

## Servant Leadership and Faculty Loyalty Nexus; Mediating Role of Faculty Trust

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### Abstract

*The higher education sector, particularly in Pakistan, is facing intense pressures that could drain its competence and thwart its ability to meet growing stakeholder demands. Given the myriad of complex problems faced by higher education, it is difficult to imagine that an administrator of any level could be more effective without engaging in servant leadership. The purpose of present study was to verify the impact of servant leadership on employee's loyalty and the mediating effect of employees trust on this relationship. Data were collected from faculty members of private sector universities located in Peshawar. The participants rated perceived servant leadership style of their managers in the university and their own level of trust in leadership and loyalty using existing measures. The findings concluded a positive and significant influence of servant leadership on employees' loyalty. The employee trust partially mediated the relationship between servant leadership and employee loyalty. The outcome is likely to be helpful for management of higher education to revamp their strategy regarding hiring and retention of managers.*

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Employee Loyalty, Employee Trust, Higher Education

### Introduction

Given the societal need for higher education (HE) to be effective, it is imperative to study variables of importance in the context of organizational effectiveness. In today's global environment, the HE sector in particular is facing mounting pressures that further drain its competences and prevent its ability to meet growing stakeholders' demands. Making employees loyal and committed is one of today's most challenging tasks for organizations. Numerous ways are suggested to tackle such issues amongst which leadership style is a standpoint; as leadership styles express the association of leaders and employees (Ingram *et al.*, 2005). According to Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander (2006) employees' turnover is significantly affected by leadership style. They further suggested that employees choose to leave when they realize their leader is not trustworthy. Brashear, Bellenger, and Boles (2006) argued that leaders who nurture pleasant affiliation by promoting subordinates will efficiently improve their organizational commitment and loyalty.

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## **Background**

The old-fashioned leadership style in Pakistan is top-down that demonstrates a superior command style. However, the staff oriented style of leadership may enhance employees' trust that might lead to employees' loyalty. The emotional connection of servant leadership associates with the theme of employees' loyalty (Hussain, & Ali, 2012). The concept of employees' loyalty evolved from customers' loyalty - the foundation and driving force of a sustainable competitive advantage. Just like customers' loyalty, employees' loyalty is imperative for organizations' sustainable competitive advantage (Zhao *et al.*, 2012). However, it is very tricky to make employees loyal instantly. Therefore in this study "employee trust" is taken to bridge the association of servant leadership and employee's loyalty as servant leaders gain trust of employees by leading through example in crisis and vulnerable situations (Banutu-Gomez, 2007). Employees feel more comfortable with leaders they trust (Selemani, 2014). Trust is one of the most important effects of servant leadership, organizational behavior and an important determinant of leaders' behavior and communication skills (Gao, Janssen, & Shi, 2011).

Trust is the credence or confidence that one party will perform action as per expectation of another party in vulnerable conditions (Anderson, & Narus, 1990; Morgan, & Hunt, 1994; Sanzo *et al.*, 2003). Trust is one of the most important factors for employees to work with a leader in a collaborative manner (Anantatmula, 2010). Leaders instil trust in employees through their actions, such as by serving them, delegating authority, and the amount of freedom given to employees (Redick *et al.*, 2014). For a leader it is imperative to establish trust, for it enhances commitment and employees' loyalty (Anantatmula, 2010).

## **Problem Statement**

Employees' turnover intentions and trust in the institutional leaders has become a critical issue. Employees in HE such as academic faculty members are playing a vital role. It is crucial for HE institutions to get the best human resources, train them, develop them, and encourage them to consistently perform outstanding jobs. The human resource department functions include getting the best people from the market and keeping them with the organization by making them committed and loyal (Rehman *et al.*, 2013). Hence, it is imperative for organizations to investigate how they convince individuals to remain with the organization. Plentiful research work is available on the association of leadership styles, employee commitment, employee performance, and employee satisfaction etc. (Ding *et al.*, 2012s; Ngambi, 2011). However, there seems little effort in exploring the linkage among the servant leadership, faculty' trust, and loyalty especially in HE context. This is what constitutes the basis and purpose of this study with special reference to private universities.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To understand the relation between servant leadership style and faculty' loyalty in private universities of Peshawar.
2. To understand how servant leadership style determines trust of faculty members in private universities in Peshawar.
3. To examine the effect of faculty trust on loyalty.
4. To examine the intervening effect of faculty' trust between the relation of servant leadership and faculty loyalty.

## **Literature Review**

### **Leadership**

Rimes (2011) defined leadership as an art of influencing people towards organizational goals and argued that leadership exists in the shape of aims and relationships, and provides vision to the organization and its people. Leaders instil trust and confidence in their followers that makes them remain loyal and committed to the organization. Leaders possess many characteristics and among them, the inspirational aspect is one of the best aspects to motivate followers (Hussain & Ali, 2012).

Leadership plays a vital role in performance enhancement. Waldman, Bass, and Einsten (1987) argued that employee performance is enhanced when he/she feels comfortable with the leader. Similarly, Dierendonck (2011) associates the success of organization with leadership theories. Whereas, Collins and O'Brien (2011) argued that it is the ability of a leader to context specific appropriate leadership style.

### **Servant Leadership**

The idea of servant leadership was first proposed by Greenleaf in 1977. He proposed that to be the best leader one has to be a great servant. The concept of servant leadership has various attributes such as listening, empathy, healing, persuasion, awareness, conceptualization, commitment, stewardship, and building community (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003; Greenleaf, 2002; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Among these characteristics of servant leadership, stewardship, healing and empathy are unique as Spears and Lawrence (2002) found healing as one of the important attributes of servant leadership while, Barbuto, and Wheeler (2006) determined five attributes of servant leadership such as stewardship, healing, empathy, altruistic calling, wisdom and persuasive mapping unique.

### **Servant Leadership In higher Education**

Like other service oriented firms, servant leadership is equally important for HE institutions because of its importance for learning and cooperation. Drury (2005) argued that servant leaders' primary intention includes the enhancement of followers. In HE

context this means that servant leaders emphasize on the development of the faculty members. Cerit (2009) found that servant leadership is highly correlated with job satisfaction in HE context. Similarly, Scardino (2013) evaluated the role of servant leadership in education while adopting the attributes proposed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) and found a strong correlation of servant leadership with emotional healing. Likewise, Al-Mahdy, Harthi and El-Din (2016) measured servant leadership using the scale developed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) while determining its impact on employees' job satisfaction in Oman Schools and found it a reliable scale. Given the myriad of complex problem faced by HE, it is difficult to imagine that an administrator of any level could be more effective without engaging servant leadership.

### **Employees Loyalty**

Emotional connection of servant leadership is associated with the theme of employees' loyalty. The concept of employees' loyalty evolved from customers' loyalty, the foundation and driving force of a sustainable competitive advantage. Just like customers' loyalty, employees' loyalty is imperative for sustainable competitive advantage of organizations (Zhao *et al.*, 2012). It is considered as one of the important and effective business strategy (Hamid *et al.*, 2013). It is a multi-dimensional variable such as active and passive loyalty (Ganesh, Arnold & Reynolds, 2000); repurchase intentions and recommendation (Rauyruen, & Miller, 2007); repurchase and advocacy (Fullerton, 2005). Kumar and Shah (2004) also proposed behavior and attitude as important aspects of loyalty. The current research will focus on behavior and attitudinal loyalty because these attributes cover the behavioral as well as the affection aspects towards the organization.

### **Employees Trust**

Trust is an important outcome of servant leadership and organizational behavior (Gao, Janssen, & Shi, 2011). It is a belief or confidence that one party will perform action as per expectations of the other party in vulnerable conditions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sanzo *et al.*, 2003). Trust motivates employees that enhance their performance more than expectations (Moran & Hoy, 2000). Gao, Janssen, and Shi (2011) claimed that trust is one of the primary factors between a leader and followers. They suggested that employees who trust their leaders are more loyal and committed.

Various aspects of trust have been presented by numerous scholars over time, such as competency (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), openness (Gabarro, 1987), concern and reliability (Mishra & Eich, 1992). Trust has fascinated attention in HE. It is considered one of the significant factors in HE (Macfarlane, 2009). Gibbs (2007) argued that people demand trust in vulnerable conditions and he directly related this with university entrance because HE provides support to people in reaching the boundary of

what is known to what might be knowable. Similarly, Jachowicz (2016) contended the importance of faculty and their immediate supervisor's relationship. He further confirmed the significant association of interpersonal trust of faculty members and leaders.

### **Servant Leadership and Employees Loyalty**

Faculty loyalty evolved from the concept of customers' loyalty. According to Zhao *et al.* (2012) employee's loyalty is very crucial for producing loyal customers. Servant leadership through its attributes serve employees that leads to emotional bonding. Liden *et al.* (2008) found a significant impact of servant leadership on employees' commitment and loyalty. Similarly, Jaramillo *et al.* (2009) concluded in their study on 501 full time sales staff that servant leadership improves commitment and affectively reduces employees' turnover intentions. Sokoll involved 207 full-time faculty members in her study conducted at a University in Southern region of USA and found that servant leadership has an optimistic impact on faculty commitment and loyalty (Sokoll, 2014). It is believed that employees who get encouraging treatment are likely to stay with the organization as they perceive that leaders attitude towards employee concerns add to employee's concern (Joseph & Winston, 2005). Hence, it is assumed from the above discussion that servant leaders positively affect faculty loyalty ( $H_1$ ).

### **Servant Leadership and Faculty Trust**

Trust is an important variable and has a significant association with servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Employees' trust and commitment are known as important outcomes of servant leadership in organizational behavior and leadership literature (Gao, Janssen, & Shi, 2011). Servant leaders make a situation where their followers develop trust in them in light of the fact that in this condition subordinates feel acknowledged and can gain from their mistakes (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The author further expressed that servant leaders empower their followers and appreciate them when they do their job successfully. Chinomona, Mashiloane, and Pooe (2013) proposed trust as an important determinant of leaders' behavior and communication skills. Banutu-Gomez (2004) argued that employees trust servant leaders since they care in vulnerable situation. Numerous researchers such as Joseph & Winston (2005) found a significant role of servant leadership in imparting trust among employees. Sokoll (2014) found in her study that employees' trust is significantly influenced by servant leadership. Therefore, the current study hypothesized that the followers trust their leaders due to servant leadership. In the light of preceding discussion it is assumed that servant leaders have an optimistic impact on faculty trust ( $H_2$ ).

### **Faculty's Trust and Loyalty**

Previous studies suggest that trust has a significant role in building customers' loyalty (Kaur, Sharma, & Mahajan, 2012; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Trust has a great

influence in making employees loyal towards leadership and organization. Malinchak (2010) argued that employees' loyalty can be achieved by educating employees and creating a trustworthy environment. Fleming and Asplund (2007) conditioned employees' loyalty to leaders' role by instilling trust and confidence. Matzler and Renzl (2006) proposed trust as one of the important factors while making employees' loyal. Similarly, Boonlertvanich (2019) argued that the greater the level of trust the greater impact would be on employees' loyalty. Hence, it can be assumed that faculty which trusts its leaders tends to be more loyal towards its leaders/organization (H<sub>3</sub>).

### **Servant Leadership, Faculty Trust and Loyalty**

Preceding research shows a significant association of servant leadership commitment and loyalty (Liden *et al.*, 2008). Further, Jaramillo *et al.* (2009) added that employees' turnover intention significantly reduces with servant leadership. Whereas, Banutu-Gomez (2004) found trust and servant leadership significantly associated with each other. Likewise, Sokoll (2014) found in her study a positive significant impact of servant leadership on employees' trust. Trust on the other hand has a great influence in making employees loyal towards leadership and organization. Further, Malinchak (2010) claimed that employee loyalty can be accomplished by educating employees and creating a trustworthy environment. Fleming and Asplund (2007) argued that the leader has a significant role in imparting trust in employees that eventually leads to loyalty. Servant leaders create an environment that encourages trust in followers who in return remain with the leader/organization (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Keeping in view the above discussion, it is assumed that servant leaders instil trust in followers that will lead to loyalty (H<sub>4</sub>).

### **Rationale of the Study**

It is crucial for HE institutions to get the best human resources from the environment, train them, develop them, and encourage them to consistently perform outstanding jobs. For organizations to be successful, it is very important to keep valuable individuals. Hence, it is imperative for organizations to investigate how they convince individuals to remain with the organization (Rehman *et al.*, 2013). Various authors have worked on the association of leadership style, employees' commitment, employees' performance, and employees' satisfaction. Such as Goh and Low (2013) observed the impression of servant leadership on organizational commitment through trust as a mediator. Khan *et al.* (2015) identified the power of servant leadership on faculty loyalty in HE. Similarly, Chinomona, Mashiloane and Poe (2013) worked on the association of servant leadership and faculty trust with organizational commitment as a mediator. Akbari *et al.* (2014), on the other hand, tested the mediating role of job involvement between servant leadership and organizational commitment. Likewise, McCann, Graves

and Cox (2014) evaluated the impact of servant leadership on employees’ satisfaction and employees’ performance in Rural Community Hospitals. Ngambi (2011) verified the impact of leadership on employees’ morale in HE. Ding *et al.* (2012) verified the intervening role of employees’ satisfaction between the association of servant leadership and employees’ loyalty. Plentiful research is available on servant leadership, employees’ satisfaction, performance, and loyalty. However, limited literature is available on the association of servant leadership and faculty loyalty in HE. Similarly, efforts to test faculty trust as a mediator between the relationship of servant leadership and faculty loyalty in higher educational setup is equal to naught. The current study is an effort to fill that gap.

**Operational Definitions and Conceptual Model**

**Servant Leadership:** Greenleaf (1977) defined servant leadership as “serving others”. The current study has focused on the Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) model as the base model for measuring servant leadership with five attributes such as “Altruistic Calling, Emotional Healing, Wisdom, Persuasive Mapping and Organizational Stewardship”.

**Faculty Loyalty:** This concept evolved from customers’ loyalty, the foundation and driving force of a sustainable competitive advantage. Numerous authors’ defined loyalty differently, however the researcher for the current study has focused on the combination of “Attitudinal Loyalty and Behavior Loyalty” of Kumar and Shah (2004).

**Faculty Trust:** Trust is a belief or confidence that one party will perform actions as per the expectations of another party in vulnerable condition (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Sanzo *et al.*, 2003).

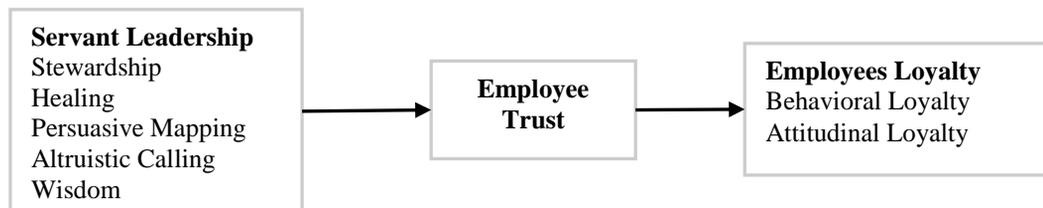


Fig. 1: *Conceptual Model of the Study*

**Hypotheses**

- H<sub>1</sub>: Servant leadership has a significant positive effect on faculty loyalty*
- H<sub>2</sub>: Servant leadership has a significant positive correlation with faculty trust*
- H<sub>3</sub>: Faculty trust has a significant positive effect on faculty loyalty*
- H<sub>4</sub>: Faculty trust mediates the relationship between servant leadership and faculty loyalty*

## Research Methodology

### Population and Sample

This study engaged faculty members of private sector universities situated in Peshawar to investigate the perceived role of their leaders and its impact on loyalty. Furthermore, it took faculty trust as a mediating variable to evaluate the indirect effect of servant leadership on faculty loyalty.

Probability sampling approach and “stratified random sampling” technique was adopted for data collection. The questionnaires were distributed under stratified random sampling using disproportionate method to collect the responses from the respondents on a pre-planned questionnaire. The stratification was done due to the different levels of faculty members (e.g. Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Full Professor). The total population of this study was 2000 faculty members (Universities’ websites) of different private universities in Peshawar, 334 questionnaires were circulated after finding the exact sample size by using the Slovin’s formula (Pagoso & Montana, 1985).

### Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from the faculty members of private universities of Peshawar on a questionnaire consisting of existing measures using the 5-Point Likert scale.

### Instrumentation

For the current study, servant leadership scale is adopted from Barbuto and Wheeler (2006). Servant leadership is determined through five attributes proposed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) and contains 23 items. The questions asked regarding the Altruistic, Emotional Healing, Wisdom, Persuasive mapping and organizational stewardship attributes of servant leadership. Likewise, employees’ loyalty scale of Foster and Cadogan (2000) was used with 6 items to measure faculty loyalty for the present study. The questions asked to measure faculty are limited to the behavioral and attitudinal aspects of loyalty. Whereas faculty’ trust is measured by a scale developed by Alrubaiee and Alnazer (2010), comprising of 9 items. The questions asked to measure faculty trust include “my supervisor has high integrity”.

## Findings and Analysis

### Sample Characteristics

All respondents in this study were faculty members aged between 22 and 60 years. Majority of the respondents were well qualified: Master 111, M.Phil 129 and PhD 35. Male respondents were 195 and females were 80. In terms of position: professors 20, associate professors’ 25, assistant professors 68, lecturers 80 and junior lecturers 15.

Table 1: *Sample Characteristics (n=275)*

	Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	195	70.9	70.9	70.9
	Female	80	29.1	29.1	100.0
Age	22-25	39	14.2	14.2	14.2
	26-30	94	34.2	34.2	48.4
	31-35	67	24.4	24.4	72.7
	36-40	48	17.5	17.5	90.2
	41 and Above	27	9.8	9.8	100.0
Qualification	Master	111	40.4	40.4	40.4
	M.Phil	129	46.9	46.9	87.3
	PhD	35	12.7	12.7	100.0
Experience	1yr - 2yrs	80	29.1	29.1	29.1
	3yrs - 5yrs	103	37.5	37.5	66.5
	6yrs - 9yrs	86	31.3	31.3	97.8
	10+	6	2.2	2.2	100.0
Position	Junior Lecturer	30	11	11	11
	Lecturer	150	54.5	54.5	65.5
	Assistant Professor	50	18	18	83.5
	Associate Professor	25	9	9	92.5
	Professor	20	7.5	7.5	100
<b>Total for each category</b>		<b>275</b>			

### Reliability and Validity of Measures

The descriptive statistics and reliability of scales are shown in Table 2. Item's reliability and internal consistency was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha. The Alpha coefficient for servant leadership was .836, for employees' trust it was .76, and for employees' loyalty it was .77 which confirmed the reliability of the items used to measure these main variables of the model under study.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability of Scales (n=275)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Alpha Coefficient
Altruistic	9.67	2.55	.82
Emotional Healing	9.51	2.46	.81
Wisdom	9.44	2.22	.82
Persuasive Mapping	6.13	1.57	.82
Stewardship	13.37	2.93	.82
Trust	29.52	5.15	.76
Attitudinal Loyalty	10.26	2.26	.73
Behavioral Loyalty	9.74	2.26	.73
Servant Leadership	48.15	8.37	.82
Loyalty	29.71	4.70	.77

The instruments were validated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS. All the models were first examined individually and then the overall measurement model. After the analysis, it was found that all the models indicated good fit confirming validity of the instrument as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: *Validity of the Measures*

Model	$\chi^2$	P	DF	CMIN/DF	CFI	RMSEA
Servant Leadership	9.12	.05	5	4.10	.97	.07
Employee's Trust	68.60	.00	24	2.80	.91	.09
Employee's Loyalty	7.10	.30	6	1.10	.99	.03
Measurement Model	481.00	.00	157	3.06	.75	.09

### Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis of the study, servant leadership has a significant positive effect on faculty loyalty, was tested through path analysis in AMOS. The result of path analysis found the standardized beta value of .49 significant at  $p < .001$  showing, a positive and significant effect of servant leadership on employees' loyalty (Table 4).

The second hypothesis, servant leadership has a significant positive correlation with faculty trust, was confirmed through path analysis in AMOS by getting standardized beta value of .76 significant at  $p < .001$ . This confirmed the significant positive effect of servant leadership and employees' trust (Table 4). The third hypothesis was examined after performing path analysis, and beta value of .63 at  $p < .001$  revealed that employees' trust significantly and positively affected faculty' loyalty (Table 4).

Lastly, the mediating influence of faculty' trust between the association of servant leadership and faculty loyalty was determined through path analysis. After performing test it was found that the value of beta -.01 reduced from .49 in the direct effect, illustrates the mediating effect of faculty trust. However, the p-values suggest that the association in both (direct and indirect effect) were found significant. Hence, it is unfolded that faculty trust partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and faculty loyalty (see table no 4).

Table 4: *Results of Hypotheses*

Hypotheses	Direct Effect	Mediating Effect	Results	Status
H <sub>1</sub> (SL->FL)	.49***	N/A	Significant	Accepted
H <sub>2</sub> (SL->FT)	.76***	N/A	Significant	Accepted
H <sub>3</sub> (ET->FL)	.63***	N/A	Significant	Accepted
H <sub>4</sub> (SL->FT->FL)	-.01***	.63***	Partial Mediation	Accepted

Note: SL= Servant Leadership, FL=Faculty Loyalty, FT=Faculty Trust \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Discussion

Empirical findings conclude that servant leadership positively influences faculty' loyalty in private sector HE context. The results support previous findings on servant leadership and employees' loyalty (Chang, Chiu & Chen, 2010; Lisbijanto & Budiyanto, 2014; Riketta & Dick, 2005).

The second hypothesis was designed to know how servant leadership effects faculty' trust in Private Universities of Peshawar. The said hypothesis was examined using path analysis which revealed a significant role of servant leadership in developing

trust in employees. This finding is consistent with prior research by Yilmaz and AltinKurt (2012).

The third proposition was designed to examine the association of faculty trust and loyalty in private universities of Peshawar. Path analysis was performed for examining the said association. Empirical findings revealed that trust positively influences employees' loyalty. Trust is one of the important factors and effect of servant leadership in leadership and behavior literature. The employees who trust their leaders feel more attached towards organization (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The findings also support the previous research studies (Reynolds & Arnold 2006; Babin *et al.* 2005; Ding *et al.*, 2012; McCann, Graves, & Cox, 2014; Lisbijanto & Budiyo, 2014).

The mediating effect of employees' trust between the relationship of servant leadership and employees loyalty was also examined using path analysis. Findings revealed that trust partially mediates the association of servant leadership and employees' loyalty. It concludes that servant leaders impart trust in employees' that further leads to loyalty. Past literature on this mediated association is scarce. These findings support the results of Yilmaz and AltinKurt (2012) on relationship of servant leadership with employee trust and also support the findings of Lisbijanto and Budiyo (2014) on association between trust and employees loyalty.

### **Conclusion**

The primary purpose of study was to examine the effect of servant leadership on faculty loyalty directly and through faculty trust. A total of 334 adopted questionnaires were distributed among the faculty members of private universities in KP through stratified random sampling. Data were verified through CFA and hypotheses were developed with the help of theoretical and empirical literature. Hypotheses were examined through path analysis in AMOS. Results confirmed a positive direct effect of servant leadership on faculty loyalty. Moreover, the mediating role of trust has been verified through path analysis and it was found that trust partially mediates the association of servant leadership and faculty loyalty.

### **Implications**

This study contributes theoretically by adding literature regarding relationships among servant leadership, trust, and loyalty. It verifies that trust partially mediates the link between servant leadership and employees' loyalty. This study will provide the administrators an understanding on fostering more effective leadership practices like servant leadership. The findings of current study would also be useful for management of higher educational institutions to revamp their strategies regarding hiring managers and leaders.

## Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

The current study is limited to the five attributes of servant leadership such as altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping and organizational stewardship. Future research may consider inclusion of other attributes while measuring servant leadership. Similarly, loyalty could be measured through other attributes, such as word of mouth, retention and advocacy. Moreover, Trust may also be verified as a moderating variable. Further, this model may also be extended to public sector universities, comparative context of both public and private sector universities and other sectors of economy as well.

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