

Cruciality of Servant Leadership Behaviours among Departmental Heads At Malaysian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine staff's perceptions of the cruciality of servant leadership behaviours among department heads at private tertiary institutions. The study was limited to 56 administrative and teaching staff from three private colleges in Sabah and Sarawak as well as an Australian-based university in Sarawak. The online-administered Servant Leadership Questionnaire, developed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), was utilized to collect data for this study which were later analysed using SPSS 26.0. The Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant differences in terms of gender, while the Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed no significant differences in terms of age and qualifications. Results of a one-sample Wilcoxon test indicated that, with the exception of two servant leadership items, all items were significant at the hypothesized value of 3.5. This suggests that, for the majority of items, staff consistently chose the higher scores, while there were two servant leadership items that differed from this trend. Additionally, analysis of the data revealed that the mean score for servant leadership behaviours was 99.8 for males and 94.9 for females, out of a total score of 115. These results indicate that staff generally perceived the importance of servant leadership among department heads to be high. Overall, this study found that 92.9 percent of staff indicated that it was very crucial or crucial for department heads to be aware of what was happening, while 91.1 percent indicated that it was very crucial or crucial for the department heads to be able to anticipate the consequences of their decisions. Approximately 92.9 percent of the participants indicated that the department heads also should demonstrate a high level of awareness of what was happening within the organization. Additionally, 89.3 percent of participants felt that it was important for the department heads to ensure that the organisation functions as a community.

Keywords: 1. cruciality of servant leadership 2. department heads 3. private tertiary institutions in Malaysia

Introduction and Background

Greenleaf (1991, 2002) believed that a leader should be a servant first, starting with the desire to serve and then making a conscious choice to lead. Servant leaders focus on meeting the highest priority needs of others, encouraging them to become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous individuals, and even developing into servant leaders themselves. The ultimate goal of a servant leader is to create a caring and effective society (Crippen, 2012; DePree, 2001; Greenleaf, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1998). According to Greenleaf (1991, 2002), servant leaders are highly subtle in their approach; hence, others often see the final outcome but rarely notice the cause.

According to Greenleaf (1998), servant leadership is characterised by ten qualities, with the first three being active listening, empathy and healing power (Crippen, 2012; DePree, 2001; Greenleaf, 1998). Firstly, servant leaders practice active listening and reflection, paying attention to both what is said and unsaid. As effective communicators, they practice

active listening not only to themselves but also to others. Secondly, they show empathy toward others, putting themselves in their employees' shoes to show understanding and support. This empathy promotes trust, as employees often develop more positive self-esteem when their leaders empathise with them and accept them for what they are while appraising their job performance. Thirdly, servant leaders demonstrate the potential to heal themselves and others. They are health-conscious and highly aware that adverse events can affect people's health. Moreover, they are willing to change and engage in activities that promote better health. As a result, they often introduce healthy support systems that modify behaviour, which may involve an individual, a team or the entire institution.

The next three qualities of servant leadership are general awareness, persuasion and conceptualisation (Crippen, 2012; DePree, 2001; Greenleaf, 1998). Firstly, servant leaders develop general awareness through self-reflection, feedback from others, and openness to learning. They also link their knowledge with specific actions. Secondly, servant leaders possess persuasive power to influence and convince others while also allowing space for others to intuitively believe or act. Thirdly, conceptualisation enables servant leaders to nurture their abilities to turn dreams into reality. They rely on the past and present to set goals, while using the future to evaluate, analyse and foresee contingencies. As skilled conceptualisers, they act as persuaders and relationship builders who strive to guide and sustain others.

The last four qualities of servant leaders are foresight, stewardship, commitment to human development and community growth (Crippen, 2012; DePree, 2001; Greenleaf, 1998). Firstly, they possess the ability to predict the outcome of a situation, demonstrating their capability to lead. Their rational foresight resembles a running internal computer with intersecting series of random inputs. They often compare current events with past projections, while simultaneously projecting future events with uncertainty. Secondly, equipped with strong stewardship, servant leaders ensure that all staff hold their institution in trust. They care for the institution's wellbeing and serving the needs of all institutional members for society's greater good. Additionally, their stewardship is based on accountability, characterised by the intrinsic motivation to serve. Thirdly, servant leaders show a commitment to people's individual growth, fuelled by the desire to help others attain their fullest potential. Their effectiveness is reflected primarily among followers who are encouraged to reach greater heights, while engaging in lifelong learning and sociocultural development. Lastly, servant leaders promote community progress through social services, financial investments and communal care.

Mitau (2015) summarised that servant leadership is a feasible approach to help organisations achieve global citizenship, while tackling tough global problems through value-lasting innovations. Tertiary institutions can only achieve long-lasting success through progressive thinking and positive attitudes toward stakeholders and society at large. Educational leaders must treat all staff as internal customers in return for their loyalty and productivity. Therefore, servant leaders are particularly suited to improve staff productivity, student enrolment and research output. Their unique perspectives enable them to counter the unpredictable changes occurring in higher education within a rapidly evolving world; their universally acclaimed leadership style enables them to effectively function in vastly different organisational cultures. The socioeconomic and competitive convergence between and among tertiary institutions, as well as the interdependence of businesses, necessitates a more empathetic form of leadership. Therefore, servant leadership appears to be the most appropriate leadership model for today's workplace diversity with more flattened organisational structures.

Mitau (2015) emphasised that an over-reliance on transactional and transformational leadership styles is undesirable. Servant leadership not only provides additional theoretical perspectives, but also more comprehensive leadership in tertiary education that demands a set of moral-ethical values. While other forms of leadership primarily focus on the leader or organisation, servant leadership is particularly relevant in tertiary education as it seeks to achieve organisational goals by helping staff achieve theirs. Servant leadership reinforces the moral-ethical principles of tertiary institutions in relation to honesty, integrity, and various social concerns, while also recognizing that students, parents and other stakeholders expect more than just precepts. Furthermore, many tertiary leaders focus on social responsibility, humanitarianism and ecological sustainability to establish the tenets of the institution and to recruit quality staff and students. These new and evolving values not only help facilitate teaching and learning outcomes, but also enable tertiary institutions to enhance their global recognition, social responsiveness and commitment to environmental preservation.

On the other hand, Whitlock (2017) reaffirmed that servant leadership emphasises that the primary responsibility of leaders is not only to ensure organisation success, but also to demonstrate accountability to followers and stakeholders. Servant leaders are expected to act ethically, prioritising others and showing empathy towards others. They not only foster subordinates' professional growth and empowerment, but also strive to build a congenial work environment. Therefore, servant leadership is aligned with education since leaders must prioritize staff needs and concerns, encouraging educational leaders to align staff needs with the goal of serving. Moreover, servant leadership is synonymous with ethical leadership that encompasses the leaders' self-concept, self-awareness and interpersonal relationships. In addition to emphasising the importance of integrity, fairness and ethical practices, it also entails knowledge of educational policies, social justice and district culture. Servant leaders are conscious of the moral and legal implications of their decision and strive to practise inclusive leadership in the context of multiculturalism.

Servant leadership is effective in educational management and leadership for various reasons (Whitlock, 2017). Educational managers and leaders are primarily responsible for nurturing the institution's vision, mission and culture. As greater involvement from stakeholders often increases internal support that leads to overall success, servant leaders are often employed to meet stakeholders' needs. Furthermore, many often provide leadership training for disadvantaged youths, encouraging them to reaffirm their roots and improve their own community. As no district is entirely free from poverty, enhancing servant characteristics among youths not only benefits the educational institution but also the entire community.

According to Harappa Education (2020), although servant leadership can be defined in various ways, it is essentially a principle that ascribes the leader as a servant first. Servant leaders strive to attain higher goals with a 'serve first' attitude by guiding their teams to act first. As passionate and motivated role models, they encourage staff to behave similarly, leading by example rather than merely dictating orders. Additionally, servant leaders often use the attributes of honesty, humility and trust to define the true meaning of servant leadership. A sense of humility encourages them to acknowledge their mistakes and rectify them willingly. They often let go of their pride to actively engage with the entire institution, promoting collaboration, collegiality and holistic development among all staff members.

Furthermore, Harappa Education (2020) postulated that servant leaders often prioritize the team over themselves because service supersedes their desire for fame, recognition or rewards. They work to instil a sense of community in the institution, treating staff as a respected and nurtured family. They attempt to handle most problems independently, rather than placing pressure on their 'family' members. Unlimited by their own desire for personal recognition, servant leaders demonstrate a 'serve first' mindset. Rather than expecting staff to merely comply with orders, they work to show their team how tasks can be accomplished proactively. In short, they are willing to collaborate with subordinates, learn from mistakes and continuously improve themselves.

Review of Research Literature

Zhang, Lin and Foo (2012) investigated the preferred leadership style in the public sector and they found that servant leadership was more preferred than authoritative leadership, suggesting that servant leadership better utilizes leaders' power. Ramli and Desa (2014) conducted a study on the relationship between servant leadership and organisational commitment among 143 employees from various organisations. The findings showed a significant association between servant leadership and organisational commitment. Trust in leadership acted as a mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and organisational commitment, emphasising the importance of leadership in fostering positive job behaviour among employees. Ibrahim and Don (2014) examined the impact of servant leadership on change management in schools among 342 teachers. The findings revealed that servant leadership had a positive and significant impact on change management. Additionally, five dimensions of servant leadership significantly predicted change management, including primary subordination, ethical emotional healing, community development and subordinates' authorisation. Lastly, the predictor variables collectively accounted for 97.6 percent of the variance in change management.

Abu Bakar and McCann (2016) investigated the impact of dyadic communication agreement on the dyadic-within group level as a mediating variable between servant leadership and group organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) among 510 employees. The findings revealed that servant leadership was significantly related to leader-member dyadic communication style at the individual level. The servant leadership-group-level OCB link was also partially mediated by leader-member dyadic communication style. Additionally, Ng, Choi, and Soehod (2016) who explored the impact of servant leadership on the job withdrawal intention among 109 employees, revealed a significantly negative relationship between servant leadership and job withdrawal intention. This suggests that servant leadership may help to reduce staff attrition.

McCann and Sparks (2018) conducted a study on the relationship between servant leadership and perceptions of instructional quality among 802 university students. The findings revealed that professors scored higher means on emotional healing and persuasive mapping compared to other traits. Additionally, they tended to exhibit significantly higher levels of altruism, wisdom, organisational stewardship and performance mapping. However, the study did not observe any significant differences in the servant leadership between adjunct and full-time professors, or between male and female professors. Lastly, the study found a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and instructional quality; professors who exhibited more servant leadership attributes tended to provide better instruction.

Saleem, Zhang, Gopinath and Ahmad (2020) conducted a study on the effects of servant leadership on performance among 233 department heads at public universities. The findings showed that servant leadership significantly predicted subordinates' affective trust, organisational citizenship behaviours and task performance, with affective trust serving as a mediator of servant leadership's effect on task performance. Moreover, the findings indicated that affective trust, which is a mutual exchange of concern and care between subordinates and leader, significantly mediated the relationship between servant leadership and individual productivity. On the other hand, Elche, Ruiz-Palomino and Linuesa-Langreo (2020) examined the relationship between supervisor servant leadership and employee organisational citizenship behaviour among 343 supervisors and 835 employees. The findings revealed that supervisor servant leadership had an indirect impact on organisational citizenship behaviour, with employee empathy and group service climate serving as mediators. These findings implied that supervisors who practise servant leadership tend to enhance organisational citizenship behaviour by introducing human resources initiatives to increase employee empathy and establish a service-oriented climate.

Aboramadan, Dahleez and Hamad (2021) carried out research on the impact of servant leadership on work engagement and affective commitment among 324 academics. The findings showed significant positive correlations between servant leadership and work engagement, between servant leadership and affective commitment and between servant leadership and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement was fully mediated by job satisfaction, suggesting that servant leadership in academia fosters job satisfaction, which then boosts work engagement. Additionally, Ghasemy, Akbarzadeh and Gaskin (2022) explored the effects of two aspects of servant leadership (behaving ethically and helping subordinates succeed) on job satisfaction and community citizenship behaviour among 1,876 lecturers. The findings revealed that there are two distinct model structures at both lecturer and department levels; specifically, while both aspects of servant leadership could predict the outcome variables at the lecturer level, only ethical behaviours significantly predicted community citizenship behaviour.

Ghasemy and Frömbling (2022) conducted a study on the relationships between academics' servant leadership, affective commitment and job performance among 220 academics. The findings showed that, although both servant leadership and affective commitment were stable over time, servant leadership was the primary driver of both affective commitment and job performance. Furthermore, the relationship between servant leadership and job performance was significantly mediated by affective commitment. Ghasemy, Elwood and Nejad (2021) examined the hierarchical structure of a multidimensional servant leadership model among 430 leadership positions and 1,434 non-leadership positions. The study found significant evidence for the applicability and pertinence of nine out of ten servant leadership principles in academia, thus validating servant leadership principles in Malaysian higher education.

Eliot and Osburn,(2022) discussed how faculty's use of servant leadership can improve students' resilience, which in turn can help them better overcome adversities. Due to the academic demands, financial constraints, isolation and other campus issues, the mental health of many tertiary students has been exacerbated. These students need to use their resilience to confidently overcome challenges, while responding proactively to stress and tension. Faculty members who exhibit servant leadership traits are uniquely positioned to help develop student resilience through various means such as active listening, empathy, emotional healing and community building. As servant leaders, faculty members can practise active listening techniques in the classroom, set aside class time to "check-in" with students and discuss the stresses and pressures they may be experiencing. They can encourage students to visualise pathways to success, create learning communities within their classroom to generate peer support and model empathy in ways that students can relate to and replicate. In addition to assisting students in coping with academic stress, implementing these actions can also help them transition from campus to the real world.

The study conducted by Aboramadan et al. (2022) explored the impact of servant leadership on the extra-role behaviours (innovative work, organisational citizenship and creativity) of 309 employees at non-profit organisations. Work engagement was used as a mediator in the analysis. The findings of the study revealed a significant correlation between servant leadership and employee work engagement. This implies that employees under servant leaders tend to reciprocate by displaying positive work-related outcomes. Moreover, the people-centred approach of servant leaders tends to enhance the job and personal resources that reinforce employee work engagement. When employees perceive that their leaders prioritise their interests and show concern for their professional growth, they tend to exhibit high levels of engagement because of the reciprocal exchanges and favourable relationships that are built.

The study conducted by Swart et al. (2022) explored the impact of servant leadership on the organisational climate of 249 educators from primary and secondary private schools. The findings revealed a significant relationship between servant leadership and organisational climate, with private school leaders demonstrating servant qualities such as empowerment, stewardship, accountability and humility. In addition, private school leaders who exhibit servant leadership qualities tend to enhance organisational image, teamwork and constructive attitudes of their staff. Zada et al. (2022) conducted a study exploring the impact of servant leadership on the psychological distress experienced by 277 healthcare staff during the pandemic. The findings revealed a negative correlation between servant leadership and psychological distress, suggesting that organizations with servant leaders may be better equipped to support the mental health of their employees during challenging times. Furthermore, work engagement was found to mediate the relationship between servant leadership and psychological distress, implying that servant leadership is vital in promoting mental healthcare. This extends its practical utility to the field of psychology and crisis management. Lastly, Ghasemy and Frömbling (2022) discovered that servant leadership had a positive impact on affective commitment and job performance, with affective commitment acting as a significant mediator between academics' servant leadership and job performance.

Significance of the current study

Organisational, individual and stakeholder value creation has become a major component in Malaysian higher educational development. Therefore, the vision and mission of a tertiary institution must be synchronous with the moral-ethical and cultural values of the larger society. Although servant leadership has been widely published in Western countries, it has not been adequately explored in the context of private tertiary institutions in Malaysia. This type of leadership is still a neglected area in the Malaysian sociocultural context. Since servant leadership requires further investigation as a pragmatic model for private tertiary education in the country, there is an urgency to seek empirical evidence of existing servant leadership practices because it has the potential of becoming a viable leadership model in the current context. To address this gap, there is a need to measure its robustness in terms of local staff's attitudes toward the cruciality of servant leadership behaviours. The findings of the study will fill in the gap on the servant leadership practices among educational leaders in Malaysia.

The need to explore servant leadership in Malaysia becomes more obvious owing to cultural variances between Western and Asian countries. Leadership theories developed in the West might not be equally applicable in Malaysia due to

differences such as individualism/collectivism and power distance (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Many of the servant leadership studies that have been conducted in Western countries are more individualistic with low power distance. Sociocultural differences in an Asian setting such as Malaysia, provide justification to examine staff's perceptions of the cruciality of servant leadership within the Malaysian milieu. Examining servant leadership and its cruciality among department heads at private tertiary institutions in the country has crucial implications as it yields greater insight into how tertiary management can incorporate its components to increase leadership quality and effectiveness in an Asian context. Lastly, although there is some consensus that servant leadership has a positive impact on tertiary institutions, there is a need to produce more empirical data to establish a better operational definition of the model. This study would provide useful information on the cruciality of servant leadership as a contemporary model in private tertiary education in Malaysia.

Research questions

With the statement of problem, gap and significance of research established, the following research questions were formulated to guide the current research:

- What were the descriptive statistics of servant leadership behaviours in relation to gender, age and qualifications?
- Were there any significant differences in servant leadership by way of gender, age and qualifications?
- What were the significant servant leadership behaviours based on the hypothetical value of 3.5?
- What were the percentages of agreement in servant leadership behaviours among department heads?

Methodology

Instrument

The Servant Leadership Questionnaire designed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) was used to collect data. The authors reported its scale development and construct clarification by administering it to 388 elected officials who attended a full-day leadership training seminar. The findings indicated that the subscales of the Servant Leadership Questionnaire had reliabilities ranging from 0.68 to 0.87. Additionally, self-rated subscales showed means ranging from 2.48 to 2.98 based on a Likert scale; standard deviations were fairly consistent across the subscales, ranging from 0.49 to 0.58. The highest reported characteristics for the sample were wisdom and organizational stewardship, while persuasive mapping was the lowest reported characteristic. The subscale intercorrelations ranged from $r = 0.28$ to $r = 0.53$ for the self-versions, and from $r = 0.47$ to $r = 0.71$ for the rated versions. The highest intercorrelation for the self-version was between emotional healing and persuasive mapping, while the lowest intercorrelation was between altruistic calling and persuasive mapping. The overall model fit, indicated by the chi-square value, $\chi^2(220) = 1,410.69$, with $p = 0.0$, was the same for both versions. The resulting root mean square error of approximation was 0.010, and the normed fit index was 0.96. The non-normed fit index was 0.96, the comparative fit index was 0.96, the incremental fit index was 0.96, and the relative fit index was 0.95. Lastly, the data appeared to support the five-factor structure of the model.

Data collection and analysis

The study was limited to 56 administrative and teaching staff from three private colleges in Sabah and Sarawak, as well as a university based in Australia with a campus in Sarawak. Deans, coordinators, department heads and staff were contacted via email and invited to respond to an online questionnaire. The staff hailed from culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah and Sarawak. According to Roscoe (1975), a survey generally requires a sample size of at least 30 and should be 10 times the number of independent variables of the study. Since this study involved three independent variables (age, gender and qualifications), a sample size of 56 subjects were considered sufficient to yield reliable and valid results. The central limit theorem supports this rule of thumb, indicating that the sample was adequate for independent and identically distributed variables.

A spreadsheet was automatically generated and the collected data was analysed using SPSS 26.0 to address the research questions. Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether significant differences existed in staff's perceptions of servant leadership behaviours among department heads by gender, while the Kruskal-Wallis H test was

used to determine whether significant differences existed in staff’s perceptions of servant leadership behaviours among department heads by age and qualifications. A one-sample Wilcoxon test was performed to determine the significance of the servant leadership items based on the hypothesized value of 3.5.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 presents the demographic information of staff pertaining to age, gender and qualifications. Male staff comprised 46 percent, while 54 percent were female. Approximately 25 percent of the staff were aged 25 to 35, 29 percent were aged 36 to 45, 32 percent were aged 46 to 55 and 14 percent were aged 56 to 60. Approximately seven percent of the staff hold a diploma, 39 percent held a bachelor’s degree, 29 percent held a master’s degree and 25 percent held a doctorate. The results indicated that the mean score of servant leadership behaviours was 99.8 for male staff and 94.9 for female staff (out of a full score of 115), suggesting that staff perceived the cruciality of servant leadership among department heads as high (see Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of servant leadership according to independent variables

Gender	Percentage frequency	Mean
Male	46.42%	99.77
Female	53.57%	94.93
Age	Percentage frequency	Mean
25-35	25.00%	94.29
36-45	28.57%	102.38
46-55	32.14%	94.28
56-60	14.29%	98.38
Qualifications	Percentage frequency	Mean
Diploma	7.14%	93.00
Bachelors	39.29%	93.45
Masters	28.57%	99.94
PhD	25.00%	101.07

Very high = 104-115; High = 92-103; Average = 81-91; Low = < 81

The Mann-Whitney U test for the servant leadership items across gender revealed significant differences for only three items: “pays attention if staff had a personal trauma”, “believes that the organisation should play a moral-ethical role in society”, “sees the organisation for its potential to contribute to society” and “is preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in future”(see Table 2).

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U test for servant leadership items across gender

Item	p-value
Puts staff’s best interests ahead of his/her own	0.923
Does everything he/she can to serve staff	0.388
Sacrifices own interests to meet staff’s needs	0.654
Goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet staff’s needs	0.925
Pays attention if staff had a personal trauma	0.007**
Helps staff deal with emotional issues	0.359
Able to help staff to heal emotionally	0.059
Could help staff mend hard feelings	0.162
Alert to what’s happening	0.608
Able to anticipate the consequences of decisions	0.205
Shows great awareness of what is going on	0.228

Seems in touch with what's happening	0.526
Seems to know what is going to happen	0.633
Offers compelling reasons to get staff to do things	0.095
Encourages staff to dream big about the organisation	0.231
Is very persuasive	0.859
Is good at convincing staff to do things	0.512
Is gifted when it comes to persuading staff	0.286
Believes that the organisation should play a moral-ethical role in society	0.004***
Believes that the organisation should function as a community	0.066
Sees the organisation for its potential to contribute to society	0.036 *
Encourages staff to have a community spirit at the workplace	0.292
Is preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in future	0.018*
Overall	0.157

*** $p < 0.005$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

The Kruskal-Wallis H test for the servant leadership items across age showed no significant differences for any of the items (see Table 3).

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis H test for the servant leadership items across age

Item	<i>p</i> -value
Puts staff's best interests ahead of his/her own	0.827
Does everything he/she can to serve staff	0.829
Sacrifices own interests to meet staff's needs	0.324
Goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet staff's needs	0.892
Pays attention if staff had a personal trauma	0.098
Help staff deal with emotional issues	0.142
Able to help staff to heal emotionally	0.091
Could help staff mend hard feelings	0.060
Alert to what's happening	0.541
Able to anticipate the consequences of decisions	0.448
Shows great awareness of what is going on	0.298
Seems in touch with what's happening	0.907
Seems to know what is going to happen	0.520
Offers compelling reasons to get staff to do things	0.245
Encourages staff to dream big about the organisation	0.619
Is very persuasive	0.535
Is good at convincing staff to do things	0.483
Is gifted when it comes to persuading staff	0.921
Believes that the organisation should play a moral-ethical role in society	0.260
Believes that the organisation should function as a community	0.353
Sees the organisation for its potential to contribute to society	0.856
Encourages staff to have a community spirit at the workplace	0.094
Is preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in future	0.211
Overall	0.210

The Kruskal-Wallis H test for the servant leadership items across qualifications revealed significant differences for only two items: “puts staff best interests ahead of his or her own” and “does everything he or she can to serve staff” (see Table 4).

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis H test for the servant leadership items across qualifications

Item	p-value
Puts staff's best interests ahead of their own	0.028*
Does everything he/she can to serve staff	0.026*
Sacrifices own interests to meet staff's needs	0.326
Goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet staff's needs	0.407
Pays attention if staff had a personal trauma	0.214
Helps staff deal with emotional issues	0.093
Able to help staff to heal emotionally	0.421
Could help staff mend hard feelings	0.366
Alert to what's happening	0.686
Able to anticipate the consequences of decisions	0.867
Shows great awareness of what is going on	0.899
Seems in touch with what's happening	0.809
Seems to know what is going to happen	0.369
Offers compelling reasons to get staff to do things	0.909
Encourages staff to dream big about the organisation	0.826
Is very persuasive	0.137
Is good at convincing staff to do things	0.285
Is gifted when it comes to persuading staff	0.711
Believes that the organisation should play a moral-ethical role in society	0.346
Believes that the organisation should function as a community	0.564
Sees the organisation for its potential to contribute to society	0.461
Encourages staff to have a community spirit at the workplace	0.193
Is preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in future	0.340
Overall	0.268

* $p < 0.05$

The results from the one-sample Wilcoxon test indicated that the median values for each of the items were significantly greater than the hypothesized value of 3.5, with the exception of the item “sacrifices his or her own interests to meet staff’s needs.” (see Table 5).

Table 5: One-sample Wilcoxon test based on the hypothesized value of 3.5

Item	<i>p</i> -value	Conclusion
Puts staff's best interests ahead of their own	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Does everything he/she can to serve staff	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Sacrifices his/her own interests to meet staff's needs	0.072	Not significantly different from the hypothesized value
Goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet staff's needs	0.009	Not significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Pays attention if staff had a personal trauma	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Helps staff deal with emotional issues	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Able to help staff to heal emotionally	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Could help staff mend hard feelings	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Alert to what's happening	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Able to anticipate the consequences of decisions	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Shows great awareness of what is going on	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Seems in touch with what's happening	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Seems to know what is going to happen	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Offers compelling reasons to get staff to do things	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Encourages staff to dream big about the organisation	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Is very persuasive	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Is good at convincing staff to do things	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Is gifted when it comes to persuading staff	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Believes that the organisation should play a moral-ethical role in society	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Believes that the organisation should function as a community	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Sees the organisation for its potential to contribute to society	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Encourages staff to have a community spirit at the workplace	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
Is preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in future	<i>p</i> < 0.001*	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value

**p* < 0.001

Percentages of agreement

The percentages of agreement (very crucial or crucial) were collapsed to gain an overall understanding of staff perceptions regarding the degree of cruciality of servant leadership behaviours among department heads. Approximately 92.9 percent of staff indicated that it was very crucial or crucial for department heads to be alert to what is happening, while another 91.1 percent reported that it was very crucial or crucial for them to be able to anticipate the consequences of their decisions. Approximately 92.9 percent of the staff indicated that department heads should demonstrate a high awareness for what is going on, while another 89.3 percent expressed that department head should ensure that the organisation functions as a community. Overall, the majority of staff demonstrated positive attitudes toward the cruciality of servant leadership (see Table 6).

Table 6: Percentages of agreement on the cruciality of servant leadership

Degree of cruciality	1	2	3	4	5
Puts staff's best interests ahead of his/her own	0.0%	1.8%	21.4%	32.1%	44.6%
Does everything he/she can to serve staff	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	39.3%	39.3%
Sacrifices own interests to meet staff's needs	1.8%	5.4%	35.7%	32.1%	25.0%
Goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet staff's needs	3.6%	5.4%	25.0%	35.7%	30.4%
Pays attention if staff had a personal trauma	3.6%	0.0%	10.7%	44.6%	41.1%
Helps staff deal with emotional issues	3.6%	0.0%	16.1%	39.3%	41.1%
Able to help staff to heal emotionally	1.8%	1.8%	14.3%	41.1%	41.1%
Could help staff mend hard feelings	3.6%	3.6%	16.1%	37.5%	39.3%
Alert to what's happening	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	37.5%	55.4%
Able to anticipate the consequences of decisions	0.0%	0.0%	8.9%	39.3%	51.8%
Shows great awareness of what is going on	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	39.3%	53.6%
Seems in touch with what's happening	0.0%	1.8%	12.5%	33.9%	51.8%
Seems to know what is going to happen	0.0%	1.8%	10.7%	44.6%	42.9%
Offers compelling reasons to get staff to do things	0.0%	0.0%	16.1%	41.1%	42.9%
Encourages staff to dream big about the organisation	0.0%	3.6%	14.3%	37.5%	44.6%
Is very persuasive	0.0%	1.8%	16.1%	46.4%	35.7%
Is good at convincing staff to do things	0.0%	1.8%	23.2%	39.3%	35.7%
Is gifted when it comes to persuading staff	0.0%	3.6%	26.8%	33.9%	35.7%
Believes that the organisation should play a moral-ethical role in society	0.0%	1.8%	10.7%	30.4%	57.1%
Believes that the organisation should function as a community	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%	35.7%	53.6%
Sees the organisation for its potential to contribute to society	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	37.5%	50.0%
Encourages staff to have a community spirit at the workplace	0.0%	1.8%	14.3%	44.6%	39.3%
Is preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in future	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	32.1%	55.4%

5 = Very crucial; 4 = Crucial; 3 = Uncertain; 2 = Not crucial; 1 = Not crucial at all

In summary, the current study found no significant differences in staff's perceptions regarding the cruciality of servant leadership behaviours among department heads at Malaysian tertiary institutions. Similarly, Melchar and Bosco (2010) who conducted a study on employees' perceptions of servant-leader behaviours among mid-level service managers of three automobile dealerships, also found no significant differences in terms of gender, age, education and length of service, suggesting that servant leadership was effective for most employees irrespective of their demographics. Likewise, Barbuto and Gifford (2010) who studied staff's perceptions of servant leadership among male and female leaders in county government offices, found that both genders were equally effective in utilising the communal and agentic dimensions of servant leadership, thus refuting prevailing gender role stereotypes in leadership.

Recommendations and Limitations

Considering the significance of moral-ethical values in the rapidly evolving and complex academic environment in Malaysia, as well as the need for more holistic approaches to higher education leadership, it is recommended that private tertiary institutions incorporate servant leadership principles to reflect a more comprehensive academic leadership mode. Mittal and Dorfman (2012) who analysed the effectiveness of aspects of servant leadership across cultures, found that in Asian cultures, empathy and humility were more strongly endorsed compared to European cultures. Moreover, Murari and Gupta (2012) discovered that characteristics of servant leadership such as foresight, persuasion, awareness and stewardship had a significant impact on employee empowerment. The servant leadership traits of stewardship, persuasion

and conceptualisation had a positive impact on factors such as organisational commitment, work environment satisfaction, role satisfaction and job involvement, ultimately leading to higher organisational performance and greater competitive advantage.

Salgado and Dabdoub (2022) recommended several ways in which educational leaders can practise servant leadership. Firstly, educational leaders need to focus on building a community by establishing positive relationships. Even leaders who are used to being authoritarian figures have to aim to interact with the entire institution as equal members of the community, regardless of their roles and responsibilities. Educational leaders should remember people they interact with, possess their own affections, thoughts, interests and educational background that might influence their behaviour. It is important for educational leaders not just to tolerate, but to accept and embrace differences as being worthy. By interacting with their staff in a more humane manner, leaders can build a community to replace the bureaucratic system. Secondly, educational leaders can develop effective communication skills and positive attitudes to establish favourable relationships. For example, they should actively listen to their staff, provide them with a voice and welcome their opinions. In addition to encouraging staff to freely voice their opinions, leaders themselves can ask questions as empathetic and active listeners. Changing how they communicate helps create healthy relationships that can have a cascading effect from teachers to students, and onto parents and other stakeholders.

Thirdly, educational leaders should increase awareness of their mission and vision to better espouse their motivations to the general community. In addition to highlighting their purpose statement and the ethos of their institution, they also need to exhibit intrinsic motivation so that their institution will flourish according to the principles of servant leadership. Lastly, educational leaders can develop a new educational culture by removing outmoded practices within the organisation. They must be able to relate to and communicate with the community in a socially and culturally acceptable manner. Additionally, they should be capable of creating an authentic community with staff to implement innovative programs and curricula that will bring change and progress to the teaching and learning community (Salgado and Dabdoub, 2022).

Although this study yielded some interesting findings, the generalisability of the results may be limited. One limitation of this study is that servant leadership was measured using a self-reported scale, which some responses could have been influenced by social desirability bias that might have increased the mean scores. Further, this study only examined significant differences in staff's perceptions of servant leadership; future research should seek evidence for causal relationships between variables. Lastly, the study was limited to a small sample within the cultural context of two Malaysian states. To obtain more accurate information concerning the cultural sensitivity and robustness of the study, cross-cultural research involving a larger sample size would be necessary.

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