



The Impacts of Servant Leadership on Employees' Job Satisfaction in the Construction Companies

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Abstract. Construction companies generally have the phenomenon such as long-term dispersion of construction sites, heavy workloads and long construction periods, which may increase the turnover of their employees and not conducive to the long-term stable development of the construction companies. Therefore, improving the job satisfaction of their employees is an important way to retain its human resources, which is also conducive to improving the market competitiveness of construction companies. In addition, due to the leaders play a critical role in the process of employee's personal growth, enhance the employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Thus, this study probes deep into the correlations of four variables which include that servant leadership, organization-based self-esteem, power distance, and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, with organization-based self-esteem as the mediating variable and power distance as the moderating variable, we explored whether servant leadership would affect job satisfaction through the mediator of organization-based self-esteem and the moderator of power distance. The research result of this study will provide some valuable information to the managers of construction companies for how to improve the job satisfaction of their employees.

Keywords: Construction companies · Servant leadership · Organization-based self-esteem · Power distance · Job satisfaction

1 Introduction

As globalization gains momentum and competition in the global market grows, the standard for organizational development rises. Organizational development is an important channel to shift the organizational management cost control to reach organizational goals. In this study, we focus on servant leadership, a new management mode, and explores its impact on the employees' job satisfaction theoretically and empirically. We also analyze the mediating role that organization-based self-esteem and its sub-dimensions, and the moderating role that the employee's power distance plays in the correlation between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem.

As the leadership theories evolve, different leadership styles including transactional leadership, transformational leadership, paternalistic leadership, and servant leadership

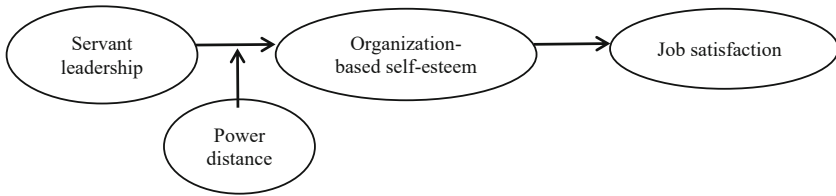


Fig. 1. Hypothesized Model

come into being. The concept of “servant leadership” was first proposed in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf, who defined servant leadership as a leadership style that prioritizes employees, customers and the organization and puts the needs of others, the organization and the society before his/her own. Servant leaders can fully exploit the employees’ potential in self-management, performance completion and skill training (Greenleaf, 1970) [1]. Greenleaf points out that a leader should first be a servant, and the kernel of servant leadership is serving instead of managing others. Servant leaders will train, guide and care about the employees to help them improve themselves (Russell & Stone 2002) [2].

With organization-based self-esteem as the mediating variable, this study aims to analyze the impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction to come up with strategies to improve job satisfaction, provide practical suggestions for human resource management, help employees improve work efficiency, achieve higher performance and get promotions.

This study intends to verify the impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction through empirical research, and explore the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem and the moderating role of employee power distance, and thereby provide a theoretical basis for organizational management to improve job satisfaction, increase team cohesion, motivate employees and human resource management policy-making. Different leadership styles will lead employees to different work performance, and the servant leadership often creates a more harmonious work environment and increases work efficiency. Thus, we built a theoretical model for this study (Fig. 1).

2 Research Hypotheses

2.1 Positive Correlation Between Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Servant leadership is a new leadership mode that focus on the employee needs and aims to improve the leader’s followers. When employees feel valued by the manager, their job satisfaction increases (Trott & Windsor, 1999) [3]. An open-minded manager plays a significant role in improving the employees’ job satisfaction, while a narrow-minded one works the other way. Trot (1999) points out that a leader should first be a servant who serves the employees, tries to meet their physical and psychological needs, help them to grow. Barbuto, Wheeler and Washington (2006) [4] hold that servant leaders are more likely to take employees as the focus to increase their job satisfaction. Wu and Yao (2008) [5] find the positive correlation between servant leadership and the employees’ job satisfaction. Thus, we propose Hypothesis 1:

H1: servant leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction.

2.2 Positive Correlation Between Servant Leadership and Organization-Based Self-esteem

Servant leadership is positively associated with organization-based self-esteem because servant leaders are servants in the first place (Russell, 2002) [2]. Servant leaders aim to improve the employees' self-esteem, make them believe their abilities, their importance to the organization and their value, thereby promoting development of both the organization and the individual employees. Pierce (1989) [6] points out that the respect that managers give to employees is an important part of organization-based self-esteem and touches on the complexity of organizational structure and work. How the organizational leaders treat the employees affect the employees' organization-based self-esteem. If the leader can guide the employees in the right way and make them feel valued in the organization, the employees' organization-based self-esteem improves.

Relevant research in China also abounds. Yan and Huang (2012) [7] point out that organization-based self-esteem reflects the employee's perception and judgement of their position and value in an organization. The servant behaviors of leaders will increase their perception of value and motivate them to work harder. Tharenou (1979) [8] points out that servant leaders will provide freedom and flexible authority to workers, increase the diversity of work and improve the workers' organization-based self-esteem. The quality of servant leader-employee relationship is positively correlated to the employee's organization-based self-esteem (Aryee, Budhwar & Tan, 2003) [9]. Therefore, an organization with servant leaders will provide high-level maintenance of the employee's self-esteem, make them feel being recognized and valued. Thus, we propose Hypothesis 2:

H2: Servant leadership is positively associated with organization-based self-esteem.

2.3 Positive Correlation Between Organization-Based Self-esteem and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction manifests an employee's emotional perception of the work. The two-factor theory proposed by Herzberg states that the responsibility, satisfaction and sense of achievement that an employee feels in an organization all contribute to job satisfaction. Pierce (1989) [6] argues that employees with high organization-based self-esteem will feel valued by the organization and contributory to the organization, and as a result, they feel more motivated and make more contribution at work, leading to high job satisfaction. Pierce (1993) [10] finds that employees with high organization-based self-esteem has higher job satisfaction than their peers who have low organization-based self-esteem. Rank, Nelson, Allen and Xu (2009) [11] find that employees with low organization-based self-esteem will doubt their own value to the organization and thus have low job satisfaction. Moreover, Lee (2003) [12] find that the impacts of job safety and difficulty on job satisfaction will also affect the employees' organization-based self-esteem. In this logic, it can be assumed that employees with higher organization-based self-esteem work harder and have stronger adaptability; while those with lower self-esteem will feel less

satisfied with the leaders' management, showing lower job satisfaction. Employees with higher self-esteem often show higher job satisfaction. Therefore, we propose Hypothesis 3:

H3: Organization-based self-esteem has significantly positive correlation with job satisfaction.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Organization-Based Self-esteem in the Correlation Between Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Organization-based self-esteem can mediate the employee-leader correlation to improve work efficiency and achieve win-win. The leader's management style affects the employees' moods and attitude at work, thereby affecting their job satisfaction and further the organization. Organization-based self-esteem is a mediating variable between servant leadership and job satisfaction, reflecting the internal and latent impacts of the employee's psychology on job satisfaction. Cho and Dansereau (2010) [13] point out that the management style affects the employees' psychology and moods in a latent manner, which works indirectly to the employee's organization-based self-esteem. Therefore, management styles are an important factor for organization-based self-esteem. High job satisfaction relies largely on the "latent" organization-based self-esteem in the employees. That is, servant leadership can improve job satisfaction through organization-based self-esteem.

Besides, a servant leader needs to set an example for the employees, and create a mutually-serving and mutually-recognizing work environment in the organization to improve the employee's self-esteem. In this way, employees will feel a sense of mission and will engage more in communication with the leaders to achieve higher job satisfaction and opportunities for development. That is, organization-based self-esteem plays a mediating role between servant leadership and job satisfaction. In this context, there will be a closer connection between the employees and the leaders, which contribute to a higher job satisfaction. Therefore, we propose Hypothesis 4:

H4: Organization-based self-esteem plays a mediating role in the correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction.

2.5 The Moderating Role of Power Distance in the Correlation Between Servant Leadership and Organization-Based Self-esteem

Power distance is an important dimension of corporate culture and values, and affects the employees' pursuit of recognition and value in combination with work experience and personal experience. Kirkman (2009) [14] points out that the power distance will affect the employees' perception of their position in the organization, and affects the shaping of their values, emotions and behaviors. Greenleaf (1970) [1] argues that servant leaders encourage equality and their respect to employees will make the employees with high power distance to reciprocate to the organization. Hofstede (1993) [15] finds that in a management system of a strong power distance, the employees in the servant leader-employee relationship recognize the impacts that the leaders have, are more likely to

receive the values the leaders convey, and understand these values. Lee and Peccei (2007) [16] points out that in a high power-distance environment, the servant leaders will have stronger impacts on organization-based self-esteem, and the power distance plays a moderating role between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem.

Hale and Fields (2007) [17] argue that in the traditional Chinese society, the power distance affects the employee-manager connection. Workers in China, limited by the central governance tradition tend to consider high-power leaders as authoritative while those in lower position as less important. The leader-employee inequality in a high power distance environment makes the employees more likely to accept the values conveyed by the leaders and understand the values. Servant leaders care more about the employees, emphasize respect, equality, cooperation and win-win. That is, in high power distance under servant leadership, the employees are more attached to the leaders, consider the leaders as authoritative, which helps maximize the benefits of servant leadership. Therefore, we propose Hypothesis 5.

H5: power distance plays a moderating role in the correlations between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem. That is, when the power distance is high, the servant leadership plays a stronger role in improving organization-based self-esteem.

3 Research Method

3.1 Research Design

Variables involved in the study include servant leadership, organization-based self-esteem, job satisfaction and power distance. The convenient sampling method is employed, and questionnaires are distributed in the construction companies in Mainland of China which include that Macau, Zhuhai, Nanjing, Zhengzhou. The questionnaires are answered in anonymity, and the correspondents are informed that the questionnaires are for research purposes. There is no right or wrong in the answers, and social desirability is avoided. The collected questionnaires are assessed as to whether all the questions are answered, whether all answers are the same, and how long it takes for the correspondents to complete to ensure validity of the collected questionnaires. In the study, we have distributed 395 questionnaires, among which 76 were invalid and 319 were valid, with a response rate of 80.76%.

3.2 Research Tools

The Likert 5-point scale was used in design of the questionnaire: 1 point for “strongly disagree”, 2 for “disagree”, 3 for “not sure”, 4 for “agree” and 5 for “strongly agree”.

3.2.1 Servant Leadership

Design of the scale for servant leadership refers to the scale proposed by Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008), which consists of 7 dimensions and 27 items, such as “my superior cares about my personal interests”.

3.2.2 Organization-Based Self-esteem

Design of the scale for measurement of organization-based self-esteem refers to the scale developed by Pierce (1989), consisting of 10 items, such as “my colleagues have confidence in me”.

3.2.3 Power Distance

Measurement of power distance uses the scale developed by Earley and Erez (1997), consisting of 8 items, such as “members in our department/team believe that the leaders can make right decisions without seeking advice from the employees”.

3.2.4 Job Satisfaction

Measurement of job satisfaction uses the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Fieds, 2004) [18], consisting of 16 items, such as “I feel happy when at work”.

4 Results

This section presents the statistical analysis of the questionnaire survey, involving four parts. Part 1 is descriptive analysis that focuses on the basic features of the samples; Part 2 is reliability analysis that tests the validity and reliability of the questionnaire; Part 3 is correlation analysis that tests the correlations between variables; Part 4 is the regression analysis that tests the causality between variables.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Gender

Most subjects in the questionnaire survey are female. 148 are male, taking up 46.4% of the total samples, and 171 are female, taking up 53.6%.

4.1.2 Age

The subjects are divided into four age groups: 100 are aged 18–24, taking up 31.1% of the total; 148 are aged 25–34, taking up 46.4%; 49 are aged 35–44, taking up 15.3%, 22 are aged 45–54, taking up 6.8%.

4.1.3 Length of Service

Among the subjects, 233 have worked less than 5 years (73.1%), 43 have worked 6–10 years (13.3%), 28 have worked 11–20 years (8.7%), 13 have worked 21–30 years (3.9%), and 2 have worked 30–40 years (0.6%).

4.1.4 Education

As for the educational level, 19 of the subjects have received vocational education (6%); 60 have received junior college education (18.8%), 195 have received bachelor's degrees (61.1%); 45 have received master's degrees (14.1%). Table 1 shows the specific analysis results.

Table 1. The Specific Analysis Results

Research variables	Number of terms	Alpha
Servant leadership	27	0.94
Organization-based self-esteem	10	0.84
Power distance	12	0.85
Job satisfaction	8	0.89

4.2 Credibility Analysis

Credibility can be measured by four methods: test-retest reliability, parallel-forms reliability, split-half reliability, and Tau-equivalent reliability (Cronbach α). The last one is employed in our study. The concept of Cronbach α was first proposed by L. J. Cronbach (1951) as a method to test the internal consistency of questionnaires.

There is no standard as for the minimum acceptable value for Cronbach α . In general, if Cronbach α is higher than 0.60, it is believed that the test or the scale has high internal consistency and high reliability.

In our experiments, the Cronbach α for the servant leadership scale is 0.937, that for organization-based self-esteem is 0.843, that for job satisfaction is 0.85, and that for power distance is 0.886. All these figures are above 0.6, and the overall Cronbach α reaches 0.939, far larger than 0.6, which indicates the high internal consistency and reliability of the data of our survey. Table 1 presents the values of Cronbach α for each variable in our study.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

To investigate the correlations between the four variables, we employed the Pearson production-moment correlation coefficient to measure the correlation and significance of correlations between variables. Table 2 shows the analysis result.

As Table 2 shows, the correlation coefficient between servant leadership and job satisfaction is 0.622**, which indicates the positive correlation between these two variables. The correlation coefficient between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem is 0.472**, indicating positive correlations between the two. The coefficient between organization-based self-esteem and job satisfaction is 0.515**, which reveals the positive correlation between the two.

4.4 Regression Analysis

4.4.1 Regression Analysis of the Mediating Role of Organization-Based Self-esteem

Regression analysis is performed on the variables to test whether the model holds or not. The correlation analysis results reveal that the variables in our study have significant correlations. Here, the SPSS is employed to perform hierarchical regression analysis.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 gender	1.54	0.50	-							
2 age	29.40	70.30	-0.149**	-						
3 Tenure	5.23	60.58	-0.140*	0.832**	-					
4 Education	2.83	0.74	0.140*	-0.338**	-0.341**	-				
5 Servant leadership	3.51	0.56	-0.046	0.064	0.065	0.042	-			
6 Organization-based self-esteem	3.66	0.49	-0.161**	0.058	0.052	-0.019	0.472**	-		
7 Job satisfaction	3.78	0.50	-0.127*	0.115*	0.115*	-0.001	0.622**	0.515**	-	
8 Power distance	2.97	0.83	-0.152**	0.271**	0.246**	-0.094	0.147**	0.253**	0.067	-

* P < 0.05

** P < 0.01

*** P < 0.001

The mediator effect test method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) is employed to test the mediating variable in our study. Four steps are involved: First, the independent variable can significantly affect the mediator; second, the mediator can significantly affect the dependent variables; third, the independent variable can significantly affect the changes in the dependent variables; fourth, the independent and dependent variables are introduced into the regression equation, and regression analysis is performed on the dependent variables. If the significance coefficient of the independent variable is significant, we then turn to the β value: a decreased β value indicates partial mediation; if the significance coefficient of the independent variable is no longer significant, it indicates full mediation of the mediator.

Servant leadership; Organization-based self-esteem; Power distance; Job satisfaction.

As Table 3 shows, the correlation coefficient between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem is 0.466 ($p < 0.01$), which indicates significant positive correlations. The correlation coefficient between servant leadership and job satisfaction is 0.613 ($p < 0.01$), which indicates significant positive correlation. The correlation coefficient between organization-based self-esteem and job satisfaction is 0.504 ($p < 0.01$), indicating significant positive correlation. When organization-based self-esteem is controlled, the correlation coefficient between servant leadership and job satisfaction reaches 0.485 ($p < 0.01$), which is far smaller than the absolute value of 0.613 ($p < 0.01$) that is obtained before the mediator is controlled. Thus, we can conclude that organization-based self-esteem plays a mediator role in the correlation between servant leadership (the independent variable) and job satisfaction (the dependent variable), which verifies Hypothesis 4.

4.4.2 Regression Analysis of the Moderating Role of Power Distance

To facilitate interpretation of the regression equation, we performed centralized processing on all the variables. First, we perform regression analysis with organization-based self-esteem as the dependent variable and servant leadership as the independent variable; then, we perform the second and third regression analysis with servant leadership and power distance as the independent variable and with the multiplied product of servant leadership and power distance as the independent variable, respectively.

As Table 4 shows, in the regression analysis of the servant leadership, power distance, the multiplied product of servant leadership and power distance and organization-based self-esteem, the β value is 0.116, the p value is 0.022, which indicates significant influences.

As Fig. 2 shows, the slope of the curves for low power distance and high power distance changes, indicating that power distance moderates the relationship between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem. A high power distance can increase the impact of servant leadership on organization-based self-esteem.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Variable	Job satisfaction		Organization-based self-esteem		Job satisfaction		Job satisfaction	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Gender	-0.090*		-0.136**		-0.038		-0.053	
Age	0.036		0.015		0.044		0.031	
Tenure	0.036		-0.017		0.064		0.041	
Education	0.010		-0.021		0.051		0.016	
Servant leadership	0.613***	0.391***	0.466***	0.242***			0.485***	
Organization-based self-esteem					0.504***	0.265***	0.274***	0.447***

* P < 0.05

** P < 0.01

*** P < 0.001

Table 4. The Moderating Role Of Power Distance

Model	1	2	3
Variable	Organization-based self-esteem	Organization-based self-esteem	Organization-based self-esteem
Gender	-0.136**	-0.117*	-0.116*
Age	0.015	-0.021	-0.027
Tenure	-0.017	-0.028	-0.034
Education	-0.021	-0.021	-0.013
Servant Leadership	0.466***	0.444***	0.438***
Power Distance		0.180**	0.153**
Servant Leadership × Power Distance			0.116*
R ²	0.242***	0.271***	0.284***
ΔR ²	0.230***	0.257***	0.267***
F	20.016	19.368	17.580

* P < 0.05

** P < 0.01

*** P < 0.001

5 Conclusions

5.1 Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

The correlation coefficient between servant leadership and job satisfaction is 0.622 ($p < 0.01$), which indicates positive correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction. In regression analysis, the regression coefficient between the two is 0.622 ($p < 0.01$), which further verifies the positive correlation between the two. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is verified, and a higher degree of servant leadership leads to higher job satisfaction.

5.2 Servant Leadership and Organization-Based Self-esteem

The correlation coefficient between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem is 0.472 ($p < 0.01$), indicating positive correlation between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem. In regression analysis, the regression coefficient between the two is 0.472 ($p < 0.01$), which again proves the positive correlation between the two. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is verified, and a higher degree of servant leadership leads to higher organization-based self-esteem.

5.3 Organization-Based Self-esteem and Job Satisfaction

The correlation coefficient between organization-based self-esteem and job satisfaction is 0.515 ($p < 0.01$), which indicates positive correlations between the two. In regression

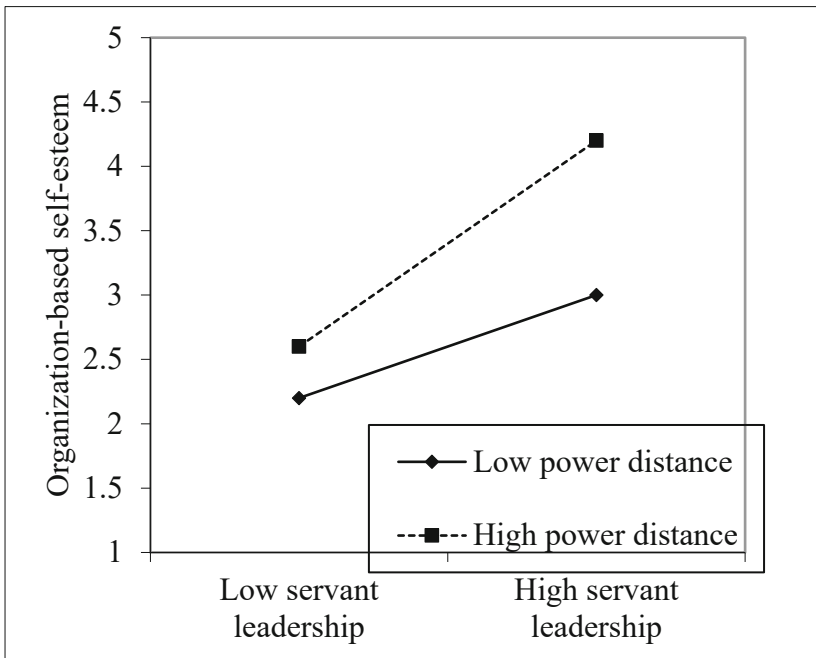


Fig. 2. The Moderating Role Of Power Distance

analysis, the regression coefficient between the two is 0.515 ($p < 0.01$), which further verifies the positive correlation between the two. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is verified and higher organization-based self-esteem leads to higher job satisfaction.

5.4 The Mediating Role of Organization-Based Self-esteem Between Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

The servant leadership is positively correlated to organization-based self-esteem and also positively correlated to job satisfaction. Regression of these three variables reveals that the regression coefficient between servant leadership and job satisfaction is 0.622 ($p < 0.01$), and that between organization-based self-esteem and job satisfaction is 0.515 ($p < 0.01$). The mediator effect test method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) is employed to test the mediating effect. First, the independent variable can significantly affect the mediator; second, the mediator can significantly affect the dependent variables; third, when the mediator is controlled, the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable is not zero, but is significantly lower than that achieved when the mediator is not controlled; in this case, it is judged that the mediating variable plays a partially mediating role. Thus, the hypothesis that organization-based self-esteem plays a mediating role between servant leadership and job satisfaction is verified. That is to say, servant leadership not only affects job satisfaction directly, but affects the latter through organization-based self-esteem.

5.5 The Moderating Role of Power Distance Between Servant Leadership and Organization-Based Self-esteem

Regression analysis of servant leadership, power distance and their multiplied product and organization-based self-esteem yields a β value of 0.116 ($p < 0.01$), which means that power distance is a moderator between servant leadership and organization-based self-esteem. Thus, Hypothesis 5 is verified. Servant leaders can help employees to accept the values, goals and visions of the organization through diverse dimensions. Under a high power distance mechanism, employees are more likely to accept the values conveyed from the management and show more respect. That is, in a high power distance environment, servant leadership has stronger impacts on organization-based self-esteem: the employees abide by the commands from the leader voluntarily, which shows the significant effect of power distance as the mediator on the organization-based self-esteem.

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