

Chapter 4

Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction: A Qualitative Study in the Chinese Healthcare Context

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to investigate the association between servant leadership and job satisfaction in a healthcare-specific environment. The study uses the method of narrative enquiry within the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis to capture the lived experience. Interviews were conducted with health professionals in a public hospital in China. The study's findings suggest that servant leadership contributes positively to health professionals' job satisfaction. The study provides insight into practical strategies for healthcare managers to optimize healthcare management. Although there are a few earlier studies that link servant leadership with job satisfaction, there has been an absence of research in the healthcare context.

INTRODUCTION

The healthcare management literature suggests that the leadership styles of managers directly affect the job satisfaction of their health professional subordinates (Morrison, Jones, & Fuller, 1997; Shanafelt et al., 2005). In addition, managers' leadership styles influence health professionals' performance and effectiveness (Casida & Pinto-Zipp, 2008). Considering the servant nature of the healthcare industry, servant leadership is a leadership style that should be endorsed by healthcare organization leaders. However, only a limited number of studies have explored servant leadership in the

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healthcare context. The intent of this study is to advance this area by investigating the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction in the healthcare sector of mainland China. The Chinese healthcare context is the focal point of this study. Currently, China is experiencing significant issues that hamper health professionals' well-being, including increasing conflict between the health service provider and the patients as well as expanding reforms in health-related sectors (Jing et al., 2013). These issues may prevent health professionals from performing effectively when serving patients or even cause health professionals to resign from their roles (Fu, Sun, Wang, Yang, & Wang, 2013).

Existing research suggests that the levels of servant leadership, characterized by leaders serving followers first and going beyond self-interests, to a variation in followers' job satisfaction (Hebert, 2003). This is verified in studies that show a positive correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction (Hebert, 2003; Irving, 2005; Miears, 2004; Thompson, 2005). However, the literature appears to lack of specific nature of servant leadership, on which the perspectives are rather diverse. Also, it does not provide an answer as to how servant leadership can lead to followers' job satisfaction, particularly in the Chinese healthcare sectors. To explore these phenomena, this study examines interviews with health professionals (i.e., doctors and nurses) working in mainland China. Following this section, are the literature review of the two major concepts involved in this study (i.e., job satisfaction and servant leadership), methods, results, and discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past few decades, job satisfaction has become one of the most investigated variables in organizational behavior research (Lu, Barriball, Zhang, & While, 2012). According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction is the "pleasurable emotional state resulting from the subjective appraisal of one's job," along with the progress of achievements of job values. Earlier research indicates that job satisfaction is important, as it can have a significant positive influence on both the organization and its employees. At the organizational level, current research demonstrates that an individual's job satisfaction can have a positive influence on organizational performance (Wood, Veldhoven, Croon, & Menezes, 2012). At the individual level, empirical evidence shows that job satisfaction positively correlates with an employee's organizational commitment (Fu & Deshpande, 2014), organizational citizenship behavior (Swaminathan & Jawahar, 2013), job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007) and knowledge sharing (Tong, Tak, & Wong, 2015). It is negatively related to absenteeism (Borgogni, Dello Russo, Miraglia, & Vecchione, 2013) and turnover intention (Bonenberger, Aikins,

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