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Emotional Labor: The Role of Servant Leadership

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the concepts of servant leadership and emotional labor were discussed and aimed to reveal the role of servant leadership behaviors on employees' emotional labor behaviors by questioning the relationships between these concepts. The research was carried out on 343 academicians as survey research. Servant leadership was represented by empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship dimensions. In contrast, emotional labor behavior was represented by surface acting, deep acting, and genuine acting dimensions. After performing the necessary statistical analyzes on the data obtained from the participants, the following conclusions were reached: None of the servant leadership behaviors have significant effects on surface acting; In contrast to the negative effects of standing back on deep acting, accountability and humility have positive effects on it and finally, accountability and interpersonal acceptance have positive effects on genuine acting.

Keywords: Leadership, Servant Leadership, Emotional Labor

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is undoubtedly "one of the most important roles in an organization" (Tsai et al., 2009). Effective leadership is critical in differentiating between corporate success and failure, whether in the public, private or nonprofit sectors. A leader's behavior can positively or negatively affect stress levels and the emotional well-being of employees (Skakon et al., 2010). Skakon et al. (2010) reviewed previous researches conducted over the past 30 years on the relationship between leadership behaviors and employee well-being. They concluded that leaders' behaviors, styles, and relationships with employees affect employee stress and emotional well-being. In other words, it was stated that as positive leadership behaviors increase, employee well-being also increases. On the contrary, as negative leadership behaviors increase, employee stress and tension increase in parallel. To put it more concretely, positive leadership behaviors such as encouraging employees to make independent decisions, and approving and considering them make it easier for employees to have a more advanced level of psychological well-being (Wijewardena et al., 2017).

The servant leadership approach, mentioned as one of the positive leadership styles mentioned above (Satır, 2017), has started to attract attention with its positive features in the research of leadership theories in recent years. Servant leadership is a concept that can apply to any organization, whether it is for profit or not. A leader who adopts serving as his/her principles and devotes himself/herself to his/her employees is called a servant leader. Servant leaders value their employees and help them develop themselves, display servant behaviors, and consider the needs of their employees rather than their personal needs. The service orientation of servant leaders is the most important feature that distinguishes them from other leadership approaches (Kurnaz & Abul, 2016).

The servant leader is basically a leader, but he/she appears as a different, deep, and colorful leader. In other words, it has many different aspects compared to an ordinary person. But despite these differences, he/she does not forget to be a simple person. It does not detract from the dignity of being human in any way. Although this type of leader is strong, powerful, and has intense enforcement power, he/she tends to behave in a completely submissive mood if necessary. In general, he/she trusts people, or his followers very much and he/she believes that they will improve, and does not give up his/her understanding of tolerance even in every mistake they make. His understanding of tolerance is tried to be appreciated and imitated by his/her followers (Fındıkçı, 2013).

Again, the concept of emotional labor, which has been emphasized in recent years, refers to "emotion management" in the workplace in general terms. Emotional labor is called the ability of employees to keep their emotions in their services and relationships under control in accordance with the wishes and rules of the organization. In other words, emotional labor is the efforts of employees to understand others and feel others' emotions as their own (Begenirbaş & Yalçın, 2020). Emotional labor, which is generally seen as a role requirement by organizations, includes attitudes

toward displaying emotions that the organization wants and preventing some emotions that the organization does not want (Seçer, 2005).

It is possible to see emotional labor in employees in three ways. The first of these is surface acting. Surface acting is the expression of emotions through facial expressions, gestures, tones of voice, etc., while pretending to feel emotions that are not felt in reality, just like an “actor”. Surface acting is showing an emotion that has never existed, or acting as if a truly felt emotion has never been experienced (Eroğlu, 2014). Employees who use surface acting suppress their feelings and imitate the desired expression (Zhan et al., 2016). Therefore, employees change observable outward expressions, present unfeeling emotions artificially, the mask felt emotions, and hide real emotions, displaying an external appearance that does not match their real emotions (Lee & Hwang, 2016).

The second form of emotional labor seen in employees is deep acting. Deep acting, also known as emotional effort, is making the real feelings of the employees consistent with the feelings they need to show (Eroğlu, 2014). Employees here act as if they are actors on the stage while projecting their emotions to the other side, as in surface acting. However, while the employee is only fulfilling the requirements of his/her role without a sense of role in surface acting, in deep acting, he/she experiences the emotions in his/her role. He/she tries to appear like an artist who immerses himself/herself in his/her role (Turan, 2018). In a way, in deep acting, the employee puts himself/herself in the other person’s place and acts through empathy (Basım & Begenirbaş, 2012).

Finally, the third form of emotional labor in employees is genuine acting. Surface and deep acting are focused on strategically manipulating emotions, while genuine acting is based on spontaneous, real, and sincere feelings. Exhibiting genuine behaviors is related to the situation of the other person rather than the behaviors that organizations want from their employees. An example of this situation is a doctor who approaches a sick child with compassion, is sincere in his feelings, and does not need to play any role (Özgüleş, 2017). In short, genuine acting is how emotions react to situations, and people express their emotions in a natural and easier way. In studies, more harmful results were obtained in organizations where surface behavior was used more frequently, while less negative results were found in organizations where genuine behavior was dominant (Grandey, 1999).

In this study, the relationship between the concepts of servant leadership and emotional labor was questioned and the effects of a servant leader's behaviors on employees' emotional labor behaviors were tried to be revealed.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Servant Leadership and Emotional Labor

Servant leadership emphasizes the emotional recovery of the employee, especially the well-being of the relationships established by the managers with the employees and their emotional maturity (Liden et al., 2014, Lu et al., 2016). According to other leadership theories, it has been observed that servant leadership is more likely to create a safer emotional environment for employees. However, servant leadership places more emphasis on the emotional comfort of the employee than other leadership theories. While other leaders try to maximize their personal and organizational interests, servant leaders are committed to developing their employees and fulfilling their needs (Lu et al., 2016, pp.507-508). In this context, servant leadership is an effective leadership style in directing employee behaviors. According to the Emotional Events Theory, effective leaders can influence the emotional events that determine the attitudes and behaviors of employees in the workplace (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Emotions are “short-term experiences that produce coordinated changes in people's thoughts, actions, and physiological responses”. Thus, emotions arise as a result of some internal or external event, last only for short periods, and consist of a combination of different and multiple factors such as facial expressions, physiological changes, behavioral changes, and cognitive changes. However, this difference leads to different results in facial expressions, behaviors and cognitive changes as emotions differ (Wijewardena et al., 2014).

It has been researched that the distinctive features of leaders, who have critical importance in the organization’s success, both gain the support of the employees and motivate them. In this context, compared to other leadership theories, it is considered that servant leadership, which focuses on accepting employees as they are, maybe more beneficial in developing a safer emotional environment for employees (Schaubroeck et al., 2011).

The results obtained in studies investigating the relationship between servant leadership and emotional labor in the literature showed that there are negative relationships between servant leadership and employees' surface acting behaviors, on the contrary, there are positive relationships between servant leadership and deep acting and genuine acting behaviors (Barbuto & Millard, 2014; Park et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2019; Begenirbaş & Yalçın, 2020).

H1= Servant leadership behaviors (empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship) significantly affect surface acting.

H2= Servant leadership behaviors (empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship) significantly affect deep acting.

H3= Servant leadership behaviors (empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship) significantly affect genuine acting.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Sample

This research was carried out on 343 academicians selected by random sampling method from 3 public universities. 40.2% (n= 138) of the participants were female and 59.8% (n= 205) were male; 15.7% (n= 54) of the participants are under 30 years old, 49.3% (n= 169) are between 30-40 years old, and 35% (n= 120) are over 40 years old and finally, 34.1 (n= 117) of the participants have been working for less than 5 years, 30.3% (n= 104) are between 5-10 years, and 35.6% (n= 122) for more than 10 years.

3.2. Measures

Servant Leadership

In our study, the Servant Leadership Scale, developed by Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011), was used to measure participants' perceptions of servant leadership behaviors in relation to their leaders. This scale with 26 items (Duyan, 2012) consists of 7 sub-dimensions as servant leader behaviors (empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship).

Empowerment is the leader's ability to make employees more effective in the workplace and to encourage them to improve themselves; *Accountability* is the leader's ability to instill in employees the awareness that they are responsible for their own performance; *Standing back* is the leader's ability to bring his employees to the fore, not himself/herself; *Humility* is the leader's ability to put his/her own talents and achievements into reasonable perspective; *Courage* is the willingness to take risks, and the ability to challenge new avenues and methods for innovation and change; *Interpersonal acceptance* is the ability to understand and experience the emotions of others, to get rid of prejudices and negative thoughts, and *Stewardship* is the ability to take on greater corporate responsibilities by avoiding personal interests (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

As example items for the servant leadership scale; “*My manager helps me to further develop myself*”, “*My manager appears to enjoy his/her colleagues' success more than his/her own*”, and “*My manager holds me responsible for the work I carry out*”, “*My manager learns from criticism*” and “*My manager has a long-term vision*”. This scale was rated with a 5-point Likert scale (1= Never, 5= Always).

Emotional Labor

The Emotional Labor Scale, developed by Brotheridge & Lee (1998), was used to measure participants' emotional labor behaviors. This scale with 10 items (Grandey, 1999) consists of 3 sub-dimensions as emotional labor behaviors (Surface acting, deep acting, and genuine acting). This scale was rated with a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree). For example items for the emotional labor scale, “*Put on a show or performance*”, “*Try to actually experience the emotions that I must Show*”, and “*React to others' emotions naturally and easily*”.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Validity, Reliability, and Normality

Confirmatory Factor and Cronbach's Alpha Analyzes were applied to prove the validity and reliability of the scales we used in our research. The findings obtained as a result of these analyzes were presented in Table 1. The construct validities of the servant leadership and emotional labor scales were provided; both scales were reliable for this study.

Table 1. CFA and Cronbach's Alpha Results

Variables	CMIN/DF	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Cronbach's Alpha
<u>Servant Leadership</u>	2.75	.93	.93	.07	.04	.92
✓ <i>Empowerment</i>						.94
✓ <i>Accountability</i>						.68
✓ <i>Standing back</i>						.83
✓ <i>Humility</i>						.90
✓ <i>Courage</i>						.77
✓ <i>Interpersonal acceptance</i>						.72
✓ <i>Stewardship</i>						.85
<u>Emotional Labor</u>	2.68	.96	.96	.07	.04	.83
✓ <i>Surface acting</i>						.88
✓ <i>Deep acting</i>						.81
✓ <i>Genuine acting</i>						.71

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated to determine whether the data obtained in the study had a normal distribution. Since Kurtosis and Skewness values are considered normal when they are between -1.5 and +1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). According to the calculation findings, the data had a normal distribution.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the intercorrelations between research variables and the findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and correlations among variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>1. Servant Leadership</i>	3.11	.72	1											
<i>2. Empowerment</i>	3.12	1.04	.946**	1										
<i>3. Accountability</i>	3.77	.77	.455**	.324**	1									
<i>4. Standing back</i>	2.80	1.07	.839**	.783**	.245**	1								
<i>5. Humility</i>	2.95	1.06	.889**	.830**	.269**	.793**	1							
<i>6. Courage</i>	2.71	1.06	.743**	.668**	.201**	.610**	.637**	1						
<i>7. Interpersonal acceptance</i>	2.93	.98	.295**	.403**	-.087	.485**	.498**	.286**	1					
<i>8. Stewardship</i>	3.22	1.07	.910**	.861**	.291**	.755**	.839**	.665**	.388**	1				
<i>9. Emotional Labor</i>	2.45	.72	-.151**	-.185**	.012	-.196**	-.140**	-.109*	-.188**	-.154**	1			
<i>10. Surface acting</i>	2.45	.92	-.097	-.126*	.036	-.144**	-.103	-.083	-.162**	-.100	.936**	1		
<i>11. Deep acting</i>	2.62	.96	-.040	-.078	.088	-.105	-.012	-.017	-.081	-.053	.813**	.649**	1	
<i>12. Genuine acting</i>	2.17	.82	.314**	.317**	.201**	.267**	.301**	.215**	.225**	.300**	-.319**	-.153**	.020	1

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

It was determined that there was a generally significant and negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional labor ($r = -.151$; $p < .01$). In terms of relations between sub-dimensions, empowerment ($r = -.126$; $p < .05$), standing back ($r = -.144$; $p < .01$) and interpersonal acceptance ($r = -.162$; $p < .01$) were negatively related with surface acting; although empowerment ($r = .317$; $p < .01$), accountability ($r = .201$; $p < .01$) standing back ($r = .267$; $p < .01$), humility ($r = .301$; $p < .01$), courage ($r = .215$; $p < .01$) interpersonal acceptance ($r = .225$; $p < .01$) and stewardship ($r = .300$; $p < .01$) were positively related with genuine acting.

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

Three multiple regression models were established to question the effects of independent variables on dependent variables. At the same time, gender, age, and tenure variables were included in the models established as control variables to reach a clearer judgment. The findings of the multiple regression analysis performed on these models are presented in Table 3:

The first model was found to be significant for surface acting ($R^2 = .065$; $p < .01$). Age had a negative effect on surface acting ($\beta = -.214$; $p < .01$), while none of the sub-dimensions of servant leadership had a significant effect on surface acting. The second model was also found to be significant for deep acting ($R^2 = .075$; $p < .01$). Gender had a positive effect on deep acting ($\beta = .162$; $p < .01$). Accountability ($\beta = .134$; $p < .05$) and humility ($\beta = .283$; $p < .05$) had positive effects on deep acting, on the contrary, standing back had a negative effect ($-.221$; $p < .05$). Finally, the third model was also found to be significant ($R^2 = .133$; $p < .001$). While none of the control variables had significant effects on genuine acting, accountability ($\beta = .146$; $p < .01$) and interpersonal acceptance ($\beta = .151$; $p < .05$) had positive effects on genuine acting. Therefore H2 and H3 hypotheses were supported, but the H1 hypothesis was not supported.

Table 3. Results for testing multiple regression models

Variables	Surface Acting Model 1	Deep Acting Model 2	Genuine Acting Model 3
<i>1. Gender</i>	.000	.162**	.000
<i>2. Age</i>	-.214**	-.066	.041
<i>3. Tenure</i>	.103	-.027	-.044
<i>4. Empowerment</i>	-.142	-.197	.157
<i>5. Accountability</i>	.047	.134*	.146**
<i>6. Standing back</i>	-.117	-.221*	-.038
<i>7. Humility</i>	.099	.283*	.032
<i>8. Courage</i>	.024	.063	-.010
<i>9. Interpersonal acceptance</i>	-.122	-.036	.151*
<i>10. Stewardship</i>	.036	-.040	.069
R^2	.065**	.075**	.133***
F	2.317	2.681	5.102

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

5. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between servant leadership and emotional labor and to reveal the effects of servant leadership behaviors on emotional labor behaviors. In order to realize this aim, three hypotheses were established and the following results were reached by analyzing the obtained data.

As a result of the bivariate correlation analysis carried out to reveal the relationships between the main variables and sub-dimensions of the study, it was seen that there was a significant and negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional labor. When the relationships between the sub-dimensions of both main variables are examined, empowerment, standing back, and interpersonal acceptance were negatively related to surface acting, on the contrary, empowerment, standing back, humility, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship were positively related to genuine acting.

In order to test the research hypotheses, three different multiple regression models were established for all the sub-dimensions of emotional labor. As a result of the analysis, all three models were significant. Therefore, although the first of the research hypotheses were not supported, the second and third hypotheses were supported. When we look at the studies examining the relations between servant leadership and emotional labor in the literature, it was seen that emotional labor was handled both in general and together with its sub-dimensions, but servant leadership was only considered as a general without considering its sub-dimensions (Barbuto & Millard, 2014; Park et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2019; Begenirbaş & Yalçın, 2020). However, in our study, unlike all these studies, the servant leadership approach was handled within the scope of seven servant leadership behaviors. This was the feature that made our study differs from the aforementioned studies. When we compare the results of our study with previous studies, it was seen that in previous studies, servant leadership was significantly and negatively related to surface acting, on the contrary, it was significantly and positively related to deep acting and genuine acting. Unlike the findings in previous studies, in our study, no significant effects of servant leadership behaviors were found on surface acting. It is thought that the main reason for this situation may be the individual, organizational, social, and cultural differences between the research samples. In addition, our study revealed that some of the servant leadership behaviors had significant effects on deep acting and genuine acting. Accountability positively affected both deep acting and genuine acting, humility positively affected deep acting, and interpersonal acceptance positively affected genuine acting. Surprisingly, standing back was found to have a significant, but negative effect on deep acting. Based on the findings of this study, a general evaluation was made below:

The fact that a manager holds his/her employees responsible for their work and makes them feel that he/she values them more than himself/herself may indicate how much that manager trusts his/her employees. In this context, employees can display more self-confidence and more determined behaviors while performing their jobs. This positive situation may result in them being more diligent in exhibiting the organizational behaviors expected of them. On the contrary, the increase in the level of standing back of the manager decreases the deep acting behaviors of the employees. The reason for this may be personal, qualitative, or cultural. Respondents may have introverted personality traits or have grown up in a society with leader dependency, particularly within the scope of the research sample. Due to these and similar reasons, it is thought that respondents may have problems in bringing themselves to the fore, and this may reduce their efforts to do the behaviors expected from them by really feeling them. Managers can contribute to developing their sense of responsibility by giving initiative to their employees. At the same time, by empathizing with their employees, managers can get to know them better and have information about their feelings. As managers show such an approach towards their employees, it can be ensured that employees display the behaviors expected from them more sincerely.

Finally, we made a general evaluation in the context of the research results for the universities that represent the universe of this research. Universities are catalyst institutions of social consciousness and welfare. Therefore, these institutions must be more liberal and productive in their activities and actions. The creation of such a structure depends on raising the qualifications of academics. In order to increase the qualifications of academicians, they should be allowed and encouraged to play more active roles in organizational decision mechanisms. The fact that university administrators exhibit more servant behaviors will support this process to progress faster. University administrators should give more initiative to the academics under their responsibilities, adopt their value judgments, and get to know and accept them closely by avoiding their prejudices. If university administrators exhibit such servant behaviors, it is thought that other academicians will also display behaviors in line with organizational expectations.

As in every study in the field of social sciences, this study has some limitations and assumptions. The results obtained in this study, which was carried out on a research sample selected from a limited universe due to time and cost barriers, are valid only for the sample of this research. In future studies, the results to be obtained in studies to be carried out in wider and different research universes are important in terms of making a more general evaluation. At the same time, research that will be revised in the context of personality, social and organizational culture can reveal valuable findings for the literature.

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