-component concept of commitment. These components are as follow:

**Affective commitment:** (desire to stay): affective commitment means internal and emotional attachment to organization. The person stays in organization because they have a positive attitude toward organizational goals and values. Such a commitment is caused due to emotional attachment and the individual is willing to continue their work in the organization[32].

**Continuous commitment:** the person continues working in the organization because he needs the received salary from the organization. Based on cost-benefit analysis, the person concludes that he needs to stay in organization[4].

**Normative commitment:** this kind of commitment originates from the values of employed person in an organization. That is, the committed person is indebted to organization[14].

No organization could ever achieve its goals without having committed human resources. Leadership styles is important in achieving objectives and organizational commitment [27, 35] and low education of most of managers can effect on weakness of leadership on any organization[31]

Servant leadership with influencing commitment is one of the factors affecting efficiency and effectiveness of organization[1]. The present paper aims to identify the relationship between servant leadership and components of organizational commitment and it is hoped that it influence managers' service to this important part of education and training organization.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive correlational method has been used in the present paper regarding the purpose of the research. The population of the study includes 429 persons, including all official and contract employed physical education teachers of Bushehr province. 205 persons were finally chosen using Morgan determining sample size table.

To measure servant leadership variables, Gholipour and Hazrati questionnaire (1388) with 28 questions based on four factors of servant leadership model including service, humility and modesty, reliability and kindness was used. The validity of questionnaire is 0/90 and Likert response scale was identified with five choices from totally agree to totally disagree. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated 0.82 according to Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

To measure organizational commitment, three-component questionnaire of Allen & Meyer (1993) was used, which includes 24 questions and 3 sub-scales of commitment as continuous commitment, normative commitment and affective commitment. The validity of questionnaire is 0.76 and Likert response scale is identifies with five choices from totally agree to totally disagree. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated 0.79 according to Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

In the present study, data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) and referential statistics (Pearson correlational test and multivariate regression analysis) was used to test the hypotheses. Statistical software used in this study was SPSS18.

## RESULTS

Demographic information related to participants in the study is as following: 136 persons (66%) from the whole population (205 persons) were men and the remaining 69 persons (34%) were women. According to level of education in participants in the study, 61 persons (30%) had associate degree, 123 persons (60%) had BA and 21 persons (10%) had MA degree. The participants had the age range of 22 to 58 years old with background experience of 3 to 30 years.

Obtained results regarding value distribution of servant leadership style showed that, 141 teachers (69) considered their managers successful in terms of servant leadership style and 64 teachers (31 %) evaluated their manager’s performance as average in terms of servant leadership style. Moreover, regarding the level of organizational commitment, 128 persons (62%) had high level of commitment and 78 persons (38%) had average level of commitment to the organization.

There was also a positive and significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between servant leadership style and its components and organizational commitment of physical education teachers. Obtained results of table 2 show correlation coefficients.

**Table 1: The results of hypothesis test for variables**

Index	Servant Leadership	Service	Humility	Trust	Kindness
Pearson Correlation Coefficient	0.75	0.63	0.30	0.78	0.75
Level of Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

The table shows that servant leadership style is very effective in elevating the level of teachers’ organizational commitment.

Table 2 presents the main elements in analysis of servant leadership style for predicting organizational commitment. In this section, components of servant leadership style as an independent variable and organizational commitment as a dependent variable are considered using stepwise regression.

**Table 2. Main elements in analysis of servant leadership style for predicting organizational commitment**

Dependant variable	Step	Components	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Standard deviation	P-value	F
Organizational commitment	1	Trust	0.785	0.62	4.42	0.000	326.90
	2	Trust +Kindness	0.798	0.64	4.32	0.000	176.50
	3	Trust+ Kindness+ Humility	0.805	0.65	4.26	0.000	123.66

As shown in the table, among components of servant leadership style, trust, kindness and humility play the most important role in determining organizational commitment. Added values to R<sup>2</sup> in second and third steps are 0.019 and 0.013 respectively and according to F test these value are significant. The value of coefficient determination, if R<sup>2</sup> is equal to 0.65 which indicates that these three components explain 65% of changes in organizational commitment. Table 3 shows the elements of variables within the study for predicting organizational commitment.

**Table 3. Regression coefficients of variables for predicting organizational commitment**

Independent variable	Step	Predictor variables	Non-standard coefficients		Beta	t value	Level of significance
			B	Standard error			
Organizational commitment	One		1.29	0.071	0.78	18.08	0.000
	Two	Trust	0.88	0.14	0.54	6.20	0.000
		Kindness	0.66	0.20	0.28	3.26	0.000
	Three	Trust	0.85	0.14	0.52	6.08	0.000
		Kindness	0.86	0.21	0.37	4.04	0.000
		Humility	0.29	0.108	0.13	2.68	0.000

Based on reported beta standard coefficients in table 3, all three steps are significant and three components of trust, kindness and humility can predict organizational commitment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Servant leadership as a new style of leadership in organizations can promote performance of the members of organization through training attitudes and working behaviors of employees. Servant leadership gives priority to the needs of followers and promotes team working and self-esteem in the organizations[25]. Servant leadership avoids usual hierarchical methods and attempts to improve individual growth and increase team working in the organization through cooperation, empathy and ethical use of power[33].

The obtained results of the present study suggest that there is a significant and positive relationship between servant leadership style of managers and organizational commitment of physical education teachers. Several studies have been conducted based on the hypothesis that servant leadership can affect job attitude and behaviors of individuals at the organizational level. The obtained results of the present study highlighting the significant and positive relationship between servant leadership style and organizational commitment are consistent to the findings of similar studies[25,9,3,34,17,12,19,29,21]. On the other hand, some studies have reported a reverse relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment of employees[23,26]. Drury believed that employees in organizations with servant leadership are likely to be more committed to their jobs, not to their organization. He interpreted that servant leaders provide an environment for subordinates that makes them more self-efficient and independent. Therefore, in this case, subordinates are more likely to leave the organization and join another organization with higher chance of career progression[25]. Theoretical considerations of a servant leader as service, trusting subordinates' ability, strong interpersonal relationships, kindness, humility and listening to subordinates' ideas. Findings of some studies have shown that specifications of servant leadership increase commitment to organizational goals and job motivations of employees[5,10]. Therefore, the results of such studies as the present paper show that behaviors of servant leadership, affect employees' commitment to their organization positively.

Managing Educational system is very important. Considering skill and capabilities of manager could affect the success of educational system considerably. Achieving such capabilities is not possible just through attaining knowledge and professional information, but it also requires a comprehensive development of managers in aspects of skill, personality and change in attitude and behaviors. Regarding the importance of application of servant leadership in organizations, those managers with servant leadership style could be successful in managing the organization. Such a purpose is achievable through teaching the most effective methods to managers.

Regarding obtained results about the relationship between managers' servant leadership style of managers and teachers' organizational commitment; it is suggested that managers use more components of servant leadership style in their managing system.

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