The integration review of the servant leadership.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to integrate servant leadership from western to eastern concept, which can provide more comprehensive support in servant leadership research. In this article, it begins from the origin of servant leadership, and tells the understanding of servant leadership in Chinese context. Also, it compares transformational leadership, authentic leadership and ethical leadership with servant leadership.

Keywords

Servant leadership, Chinese context, Comparison.

1. Introduction：

Leadership is more like a nebulous concept in most of its uses and the definition of a leader depends on the situation and context [1]. In these few years, a number of organizations managed to seek an advanced leadership philosophy to cope with ethical problems and other issues, such as abuse of power, negative emotions and so on. The enterprises in diverse fields are trying to move their insights from the leaders to the subordinates to maintain long-term profits [2]. A new leadership philosophy is compelling in need. Consequently, Servant leadership is increasingly become an interesting realm where draws global scholars'' attentions. The notion of servant leadership creates a paradoxical language games because "servant" and "leader" are thought of as an oxymoron in Western cultures[3] . It is first identified by the West and rapidly passed on to the East, representatively in Chinese context. However, servant leadership is still in the initial stage, a satisfied consensus about the definition of servant leadership has been rarely reached so far. And most of the existing academic literature about servant leadership has been prescriptive in an ideal perception, while a few have been descriptive in a practical perception.

2. Servant Leadership

2.1 The origin of servant leadership

Servant leadership is firstly proposed by Greenleaf [4], he was inspired from a book named "Journey to the East". The book tells a story about a group of people travelling to the East. A servant in the group named Leo took charge of the others'' daily trifles and inspired everyone with his positive spirit. He tried his effort to meet everyone''s need and played an important role of mediator and facilitator in the group communication. Leo felt quite delightful about his job and the other group members were rather satisfied with him and got used to be surrounded by him. Until one day, Leo was suddenly disappeared without a clue, the rest were all got in a panic and lost control, the journey was suspended eventually. At that time, they realized Leo has potentially functioned as the core member who made the final decision and motivate the team to overcome challenges. In this story, Leo played two literally contradictive roles in Chinese culture---a servant and a leader. As a servant, he won his credibility through his upright personality and his effective hardworking thereby facilitating the whole team to reach the destination; as a leader, he was trusted by the others and he shaped others'' fate by the means of always walking ahead of the journey. Just like Waddell [5] referenced Greenleaf''s(1977) explanation about the servant-leader, is the one who perceived himself as a servant first, and has a strong willingness to serve, and caring others'' highest priority needs in an organization.

2.2 The development of servant leadership in Western literature:

Then, what is servant leadership? The original pioneer Greenleaf explained a servant leader in 1970:

""It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people"s highest priority needs are being served."" (p. 4)

After, the other scholars expressed their understanding about the perception of servant leadership on the basis of Greenleaf"s, but no consensual framework has come out till now. Among, this research adopted the statement that explained servant leadership as a moral philosophy that continuously underlay in one leaders" behaviors. They principally lead people on value, ideology, and belief in a long orientation [6] [7] [8]. Spears in 1995 carried Greenleaf"s thoughts and proposed 10 characteristics of servant leadership, which include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building. Though Spears gave a significant contribution to summarize the main characteristics of servant leaders, his work failed to reveal the distinction from other leadership philosophies and stayed solely in a horizontal level. In 1999, Farling, Stone, and Winson made a development via providing a more hierarchical model than Spears"s with behavioral and relational dimensions. The behavioral components involve vision and service while the relational components involve influence, credibility and trust. Their results set a meaningful stage for the further empirical research of servant leadership. However, to distinct the concept of servant leadership from others still remained vague. To explicit the uniqueness and highlight the value of investigating servant leadership, Bass[9] made a comparison of servant leadership and transformational leadership and came a conclusion that servant leadership had parallel components with transformational leadership but it moved beyond it. Unfortunately, a testable framework was still missing. Subsequently, a series of scholars devoted themselves to generalizing the dimensions of servant leadership in various descriptions, and some questions were developed to measure each of the construct.

2.3 Servant leadership in Chinese context:

Those academic contributions informed a number of Chinese scholars" viewpoints to servant leadership, and a series questions were coming along. Does it have the similar perception and similar measurement in Chinese context? Can it be applied in Chinese context? Finally, a various literatures suggested servant leadership is evident in China [10]. On the basis of the historical study, Sun and Wong [11] conducted a quantitative research approach, data from 209 leader-employee paired samples, and drew the conclusion that servant leadership has good construct validity and empirical validity. In the meantime, Wu and Yao [8] distributed 386 questionnaires from eight enterprises in China and the result demonstrated that servant leadership is positively correlated with affiliation commitment, instrumental commitment and employee satisfaction, which further highlighted the significance and the necessity of studying servant leadership philosophy in Chinese organizational context.

Among, Yao [12] proposed an integrated model under Chinese-context with 6 dimensions from intrinsic-extrinsic motivational perspective, including functional behavior dimension, affinitive behavior dimension and value guidance dimension.

2.4 Comparison with other similar leadership

2.4.1 Transformational leadership

Later on, servant leadership is perceived as a logical extension of transformational leadership theory. Furling [13] contended that servant leadership is in the same fashion as Burns"s [14] transformational leadership theory, because both of these two theories encouraged improving leaders" and subordinates" motivation and moral personality. On the contrary, some scholars contested that they are quite different in essence. Graham [15] regarded servant leadership as the most moral of charismatic effects among charismatic leadership, which contains Weberian charismatic authority, personal celebrity charisma, transformational leadership and servant leadership. Thus, the distinction of servant

leadership from others leadership philosophy can be seen. Moreover, Bass [16] argued that transformational leadership is pursuing the empowerment to the subordinates thereby enhancing their working capability. But the outcome mostly benefit on their working motivation and the achievement of the organizational goals. Namely, the transformational leaders" original dedication is to creating benefits for the organizations [17]. However, servant leadership stresses a stronger tendency towards serving marginalized groups. Patterson [18] presented the theory of servant leadership, "those leaders who lead an organization by focusing on their followers, such that followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral." Chinese scholars view servant leadership as a moral that putting the subordinates" personal benefit and growth first, the organization"s is the second and the leader himself is the last [19]. In other words, the servant leaders" initial allegiance is to devote themselves to creating opportunities within the organization for the followers attaining their personal gains [20]. In a word, the eventual object of transformational leadership and servant leadership has an essential difference. Apart from this, the main characteristics of servant leadership are humility, authenticity and interpersonal acceptance, none of which are an explicit focus of transformational leadership[2] .

2.4.2 Authentic leadership

In terms of the comparison between authentic leadership and servant leadership, Avolio and Gardner [21] held the viewpoint that they are quite similar in the role of being a root concept underlying positive leadership approaches. Zhang et al [22] referred, ""Authenticity, as a primary criterion for such leaders, is believed to be achieved through heightened levels of self-awareness and self-regulation (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Gardner et al. 2005, Sparrowe 2005)."" The importance of holding a positive moral perspective, being self-government and self-awareness, and role modeling has all revealed in the two leadership philosophies. However, Ladkin and Taylor [23] asserted that the key value of authentic leadership is emphasizing on "true self", which means authentic leadership is mainly expressing the personal charisma of authenticity, but rather than the willingness to serve and benefit the subordinates. Even though there are some overlapped characteristics between authentic leadership and servant leadership, the latter one is expected to exert a gradual influence and guidance on followers" spiritual and moral level.

2.4.3 Ethnical leadership

To be honest, we can find some overlap between ethnical leadership and servant leadership in the existing literatures. Nowadays, most employees look outside themselves to significant others for ethical guidance, which made the leaders" role of functioning as a central source of guidance increasingly explicit. [24]. Meanwhile, Brown et al [25] defined ethical leadership as ""the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making.(p120)"" Both of them advocate an intrinsic motivation and interpersonal relationships, especially containing the content of serving the subordinates [19]. However, there still exist differences. As van Dierendonck (2010), said, ""in ethical leadership the emphasis is more on directive and normative behavior, whereas servant leadership has a stronger focus on the developmental aspect of the followers.""(P1236)

2.5 Servant leadership in Chinese context:

Those academic contributions informed a number of Chinese scholars" viewpoints to servant leadership, and a series questions were coming along. Does it have the similar perception and similar measurement in Chinese context? Can it be applied in Chinese context? Does it have a positive influence in organization? Fortunately, Yao [12], Wu and Yao [8], Sun and Wong [11] asurement of servant leadership can be applied to Chinese context, it holds comparable meaning. Finally, a various literatures suggested servant leadership is evident in China [10]. Han et al [26] concluded the dimensions of Chinese servant leadership, which is demonstrated as table 2.1:

Table 2.1 Types of Chinese servant leadership and illustrative examples
(Han et al, 2009, p275)

Dimensions	Illustrative examples of behavioural or character attributes
Putting people first	Putting people first; Working for people''s interests; Exercising power for the people; Serving people wholeheartedly
Ethical behavior	Integrity; Fairness; Justice; Self-discipline; Selflessness
Moral (Agapao) love	Showing concern for the people; Caring about subordinates; Help solve problems when needed; Caring for disadvantaged groups; Caring about people''s interests
Leadership (Conceptual) skills	Knowledgeable; Creative; Have an ability to lead and organize
Building relationships	Having good interpersonal relationship with people at all levels; Dealing with the relationship properly within and outside the organization
Humility	Sociable; Friendly
Being dutiful	Being committed to one''s work; Having a strong sense of responsibility; Being serious with one''s work; Working hard
Devotion to Party policies and state laws	Being loyal to the enforcement of Party policy; Complying with state laws and regulations
Listening	Listening to the people; Accepting people''s ideas

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Among, Yao [12] proposed an integrated model under Chinese-context with 6 dimensions from intrinsic-extrinsic motivational perspective, including functional behavior dimension, affinitive behavior dimension and value guidance dimension. The sub-scales of each level are listed in table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Yao''s intrinsic-extrinsic motivational dimension of servant leadership (2008)

Level	functional behavior dimension	affinitive behavior dimension	value guidance dimension
Sub-scales	a. Visioning b. Mentoring behavior c. Empowering	a. Trust b. Empathy	a. Serving

3. Conclusion

To sum up, servant leadership was first proposed by American researcher Greenleaf [4] and intrigued scholarly interest all over the world. Universal scholars expressed different perceptions toward servant leadership conceptualization and measurement scales. Yet, no consensus has been put forward so far. By the same token, a number of Chinese scholars managed to examine its conceptualization and measurement dimensions in Chinese context and developed a variety of integrated dimension scales of servant leadership. Fortunately, most of the scholars agreed that servant leadership hold the

comparative meanings and perceptions in Chinese context and it leads to a positive influence on employees" performances.

Furthermore, it is increasingly important for us to discover more intensely into the managerial world and get an understanding of how cultural differences influence on followers" respond [28]. In this research, a qualitative research was conducted through a semi-structured interview with 5 respondents selected from one state-owned enterprise ASIGC. Throughout the interview, the five respondents shared their personal experiences with their leaders in daily working life. During, some experiences showed a relation with several dimensions of servant leadership. For instance, putting others first, modest, relationship building, empathy and so on.

Additionally, by exploring their inner responses and thoughts with regard to their corresponding experience, the cultural aspects that underpinned in servant leadership were connected and verified. The key findings demonstrated that the philosophical influences of Confucianism and collectivism tend to be more explicit in this study. Initially, some of the dimensions of servant leadership are highly fitted in Chinese valuable moral norms (eg. "ren" and "li" from Confucianism virtues), which lead to the followers" praiseful assessments toward the leaders. Meanwhile, because of the high power distance society sense, the unexpected amicability that the followers sensed from the moral love of servant leadership facilitated its charm more prominent. Hence the long-orientation relationship building revealed in collectivism society turned out to be increasingly steady and profound, thereby raising the followers" cooperation with the leaders.

Consequently, thanks to the positive effects mentioned above, the validity and the necessity of servant leadership in Chinese context appear more solid and unambiguous. Overall, the servant leadership has revealed great potential for leadership research in both Western and Eastern context [10]. Only through this innovation could every member spare no effort to make a contribution to the organization to benefit unceasing enhancement.

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