



RESEARCH PAPER

Examining the Role of Grit in the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Work Performance: An Empirical Study of Higher Education Sector Of Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan

¹ Safi Ullah* ² Nadir Khan ³ Mir Sadaat Baloch

1. Lecturer, Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: May 10, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: August 28, 2021</p> <p>Online: September 01, 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Grit, Leadership, Servant, Work Performance</p> <p>*Corresponding Author:</p> <p>safibinyounis@gmail.com</p>	<p>Leadership has been the most prominent concept in the field of organizational behavior over the years, and continues to have a huge influence on the success of organizations. However, in recent past it was observed that traditional leadership approaches were failed to produce results in modern work settings, and that prompted researchers to see the effect of leadership approaches based on principles and ethics, such as servant leadership. Servant leadership has shown rather phenomenological effects in many work environments on the output of employees. Moreover, another variable – grit, which has emerged as a promising trait to have an influence on performance of individual- in organizational Behavior. Thus, this study examines the role of grit in the relationship between servant leadership and work performance. The present research was conducted on the teaching faculty and head of departments at the universities of Balochistan, Pakistan. The study findings showed a positive relationship between leadership of servants and job performance; moreover, grit has been shown to play a major mediating role between the two constructs. Furthermore, in this paper the relevance of the study to the field of knowledge and contribution to practitioners and potential research guidance is discussed.</p>

Introduction

Today the growth of the knowledge economy, developments in technology, movements in societies and the reduction of conventional sources of funding have made it harder for higher education sectors to compete at the international level. In addition to affecting the performance of organizations, the poor performance of the aforementioned sector also causes some serious problems for the inhabitants of that region, in the form of illiteracy, lack of skilled citizens, increase in unemployment, and increase in crime rate, etc. Additionally, non suitable leadership is one of the main reasons why companies do not perform well (By, 2020).

Furthermore, the higher education market, in particular, has received very little attention from scholars in the recent past (Haider & Ahmed, 2017). It is suspected that leaders in higher education environments often use inappropriate management styles that affect not only the organization, but also staff and students (Blase & Blase, 2006).

Hence, an effective leadership approach in the higher education sector in order to keep teaching workforce motivated (Quinn & Andrews, 2010). In particular, since the position of the higher education sector in building societies is very significant, as it trains prospective workers and leaders to become good assets for their organizations and society (Samad, 2015). Therefore, diverse leadership styles need to be evaluated so that positive and negative findings can be understood.

In addition, there is a growing demand today for truthful, ethical, and serving leadership in organizations (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Like servant leadership is known as servant leadership that connects values, ethics, and honesty (Graham, 1991). Furthermore, servant leadership is somewhat distinct from other leadership models because it operates on the principle of serving first and then leading. Similarly, servant leadership is the leadership philosophy that worries most for followers.

Furthermore, for the success of long-term goals the role of grit is must, particularly in academics, but as per our best of knowledge, no study has been conducted to see the role of grit on the performance of employees, particularly, in higher education sector of Pakistan.

Therefore, it is time to see its effect in higher education environments by studying the robust success of servant leadership in various organizational frameworks (Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008). In addition, it is believed the servant leadership fits education settings by helping in the motivation of the teaching staff (Haider & Ahmad, 2017).

Therefore, the present study explored the role of grit in the relationship between servant leadership and the work performance of teachers. Particularly, this research aimed to examine the effect of servant Leadership on the work performance of teachers; and to examine the mediating role of grit in the association between servant leadership and work performance

Literature Review

Servant Leadership and Work Performance

Servant leaders see themselves as servant of the organizations in which they are (Parris and Peachey, 2013), and as such they do not neglect performance goals and requirements even though they concentrate on the personal growth of their supporters (Ferch, 2003). Contrary to traditional leadership approaches that often "sacrifice individuals on the altar of profit and development" (Sendjaya, 2015, p. 4).

Therefore, servant leadership has shown to be a predictor of numerous positive results in several studies in different cultures and organizations (Liden et al., 2008; Liden

et al., 2015; Eva et al., 2019). Such as the impact of servant leadership on team success and organizational performance (Sousa & Dierendonck, 2016; Choudhary et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, despite the amount of work that has been carried out between servant management and work performance. However, the discrepancy still exists in determining the strength of the relationship over the results (Lee et al., 2019; van dierendonck, 2011). Some studies have shown stronger associations (Ling, Lin, & Wu, 2016), while some have reported poor relationships (Neubert et al., 2016). Thus, this limits the understanding of servant leadership (Lee et al., 2019).

Therefore, it is hypothesized that

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership has a positive influence on work performance

Servant Leadership and Grit

Duckworth et al. (2007) gave the notion of "perseverance and passion for long-term objectives" grit. Despite the difficulties, barriers and fear of failure, grit is working devotedly to achieving long-term objectives (p.1087-1088). grit is effected by servant leadership because passion and purveyance comes when someone is willing and have passion with his/her work, therefore, In addition, servant leadership is characterized by providing opportunities for followers to grow and evolve for their short-term and long-term goals (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Servant leaders, however, will grow their followers only if they exercise passion and perseverance. Therefore, by fostering growth mentality and cultivating enthusiasm in workers, servant leadership approaches to longer goals (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). In addition, servant leader is ultimately a learner who has a growth mindset and develops her/her capacity for servant leadership in the whole dimension; such as empathy, emotional healing, understanding, persuasion and foresight, community building, etc., its long-lasting process, and grit is needed to succeed in achieving the above behaviors (Chan, 2016). Similarly, another aspect of servant leadership is, over the long run, servant leaders concentrate on sustainable success (Sendjaya, 2015). Whereas long-term concentration can only be done if you have a mentality of grit (Duckworth, 2007).

Therefore, perseverance and passion come from the people have passion of doing their tasks, and servant leadership and serving and dedication for achieving long-term goals, effectively implemented in multiple work environments, has a positive effect on job results. In order to lead and fulfill the needs of followers, servant leadership often needs perseverance and enthusiasm.

Therefore, it is also hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership has a positive influence on grit.

Grit and Work Performance

Researchers are paying close attention to grit because it is thought to be as effective as other conventional predictors of retention or performance, such as IQ or the Big Five personality traits (Duckworth et al., 2007). Additionally, Grit, rather than other cognitive or psychological predictors, describes work retention, military retention, marriage longevity, and high school graduation outcomes better, according to research. This is because grit motivates people to keep their jobs, seek further education, and stay in challenging training programs regardless of whether they succeed or face psychological challenges.

Despite the studies mentioned above, no study to explore grit's role in higher education sector employees' performance. Thus, this study fills this gap and hypothesis that.

Hypothesis 3: Grit has a positive influence on work performance.

Servant Leadership, Grit and Work performance

Servant leadership's hallmark is to build opportunities for followers to thrive and evolve for their short-term and long-term objectives (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Whereas long-term concentration can only be done if you have a mindset of grit (Duckworth, 2007; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Additionally, servant leadership depends on serving to achieve sustainable efficiency over the longer term (Sendjaya, 2015). Likewise, servant leader is essentially a learner who has a growth mentality and to learn all aspects of servant leadership, such as empathy, emotional healing, understanding, persuasion and foresight, community building, etc. Therefore, grit mindset is needed, to be successful in achieving the above behaviors (Chan, 2016).

In addition, grit plays a critical role in life's accomplishments (Duckworth et al., 2017). Similarly, there is sufficient evidence that grit can help boost both personal and organizational performance (Duckworth et al., 2007; Dugan et al., 2018).

Similarly, the majority of leadership research work has centered on leadership approaches based on traits, because traits can explain more than 31 percent of variance in leadership efficiency (Derue et al., 2011). However, which trait most affects leadership, remains unclear (Derue et al., 2011; Caza & Posner, 2018).

Therefore, we believe, grit may play prominent role in making servant leaders more effective.

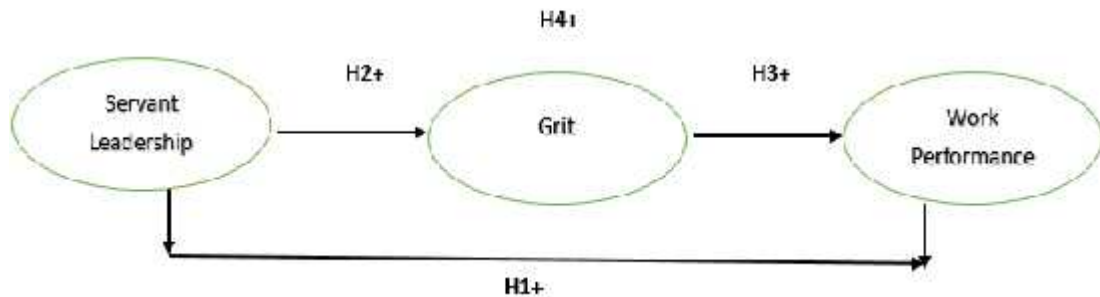
Thus, it is hypothesized that

Hypothesis 4. Grit mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work performance.

Conceptual framework of the study.

As shown below of literature based conceptual framework of the study.

Conceptual Model of the study



Material and Methods

Methods

The research was quantitative in nature. None probability technique in which convenience method of sampling was used. Furthermore, survey method was used for collection of data. This study's population consisted of teaching faculty members and their heads of departments of five universities in Quetta, Pakistan. 300 questionnaires were distributed. Later the 200 dyads usable matched responses were received. The respondents comprised 200 subordinates and 61 HODs. There were 117 male, (58.5%) and 83 Female (41.05%), 91 participants were belonging from public universities, and 109 were from private universities. Their ages were from 30 to 60 years ($M = 34.08$, $SD = 6.664$). About job title/ position, 119 participants were Lecturers, 41 assistant professors, 26 were associate and 14 were professors.

Whereas, 61 HODs include; 41 (67%) male and 20 (33%) Female, they age ranged in from 30 to 60 years ($M = 47.44$, $SD = 7.301$). Concerning job title/ position, 17 were associate professors, three were assistant professors, and 41 were professors.

Procedure

Separate questionnaires were issued to followers and leaders. As University teachers assessed their head of department on servant leadership, while themselves on grit. Conversely, the head of departments rated their followers on work performance. Later followers' responses were recognized by a code so that their responses could remain nameless. In addition, the identification code helped to align the answers of each follower with those of his or her leader.

Measures

The Likert scale varies from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) for the assessment of all variables under study. Furthermore, for assessing servant leadership, a scale developed by (Liden et al., 2014). Sample item is, "my boss puts

his/her own interests ahead of my best interests". Similarly, grit was assessed using the scale of (Duckworth et al, 2007). "New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones" is the sample question. Similarly, supervisors assessed the followers on job performance, using the scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). "He/she meets the job's formal performance requirements" was the sample item.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS v23 and AMOS v23 were used; descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation between variables were calculated after data cleaning. Multiple regression model assumptions were checked and ensured that the assumptions were met prior to regression and mediation model running (Field, 2013; Hayes, 2013).

In addition, Model 4 was used to analyze the mediating role of mediator, using process macro for SPSS v.23 (Hayes, 2013), where bootstrapping was developed to evaluate the mediation model of grit as mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and work performance.

In addition, bootstrapping is re sampling and an alternate method of conducting hypothesis testing to assess if the indirect effect is different from zero (Hayes, 2013). Where mediation is considered significant (lower limit, LL), the upper limit (UL) for the indirect effect (IE) does not include zero when using the 95 percent confidence interval (lower limit, LL).

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Descriptive, correlations and Reliability Statistics

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
Servant Leadership	5.74	.70	(0.89)		
Grit	5.63	.59	..693**	(0.76)	
Work Performance	5.90	.62	.606**	.551**	(0.94)

Note: N=200, p<0.01**, Reliability statistics are shown in diagonal.

Results given in Table 1 shows the means, standard deviation, reliability statistics and correlation values. Where servant leadership was positively associated with grit and work performance. Likewise, grit also positively associated with work performance.

Model Testing

The model was testing using AMOS 23. Where the confirmatory factor analysis results showed good model fit, as indices for entire model are ($\chi^2=409.388$, $p=.0000$; Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) =.861; Tucker and Lewis's Index (TLI) =.926; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) =.933; and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) =.050.

Test of Hypothesis

Furthermore, the model was tested using process macro Hayes model 4, in which 10000 bootstrap re samples were used to obtain confidence interval for indirect effects, as recommended by Hayes (2013).

Our first hypothesis that servant leadership positively statistically predictors of work performance, was accepted, as the values show($\beta = .38$, $t= 5.64$, $p<0.001$). Hence, it was confirmed that servant leadership is a positive predictor of employees work performance in under studied sector.

Likewise, the second hypothesis that servant leadership positively predictor grit, was accepted ($\beta = .58$, $t= 13.51$, $p<0.001$), as results suggests. Similarly, the third hypothesis, that grit is a significant predictor of work performance was also retained, since the values ($\beta = .26$, $t= 3.30$ $p=0.001$).

Likewise, our fourth hypotheses proved grit's significant role as a mediator between the two constructs.

Table 2
The indirect effect of mediator "grit"

Mediator	Beta	(SE)	95%CI (LL-UL)
Grit	.1556	.0491	(0.0606 to 0.2553)

S.E = standard error, CL= confidence interval, LL = lower limit and UL= upper limit of confidence intervals.

As shown in the table 2 the indirect effect of grit, $\beta =0.1556$, 95% confidence interval, (LL=0.0606 to UL=0.2553), where zero does not fall between upper and lower confidence intervals limits , suggesting that grit serves as a mediating role between servant leadership and work performance.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of servant leadership on work performance, and see the role of grit as a mediator between two constructs. Findings of our study proved the positive association between leaders' servant leadership behaviors and followers work performance. Since our first hypothesis, remained true, as results concluded that the positive association exists between the two constructs. The results of this study were in line with the previous studies like (Liden et al., 2015; Eva et al., 2019), Like; servant leadership on employee job performance (Liden et al., 2008), on teams performance (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2016), similarly on organizational level outcomes (Choudhary et al., 2013). Hence, in work settings servant leadership can be practice in order to have high positive impact on employee's performance.

Likewise, the second hypothesis proved the positive association between servant leadership and grit. Results showed a positive linkage between servant leadership and

grit, and in conformity with (Chan, 2016). Thus, the leaders who practice the behavior of servant leadership they will be highly gritty.

The third hypothesis, the grit positively predicts work performance, was accepted, likewise, the fourth hypotheses was also accepted, as finding suggested that grit does mediate the relationship between the two constructs.

Practical Implementations

Our study results showed that servant leadership improves organizational work efficiency, particularly in higher education institutions. In addition, results indicate that if higher education institutions want to enhance the work performance of their workers, they should first train their current leaders in the actions of servant leadership. Second, they should look for leaders with servant leadership qualities in their future hiring's, such as leaders having the ability to serve and the ability to get the best out of their workers. In addition, based on scoring on grit, leaders should be chosen. That is going to help them demonstrate perseverance and enthusiasm for their work.

Strengths and Limitations

The only study, as per our best of knowledge, where the role of grit has been examined as a mediator between servant leadership. Likewise, the only study, which involved from both followers and leaders (dyadic relationship) to see the role of studied constructs.

One limitation is that, as we cannot generalize the results, the essence of this cross-sectional study and study was conducted in the context of Pakistan. In addition, both followers and leaders were involved; this may have caused a sense of privacy-related fear when rating each other. Furthermore, the study's results may only be applicable to the higher education sector.

Recommendations

Researchers may use the limitations of current studies to help them with future research. First, in comparable studies, larger sample sizes for both leaders and followers will produce better results. Second, had scales been converted to local languages, would have received even better and more responses, as difficulties in understanding non-native languages can lead to inappropriate responses. Third, to see the causal impacts of the same constructs, longitudinal studies may be conducted. Fourth, studies in different countries may be conducted to address the generalization problem.

In order to see the outcomes of studied constructs, Fifth, complete other or self-rated studies should be performed. Sixth, rather than the higher education sector, other fields such as industry, health, and non-profit organizations should be subject to similar studies. Seventh, to see their influence among the constructs, the same variables should be checked as moderators. Eighth, in this analysis, the studied mediator should be tested with other management types, such as transactional, transformative, legal, etc.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in Pakistan's higher education sector to examine the mediating impact of grit in the relationship between servant leadership and work performance. Results showed that servant leadership positively influences the employee performance. Furthermore, this study increases the body of knowledge by how servant leadership affects work performance in the higher education sector, moreover, explores the role of grit as a mediator between servant leadership and work performance. Moreover, this study help organizations, particularly, the higher education institutes, the qualities of servant leadership should be considered when choosing and training their leaders. Additionally, the study suggest that leaders with grit (perseverance and passion) have much influence on their followers' performance.

References

- By, R. T. (2020). Leadership: In Pursuit of Purpose. *Journal of Change Management*, 21(1),30-44.<https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2021.1861698>
- Blase, J., Blase, B. J., & Blase, J. (2006). The mistreated teacher: A National Study. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 46(3), 263–301
- Caza, A., & Posner, B. Z. (2018). How and when does grit influence leaders' behavior? *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 40(1), 124–134. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-06-2018-0209>
- Chan, K. W. C. (2016). Servant Leadership Cultivates Grit and Growth Mindset in Learners. *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice*, 3(2), 2.
- Choudhary, A. I., Akhtar, S. A., & Zaheer, A. (2013). Impact of Transformational and Servant Leadership on Organizational Performance: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 116(2), 433–440. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1470-8>
- Derue, D. S., Nahrgang, J. D., Wellman, N., & Humphrey, S. E. (2011). Trait and behavioral theories of leadership: An integration and meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 64(1), 7–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2010.01201.x>
- Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087>
- Dugan, R., Hochstein, B., Rouziou, M., & Britton, B. (2018). Gritting their teeth to close the sale: the positive effect of salesperson grit on job satisfaction and performance. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 39(1), 81–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2018.1489726>
- Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant Leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004>
- Field, Andy (2013) *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics: and sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll, 4th edition*. Sage, London
- Ferch, S. R. (2003). Servant-leadership, forgiveness, and social justice. *Voices of Servant-Leadership Series*, 1, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1.1.469.4596>
- Graham, J. W. (1991). Servant-leadership in organizations: Inspirational and moral. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 2(2), 105–119. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843\(91\)90025-W](https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(91)90025-W)
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness by Robert K. Greenleaf - (25th anniv)*. Paulist Press.

- Haider, A., & Ahmed, D. (2017). Does Servant Leadership affect the Job Satisfaction of faculty members? An empirical study of public sector universities, Pakistan. *Journal of Business and Tourism, Special Issue*, 21–35.
- Hayes, Andrew F. (2013). *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press
- Lee, Y. H. (2019). Emotional intelligence, servant leadership, and development goal orientation in athletic directors. *Sport Management Review*, 22(3), 395–406. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2018.05.003>
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Meuser, J. D., Hu, J., Wu, J., & Liao, C. (2015). Servant leadership: Validation of a short form of the SL-28. *Leadership Quarterly*, 26(2), 254–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.12.002>
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.01.006>
- Ling, Q., Lin, M., & Wu, X. (2016). The trickle-down effect of servant leadership on frontline employee service behaviors and performance: A multilevel study of Chinese hotels. *Tourism Management*, 52, 341–368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.07.008>
- Neubert, M. J., Hunter, E. M., & Tolentino, R. C. (2016). A servant leader and their stakeholders: When does organizational structure enhance a leader's influence? *Leadership Quarterly*, 27(6), 896–910. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.05.005>
- Parris, D. L., & Peachey, J. W. (2013). A Systematic Literature Review of Servant Leadership Theory in Organizational Contexts. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 113(3), 377–393. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1322-6>
- Quinn, R. J., & Andrews, B. D. (2010). The Struggles of First-Year Teachers : Investigating The Struggles of First-Year Teachers Investigating Support Mechanisms. *A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 77(4), 164–168. <https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.77.4.164-168>
- Samad, A. (2015). Towards an understanding of the effect of leadership on employee wellbeing and organizational outcomes in Australian universities. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 49(6), 441–448. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jda.2015.0121>
- Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008). Defining and measuring servant leadership behaviour in organizations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2), 402–424. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2007.00761.x>
- Sendjaya, S. (2015). Servant Leadership Research 2. *Management for Professionals*, 15–38. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16196-9>

- Sousa, M., & Dierendonck, D. Van. (2016). Introducing a Short Measure of Shared Servant Leadership Impacting Team Performance through Team Behavioral Integration. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6*(2002), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.02002>
- Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership : a difference in leader focus. *The Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 25*(4), 349–361. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730410538671>
- van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management, 37*(4), 1228–1261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310380462>
- van Dierendonck, D., & Patterson, K. (2015). Compassionate Love as a Cornerstone of Servant Leadership: An Integration of Previous Theorizing and Research. *Journal of Business Ethics, 128*(1), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2085-z>