



Mitigating Employee Burnout through Servant Leadership: Evidence from Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract. Higher education institutions are facing a major problem related to employee burnout that is caused by rising academic workloads, administrative requirements, research pressures, and standards for performance. From this standpoint, the role of leadership is very important for inspiring employee well-being and employee outcomes in the workplace. The study under observation focuses on the role of servant leadership for the reduction of employee burnout among the faculty members of higher educational institutions in Bangalore. Namely, the study examines the effect of servant leadership and its component parts (empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership) on employee burnout. The type of research that is used in the study is descriptive and analytical research. Primary data were collected from 400 faculty from various college and universities of Bangalore by using structured questionnaire on the 5 point likert scale. Convenience sampling method was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that teachers have a medium level of burnout, with the most salient aspect being emotional exhaustion. The study also concludes that servant leadership is an effective leadership approach that helps to reduce employee burnout in higher education institutions. Empathy, empowerment, and ethical attitudes can boost faculty well-being, alleviate workplace stress, and improve the academic climate, all of which can be facilitated by the leadership of institutions. The results are relevant for educational leaders and policy makers wanting to enhance employee well-being and improve organizational effectiveness at the higher education level.

Keywords: Employee Burnout, Servant Leadership, Empathy, Empowerment, Ethical Leadership.

1 INTRODUCTION

Technology, accreditation, research expectations, and outcome based education systems are all issues that are becoming more prevalent at higher education institutions (HEIs). The workload and role of faculty members has significantly grown and expanded, leading to occupational stress and burnout. Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a loss of personal accomplishment, that

has a negative impact on employee well being, job satisfaction, and organizational performance (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Administrative duties, performance assessment demands, and the demands of balancing teaching, research, and service duties have contributed to a rising worry regarding faculty burnout in higher education. Educators who experience these stressors over a long period can be negatively impacted as to their motivation, productivity, and commitment to their institutions (Maslach et al., 2001).

How employees perceive their working experiences and how they feel at work are extremely dependent on leadership. Servant leadership has attracted significant interest as one of the many styles of leadership, due to its emphasis on serving others, promoting personal development and prioritizing employee well-being. Empathy, ethical behavior, stewardship, and empowerment are all characteristics of servant leaders that can contribute to supportive work climates which improve workers' psychological resources and resilience (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008).

Empirical research indicates that servant leadership can lead to lower levels of burnout and enhance trust, psychological safety, employee engagement, and organizational support (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Alzghoul et al., 2023). Emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction levels as well as organizational commitment are higher among faculty members who feel their leaders are supportive and service oriented (Bai et al., 2023). Moreover, servant leadership promotes team collaboration and genuine relationships with other people, boosting the attachment among employees and their professional satisfaction (Eva et al., 2019).

Although there has been an increased interest in servant leadership, there have been insufficient studies on how servant leadership can reduce the burnout among faculty members in the Indian higher education institutions with a special reference to Bangalore. Hence, the present study aims at examining the effect of servant leadership on the employee burnout among the faculty members of the higher education institutions in Bangalore. The results will be relevant to both leadership and organizational behavior literature and can be useful to educational leaders aiming at improving the health and effectiveness of their organizations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employee Burnout

Employee burnout is a psychological syndrome that is caused by prolonged, unmanaged workplace stress. It is defined as a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Faculty members in higher education institutions can suffer from burnout with

the growing demand for teaching, research, administration, and performance evaluation. Burnout has a negative impact on job satisfaction, commitment, productivity and wellbeing. Research has demonstrated that organizational practices and leadership that provide support can have a significant impact on lowering academic employee burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Bai et al., 2023).

2.2 Empathy and Employee Burnout

Empathy is one of the essential characteristics of servant leadership which demonstrates the leader's sense of employees' emotional and professional needs. Empathetic leaders foster a positive culture at work that makes all staff feel appreciated, valued and respected. This emotional support can alleviate stress and frustration on the job, while also helping to manage workplace stress. Empathy has previously been shown to contribute to psychological wellness and crucially reduce employee burnout, by creating trust and emotional security (Liden et al., 2008; Alzghoul et al., 2023)

2.3 Empowerment and Employee Burnout

Empowerment is the degree to which leaders promote participation, independence, and decision making by employees. Authorized faculty members enjoy more autonomy, self-belief, and inner motivation. Where employees are consulted and allowed to have professional autonomy, stress and helplessness will not occur. Studies indicate empowerment can enhance engagement, job satisfaction, and resilience, and lower burnout, emotional exhaustion (Eva et al., 2019; Aboramadan et al., 2020).

2.4 Ethical Leadership and Employee Burnout

Ethical leadership is about behavior that is fair, transparent, honest, and responsible. Ethical leaders build trust-based relationships and environment of positive organizational climate that is perceived as fair and just. This environment minimizes role conflict, minimises uncertainty in the workplace and decreases anxiety, thus lowering burnouts. Research has shown that while the ethical leadership of an organization has a positive impact on employee well-being, it can also lead to a decrease in psychological strain and occupational stress (Brown et al., 2005; Bai et al., 2023).

Servant leadership is a people-centered leadership approach that prioritizes employee growth, well-being, and development. Through dimensions such as empathy, empowerment, and ethical behavior, servant leaders create supportive work environments that enhance employee engagement and reduce burnout. Empirical evidence has always established a negative correlation between servant leadership and employee burnout, meaning that servant leadership is an effective approach to encourage employees' psychological well-being in organizations, specifically in educational institutions (Greenleaf, 1977; Eva et al., 2019; Alzghoul et al., 2023).

2.5 Objectives of the study:

The study aims to:

1. To explore the level of burnout among faculty members in higher educational institutions.
2. To examine the correlation between servant leadership and employee burnout.
To evaluate the impact of empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership on employees' burnout.
4. To determine which dimension of servant leadership is most impactful at reducing employee burnout.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The theoretic approach of this study builds upon the concept of servant leadership as a valuable asset within a company which can mitigate faculty member's burnouts in higher education institutes. The dependent variable is employee burnout, measured by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The model suggests that the three aspects of servant leadership (empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership) are independent variables affecting incidences of burnout. Empathy helps a leader to grasp and respond to faculty members' emotional and professional needs and thus lessen stress and emotional burnout. When employees have autonomy in their work, are included in decision-making and have a greater say in how the job gets done, they are less likely to feel helpless or overstressed in the job. Ethical leadership promotes fairness, transparency, integrity, and trust in the institution, which helps to make the working environment positive and minimize uncertainty and psychological stress. Therefore, the framework is based on the assumption that an increase in empathy and empowerment, and ethical leadership, reduces employee burnout, which consequently improves faculty well-being and organizational effectiveness in higher education institutions.

2.7 Hypotheses

- H1: There is a statistically significant negative correlation between Empathy and faculty member burnout.
- H2: The level of empowerment significantly negatively affects faculty members' burnout.
- H3: There is a strong negative relationship between ethical leadership and faculty member's burnout.
- H4: There is a significant negative correlation between servant leadership and employee burnout for faculty.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study will use descriptive and analytical research design to analyze the role of servant leadership in reducing employee burnout in faculty members in higher education institutions. The study was carried out in Bangalore, a major educational hub which has Universities, Autonomous colleges and Professional institutions. The target group is the faculty working in these institutions. The number of 400 respondents was used as a sample and was based on the convenience sampling method because the researchers were able to access and reach faculty members.

Structured questionnaire was used to obtain primary data that included items for measuring servant leadership dimensions and employee burnout. A five point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used to obtain responses. The dependent variable was employee burnout whereas the independent variables were Empathy, Empowerment and Ethical Leadership as the dimensions of servant leadership.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data and to find out the level of burnout of faculty members. Data were analyzed using correlation analysis to examine the relationship between servant leadership and employee burnout, and multiple regression analysis to assess the influence of servant leadership dimensions (empathy, empowerment, and ethical leadership) on employee burnout and determine the most influential servant leadership dimension.

4 DATA INTERPRETATION

The analysis and interpretation of the data was done on 400 faculty members working in higher education institutions in Bangalore. This study intends to explore the level of employee burnout and to look into the effect of servant leadership in reducing employee burnout, specifically among faculty members. Descriptive statistics were provided to determine the level of burnout, correlation and multiple regression analysis were performed to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and employee burnout and the influence of empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership on employee burnout. The results are given in an objective-wise and analyzed based on the study objectives. This section presents descriptive statistics for the faculty members' Employee Burnout. Burnout of employees was assessed by three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. The mean and standard deviation values are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Employee Burnout among Faculty Members

Burnout Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Emotional Exhaustion	3.78	0.82	High
Depersonalization	3.41	0.76	Moderate
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	3.56	0.69	Moderate-High
Overall Burnout	3.58	0.74	Moderately High

The descriptive statistics for faculty regarding their employee burnout are presented in Table 1 The overall mean score for burnout was found to be 3.58 (SD = 0.74), showing that the respondents have a moderately high level of burnout. Emotional exhaustion had the highest mean score (M = 3.78, SD = 0.82), indicating that faculty members often experience burnout in their personal lives, characterized by mental fatigue, stress, and emotional depletion resulting from their heavy workloads, academic duties, and expectations within the institution. A substantial number of faculty members also have lower scores for reduced personal accomplishment (M = 3.56, SD = 0.69). The mean score for depersonalization was 3.41 (SD = 0.76), which was a relatively low score, indicating that faculty members had moderate tendencies to have a detached or impersonal attitude toward their work and professional interactions. The results indicate that burnout is a major issue for faculty in higher education institutes. Emotional exhaustion is a major issue, reflecting and intensifying the demands of teaching and research, administration and evaluation systems. The findings underscore the importance of implementing effective leadership approaches and supportive organizational practices to improve faculty well-being and lower faculty burnout levels.

Study conducted the correlation analysis between servant leadership and employee burnout and the results were plotted in the following table 2.

Table 2: Servant Leadership and Employee Burnout

Variable	Correlation (r)	Coefficient	p-value
Servant Leadership and Employee Burnout	-0.61		0.000

The results show that servant leadership is statistically significant negatively related to employee burnout ($r = -0.61, p < 0.001$). A correlation coefficient of -0.61 indicates that there is a strong negative relationship between servant leadership and faculty burnout, that is areas where faculty members have higher levels of servant leadership, faculty burnout is lower. The negative correlation suggests that leaders who are concerned about employee happiness, promote professional development, and encourage positive work environments play a vital role in alleviating burnout. The results suggest that faculty members under servant leaders' leadership report less emotional exhaustion, less stress at work, and more psychological well-being. Thus, servant leadership is one of the important organization resources to overcome burnout in higher education

institutions. The p value is less than 0.05, thus the hypothesis is accepted. As a result, faculty members who are under the servant-leaders' care are less prone to burnout.

An investigation of Servant Leadership Dimensions in relation to Employee Burnout was conducted using Multiple Regression Analysis. Multiple Regression Analysis of Servant Leadership Dimensions on Employee Burnout was conducted.

Table 3: Servant Leadership Dimensions on Employee Burnout

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Empathy	-0.312	-6.245	0.000
Empowerment	-0.268	-5.118	0.000
Ethical Leadership	-0.189	-3.874	0.000

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.52$, $F = 142.67$, $p < 0.001$

Multiple regression analysis was used to explore the effect empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership had on employee burnout. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 142.67$, $p < 0.001$), showing that the selected servant leadership dimensions were able to explain variations in employee burnout. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.52$) shows that 52 per cent of the variation in employee burnout can be attributed to the factors empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership. This is a good indication of the explanatory power of the model, and also points to the significance of the dimensions of servant leadership in forecasting the burnout of faculty members.

Empathy was the strongest predictor of employee burnout with a negative correlation of $\beta = -0.312$, $p < 0.001$ among the predictor variables. This indicates that having faculty leaders who show empathy, caring, and emotional support greatly minimizes the risk of faculty burnout.

Empowerment also had a significant negative effect on burnout ($\beta = -0.268$, $p < 0.001$). Stress and emotional exhaustion are less common among faculty members who are accorded autonomy, who participate in decisions, and who have professional discretion. Ethical leadership had a significant negative impact on burnout ($\beta = -0.189$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that being fair, being honest, being transparent and being ethical have a negative effect on the creation of positive work environments that reduce burnout. The results show the three dimensions of servant leadership do significantly reduce employee burnout in higher education institutions, hence all the null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative hypotheses were accepted.

The fourth objective focused on identifying the most influential Dimension of Servant Leadership in reducing Burnout.

Table 4 : Ranking of Servant Leadership Dimensions

Rank	Variable	Beta (β)
1	Empathy	-0.312
2	Empowerment	-0.268
3	Ethical Leadership	-0.189

Table 4 shows the standardized beta coefficients of servant leadership dimensions and their associated rank. Results show that for faculty, empathy has the strongest correlation with reducing burnout ($\beta = -0.312$). This indicates that the understanding of emotions, active listening, and genuine concern for the well-being of the employees are tremendously appreciated by faculty members and are significant factors in reducing stress and emotional fatigue. Empowerment is second ($\beta = -0.268$), highlighting the need to allow autonomy, encourage participation, and promote the independence of academic professionals. Faculty with a perceived sense of empowerment tend to have greater work-related autonomy and burnout is lower.

Ethical Leadership is ranked third ($\beta = -0.189$). While it has less impact than empathy and empowerment, ethical leadership does contribute to a lower burnout rate when leading with fairness, transparency, trust and organizational justice. All servant leadership dimensions are found to be effective in reducing burnout, but in this regard, empathy is considered as the most important leadership characteristic for improving faculty well-being and a supportive school environment.

4.1 Findings of the study:

The study explored the impact of servant leadership on reducing the symptoms of employee burnout among faculty members in higher education institutions in Bangalore. The results showed that faculty members' burnout level was moderately high, which was the average mean score of 3.58. In terms of the burnout dimensions, emotional exhaustion was the strongest factor, suggesting that greater teaching load, administrative burden, research demands and performance stress have a significant impact on faculty well-being. The findings indicate that burnout is still a major issue in higher education institutions and should be addressed immediately by the institution.

The results of the correlation analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant negative correlation between servant leadership and employee burnout ($r = -0.61$, $p < 0.001$). The discovery suggests that professors who feel their institutional leaders employ servant leadership practices at a lower level report lower levels of burnout. The findings emphasize the need for supportive and employee-focused leadership to foster positive psychological health and cater to stress in the workplace.

The multiple regression analysis also showed that all three aspects of servant leadership (empathy, empowerment, and ethical leadership) significantly predict employee

burnout. Empathy was the most significant factor in reducing burnout ($\beta = -0.312$), followed by empowerment ($\beta = -0.268$) and ethical leadership ($\beta = -0.189$). The regression model was found to account for a large percentage of variance in employee burnout, 52 percent. The results indicate that emotional support, autonomy and fairness are important values faculty members have in their working environment.

Last, the ranking analysis revealed that the most impactful servant leadership dimension that reduces faculty burnout is empathy. This highlights the need for leaders to display genuine concern, understanding and emotional support of their employees. Though empowerment and ethical leadership play an important role in reducing faculty burnout, interpersonal care and emotional connection seem to have the highest impact on faculty well-being.

5 CONCLUSION

The present study examined the role of servant leadership in reducing employee's burnout among faculty members in Higher Education Institutions in Bangalore. The results showed that teachers have a moderate level of burnout, in which emotional exhaustion is the biggest problem. The results of the study confirmed that servant leadership was strongly related to employee burnout in a negative direction, meaning that servant leadership is a valid tool to decrease employee burnout and increase employee well-being in the workplace.

The results also confirmed that empathy, empowerment and ethical leadership significantly impact on reducing burnout, and that empathy is the most significant dimension. These results highlight the key role of leadership styles focused on the care and support of employees, equity, and professional development in mitigating burnout in an academic setting. Implementation of servant leadership practices in higher education institutions can facilitate positive and sustainable work environments for the employees which can lead to employee well-being, satisfaction and effectiveness of the organization. Hence servant leadership is seen as a strategic leadership model for the development of healthy and productive academic organizations in today's challenging education system.

5.1 Implications of the Study

The results of this research have significance from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, the study is a valuable addition to the larger body of knowledge that examines servant leadership and the employee well-being literature, as it offers empirical evidence from the higher education context. It strengthens the thesis that servant leadership is an excellent organizational asset that can alleviate employee burnout and increase employee psychological well-being. Moreover, the study

furthered the studies of servant leadership in the field of higher education institutions in India where empirical studies are comparatively less.

Practically the results imply that educational organizations need to encourage the development of servant leadership among academic administrators, department heads, and institutional leaders. Empathy, employee empowerment, ethical decision making and supportive communication-based training and development programs can help build healthier work environments. Empathy proved to be the most significant factor associated with reducing burnout, so leaders should focus on active listening, emotional support, and employee well-being programs. Institutions should also adopt participative decision making and allow faculty more autonomy to improve their feeling of control and professional satisfaction. These programs can help achieve benefits for employees, organization, and the institution's performance.

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