



The Impact of Servant Leadership Practices on Employee Happiness and Job Performance: An Empirical Study on the Public Health Sector in Abu Dhabi

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations are facing different challenges associated with human capital. One of these challenges is making employees happy at the workplace. Another challenge is finding the appropriate leadership style which enhance the performance of individuals. The issue of happiness at the workplace needs to be properly conceptualized so that useful research on it could be conducted. Therefore, this study examined the mediation role of employee happiness on the association between servant leadership practices and job performance in public health organizations in Abu Dhabi in UAE. This study developed a conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace that could give valuable contribution to future research in this area. The result of this study is expected to bring many advantages to public health sector in UAE by understanding the role of employee happiness and servant leadership of the employees in the public sector so that qualified leaders are selected efficiently to develop the performance of staff in public health organization.

1. Introduction

Employee happiness has increasingly become an imperative topic in business and management researches. In recent years, there are growing evidences that when one's employees are happy, organizations succeed (Camille, 2017). Employee happiness is an emerging topic in management as well as in psychology (Baek-Kyoo & Insuk, 2017). Erdogan et al. (2012) suggested a state view of workplace happiness that happiness depends on satisfaction with environment and if employees are happy and satisfied they will deliver better performance, and that leadership contribute to an understanding of happiness or well-being at work. In other words, both leadership and happiness linked to better performance at the workplace (Rotaru, 2014; Simmons, 2014). Engaged and happy workers are a crucial ingredient for the success of a business. When employees feel good and care about their jobs, there's a great chance the company will make more money, and there will be less people walking out the door. Unfortunately, employee engagement levels in the UAE remain very low. According to Gallup, an analytics firm in 2017, about eight in ten UAE workers (85 per cent of the population) are "not engaged" or "actively disengaged" in their work, meaning the overwhelming majority are not psychologically committed to their jobs and are less likely to become more productive. Gallup's "State of the Global Workplace" report, which covers 155 countries, showed that only 16 per cent of employees across the UAE are connected to their work. A recent study by Asma (2018) investigated the level of happiness among employees in UAE and how leadership influence planning in government organizations in implementing a strategy for long-term impacts on happiness levels in UAE.

The findings of Asma's study emphasized the necessity of correlating HRM practices, rules and systems with strategic planning that focuses on employee happiness as the greatest purpose of an organization. The findings emphasize the power of three factors related to employees' feelings towards work. One of these factors is leadership style which is found to be a strong influential on building a strong, positive and happy workplace in UAE. It is evident that the literature lacking empirical evidences on employee happiness in UAE. Therefore, the leaders of large organizations in particular should know what factors could affect employee happiness in order to effectively enhance happiness at the workplace. But research on employee happiness was rarely seen in the past (Samnani & Singh, 2014). Thus, the issues related to happiness at the workplace needs to be properly conceptualized and examined (Phathara et al., 2017). Accordingly, this study presents a novel conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace that could give valuable contribution to future research in this area.

2. Literature Review

1. Issues of Happiness in UAE

The major problem for organizations these days is retaining the best employees. The cost associated with the hiring and recruiting of employees is very high. To curb this problem, leadership plays an important role. The behavior of leadership affects the overall performance of employees. Majority of the employees leave their supervisors, not their jobs. Therefore, it is important that leadership shows positive attitude towards employees (Noor et al., 2018). A successful implementation

for UAE national guide for happiness which was launched in 2018, needs conscious leadership practices that strongly relevant to servant leadership behaviors (Asma, 2019). Therefore, this study brings attention to the expected role played by servant leadership, and government sector managers need to realize the importance of practicing its behaviors in the work environment in line with the modern orientations of UAE. Moreover, it's not clear enough how well managers in government sector consciously practicing servant leadership behaviors. As well as, it's vital role in supporting happiness of employees, and their performance improvement, specifically in the UAE. Based on these arguments, this study suggests that it is not empirically approved until today how employee's happiness mediates the effect of servant leadership towards job performance in government sector in UAE. Accordingly, the problem statement of this study lies in filling the theoretical gap in this topic and determining how servant leadership indirectly affect job performance and why the happiness of employees is essential to enhance the performance of human resources in government sector.

1.1 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership has been established and developed in the 1970's and there have been extensive studies conducted upon different aspects of it since. Also the existence of the trust towards leader and job satisfaction relationship is widely studied because of its obvious importance. The literature is limited and lacks on a theoretical model covering the direct relationship of servant leadership and job satisfaction via mediating role of trust. A servant leader first serves others. This is in sharp difference with a leader who is leader first. The difference comes from the vast various human natures for this factor is based on personality traits of the leader him/herself (Pouya, 2016).

The current new approach to leadership favors a concept that creates different ways of working in an atmosphere based on teamwork, community involvement and the participation of others in critical decisions, regardless of the cultural context. As such, it leads to personal growth and development of employees, which increases their productivity. That is why this approach to management and service management service is mentioned. As such, it pays more attention to improving the level of service of others, developing a sense of community, sharing authority in decision-making, and launching an approach. labor market (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Servant leadership directly and indirectly influences the behaviors of the followers within the organization to achieve the desired goals at the personal and organizational level. People who accept servant leadership experience higher levels of satisfaction, trust, creativity, recognition and independence in their work. The servant manager focuses on the individualized level of work; this approach is that each unit has the same meaning as creating transparency and loyalty in the workplace. Without the use of stationary power and power, desired goals can be achieved through servant leadership (Sunil, 2018).

Some leaders can be called servant leaders because they met the expectations of their employees and showed servant leadership attributes such as caring about employees well-being and personal situations, encouraging to improve and develop at the workplace, communicating well and bonding with team members, become inspirational and motivational, and most importantly show commitment to the team the leader manages (Swapna & Alaa, 2016). At an organizational level, servant leadership is a sustainable, people-centered and growth-oriented vision. Servant leadership improves the citizenship and income of an organization at the enterprise level by raising the awareness of employees and the organization of their leader. When service becomes the natural instinct, people in society work and live values full of life. Thus servant leadership is the democratic form of leadership of the people and people. Organizations dedicated to the philosophy of servant leadership offer promising growth at all levels (Donia et al., 2016).

1.2 Employee Happiness

Happiness is an ancient concept that has always drawn much interest across academic fields (Asma, 2019). Employee happiness is crucial in any organization as happy employees are said to be more committed in their work. In measuring happiness, one of the important aspects that should be considered is the level of employee engagement (Othman et al., 2018). Happiness is an emotion that is difficult for people to precisely define, even though everyone seems to have some idea of what it means to them (Mansour & Jeanne, 2014). Happiness among employees at a workplace is highly regarded by the organizational top management as one of the fundamental sources of positive organizational outcomes. However, rather than as the major source of business success, happiness at work has always been seen as a small potential contributor towards positive organizational outcomes. Nowadays, happiness at work is important and relevant due to the demand of uncertain economic challenges and increased global organizational competition (Noranee et al., 2018).

Many studies conducted have found that happy persons are more successful in varieties of life fields, as family, relationships, profits, health, and job performance (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The interest in happiness issue has extended to workplace experiences (Cynthia, 2009). Warr (2007) questioned that why some employees at their work feel happier or less happy than others? Happiness concept normally well- defined and measured at individual level include affectivity, satisfaction, commitment, and attitude at workplace.

The backgrounds of happiness at work include both organizational and professional characteristics. In the wake of recent scandals in the banking and commercial world, organizational virtuosity has recently attracted attention and features such as integrity, trust and compassion have been identified as important factors contributing to employees' happiness in the workplace (Suwaidi, 2019). Aspects of the perceived or emotional organizational climate; interpersonal and social relationships, including participation, cooperation, warmth and social rewards, cognitive growth, innovation, self-reliance

and intrinsic and instrumental rewards: extrinsic outcomes, hierarchy, structure, and prizes make employees happy in the form of satisfaction and commitment to organizational work (Wang et al., 2013). In addition, it has been shown that the organizational climate for cooperation and innovation is linked to employee engagement (Wang et al., 2013).

According to Wang et al. (2016) happiness at workplace depends on five essential factors: the contribution (the effort an employee can make), the conviction (the motivation an employee has), the culture (employee job level), the commitment (employee obligation towards organization), and trust (believe in self and in the work). While Malik (2013) found other determinants of happiness at work such as job performance, organizational culture, organizational trust, job satisfaction, managerial behavior and individual characteristics. Other scholars focused on employee happiness at individual level (i.e. happiness of individual employees). In conclusion, based on an analysis of the literature with regard to employee happiness, these four components were selected to measure employee happiness and therefore will be included in the empirical design of the final measurement model of employee happiness in UAE government organizations.

1.3 Job Performance

Employee performance is a concept that is increasingly popular amongst scholars of management sciences, as employee performance is vital to both individual and the organization. Employee Performance contributes to the overall betterment of the processes of the organization particularly in terms of efficiency and productivity (Abualoush et al., 2018). While Gupta (2014) pointed out that job performance is related to what an individual does or does not do at the workplace, Pradhan & Yana (2016) argued that job performance is related to the necessary skills, knowledge and dedication to get meaningful work. Similarly, Muchemi (2015) proposed that job performance can be changed over a period of time and consists of a number of objectives, while Kehoe & Wright, (2013), Singh & Jain (2013), & Javed et al. (2014) stated that job performance is a reflection of the productivity of the employee.

Performance has been perceived as a variable that is dependent on variables such as training, knowledge, skills and motivation other than workforce diversity (Odhiambo, 2014). Numerous studies on employee job performance have been conducted. However, different approaches of studying employee job performance circulate in today's literature. Employee performance has linkage to the activities and tasks employees carry out in effective and efficient manner, and it also dictates how much employees contribute to the organization and among the contributions of employees are output quantity, work attendance, and accommodating attitude (Abualoush et al., 2018). Natasha et al. (2018) suggests that job performance represents the behaviors employees engage in while at work. Individual job performance is a relevant outcome measure of studies in the occupational setting; it refers to how well someone performs at his or her work. Aspects such as job-specific task proficiency, behavior related to core tasks of the job, the level of commitment to core tasks, and general work behavior are becoming important factors related to job performance.

Job Performance is a multi-dimensional concept. On the most basic level, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) distinguish between task and contextual performance. Task performance refers to an individual's proficiency with which he or she performs activities which contribute to the organization's 'technical core'. This contribution can be both direct (e.g., in the case of production workers), or indirect (e.g., in the case of managers or staff personnel). Contextual performance refers to activities which do not contribute to the technical core but which support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which organizational goals are pursued. Contextual performance includes not only behaviors such as helping coworkers or being a reliable member of the organization, but also making suggestions about how to improve work procedures. It is concluded from earlier studies that job performance covers a cluster of different behaviors that results from individual's technical knowledge (e.g. knowledge in certain area of expertise), skills in doing the work and adaptability with assigned tasks (understanding the process to perform and doing it according to particular circumstances), and finally interpersonal relations in which the employee is able to work within a team and hold team spirit. Rabindra & Kesari (2016) surveyed 42 items that correspond to their proposed factors to group these nine factors. The developed items were then organized and group them in a conceptual model consist of three aspects as shown in Figure-1.

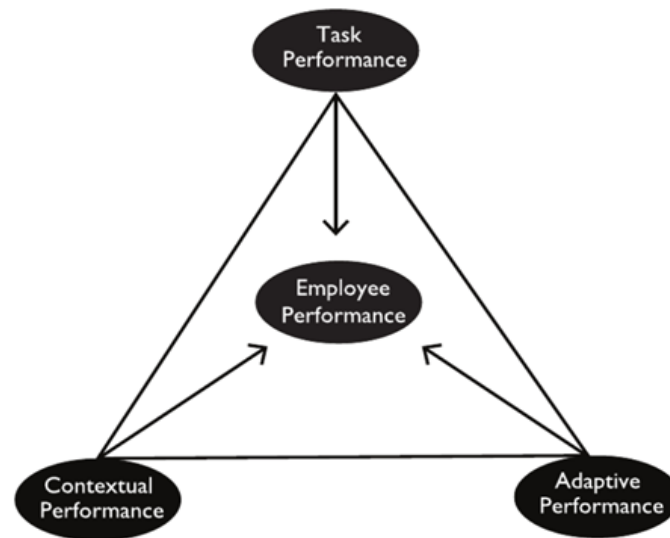


Figure: 1 The Triarchy Model of Employee Performance (Rabindra & Kesari, 2016).

As shown in Figure -1, there are three main components as follow:

1. Task Performance:

It shows how the employee maintain high standard of work (Rabindra & Kesari, 2016). Task performance refers to the core technical behaviors and activities involved in the job.

2. Adaptive Performance:

It shows how an employee stay updated with new knowledge and skills in order to quickly adapt to changes in the work (Rabindra & Kesari, 2016). Adaptive performance in the work environment refers to adjusting to and understanding change in the workplace (Ilgen & Pulakos, 2000).

3. Contextual Performance:

It is a reflection of new colleagues facing an individual in the workplace. (Rabindra & Kesari, 2016). Contextual performance is important because it represents type of behavior that is largely under the motivational control of individuals. It refers to behaviors that support the environment in which the technical core operates. In conclusion, based on an analysis of the literature with regard to job performance, these three components were selected as the best indicators of job performance and therefore were included in the empirical evaluation as the components used to measure job performance in UAE government organizations.

3. Conceptual Framework Development

The literature review reveals that employee happiness, servant leadership, and employee performance are correlated with each other. While servant leadership affect job performance; Karl & Jon (2016) argued that leaders should create a working environment where there is increased employee engagement and participation. This will lead to greater employee decision-making ability and result in more productive employees who have a higher level of performance. Many studies inveterate the role of servant leadership in increasing the job satisfaction level of employees (Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015), and this association was umpired by fairness and spiritual environment (Chung et al., 2010). In addition, servant leadership has unique characteristics that make it closely linked to role modeling processes in organizations. For instance, as the ultimate goal of servant leadership is to cultivate followers to become servant leaders as well, servant leaders would naturally lead through role modeling and provide followers with opportunities to observe and imitate their values, attitudes and behaviors (Zhen et al., 2017). Accordingly, the employees in the organization always consider the servant leader as a good model to follow, while good performance is what every leader seek from subordinates, thus in most cases servant leaders contribute to improve the performance of workforce. Other scholars found that that servant leadership influence the performance of employees. The characteristics of servant leader motivates the employees to imitate them in their work, where performance is one of the main factors every leader seek to be at high level (Wright, 2001; Ehrhart, 2004; Mullins, 2007; Walumbwa, 2010; Liden, 2014; Chung et al., 2010; Ding, 2012; Northhouse, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Zhen et al., 2017; Karl & Jon, 2016; Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015; Sousa & Dierendonck, 2015). Based on this assumption, this study examined the following hypothesis statement:

Hypothesis 1: "Servant Leadership has a Significant Effect on Job Performance"

Moreover, it is assumed that happiness at the workplace must be related to several factors, one of these factors is the influence of leader (Dierendonck, 2011; Januwarsono, 2015). In other words, the style of leadership could influence the happiness of individuals either positively or negatively. In this study, the author aims to understand how servant leadership

interact with employee happiness, and does servant leadership has a significant effect on employee happiness. A study by Othman et al. (2018) showed that leadership style is a considerable influential on employee happiness. In this regard, servant leadership is effective on many variables. As servant leadership has clear connection with individuals feeling and gladness, it has countless consequence on their satisfaction (Weiss, 2014). In other words, the characteristics of servant leader makes every individual happier and more satisfied with his/her work (Lounsbury, 2004; Dierendonck, 2011; Baah & Amoako, 2011; Januwarsono, 2015; Wang & Hackett, 2016; Othman et al., 2018). Based on this assumption, this study will examine the following hypothesis statement:

Hypothesis 2: “Servant leadership has a Significant Effect on Employee Happiness”

In the same context, several studies showed a strong connection between employee happiness and their performance. When an individual feels happy, then he/she will have strong motivation to afford best performance for his/her organization. Fisher (2010) argues for the matching of employee personal strengths with job content but notes the paucity of empirical research available to evaluate the benefits of such an approach for happiness, she recommended that adopt high performance work practices could be achieved if making employees happier at the workplace. The United Nations Assembly recognizes the need for the systematic measurement and analysis of happiness to aid sustainable development. Consequently, there is expected to be a link between happiness of people in general and happiness at work. How happy employees are in their lives and in their job are directly linked to how well employees perform their jobs (Asma, 2019). Unhappy employees can affect the performance of a company not only through lower productivity, but also through an increased show of discontent (Rice, 2013). In the same context, Kevin (2017) aimed to know how the presence of happiness in the workplace affects employee engagement that leads to organizational success. Thus, and servant leadership affect employee happiness and employee happiness influence job performance (Boehm & Lyubomirsky 2008; Edmunds & Pryce-Jones (2008); Fisher, 2010); Saenghiran, 2014; Clement et al., 2019; McGregor, 2015; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2015; Baek-Kyoo & Insuk, 2017; Khaled, 2019). Therefore, this study assumes that both employee happiness and job performance are correlated to each other. Based on this assumption, this study examined the following hypothesis statement:

Hypothesis 3: “Employee Happiness has a Significant Effect on Job Performance”

It is evident that servant leadership practices and employee happiness as well as job performance are correlated in a one conceptual model. Figure. 2 shows the mediation role of employee happiness between servant leadership practices and job performance. This conceptual model is examined in the empirical part of this study through quantitative methods and survey in the ministry of health in UAE.

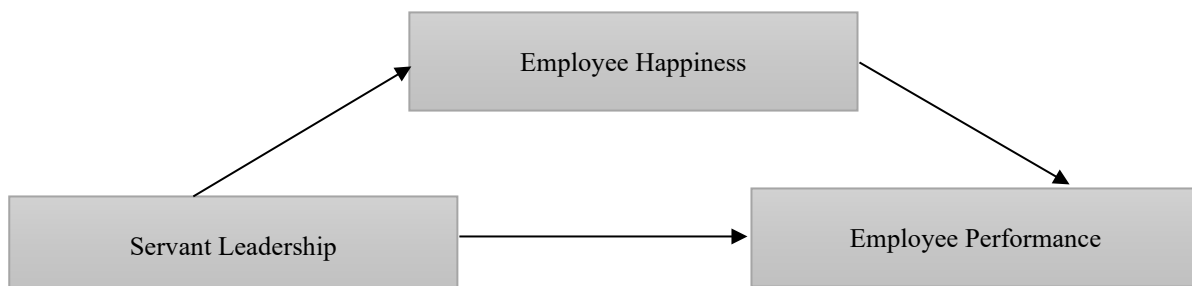


Figure 2: The conceptual Framework

4. Conclusion

The work environment plays a very important role in the work of any organization around the world. The advertising work environment motivates employees to work hard to achieve their goals and objectives. Providing the working environment of the UAE government to its employees has a huge impact on their work, this helps to manage the balance of employee happiness. Therefore, this study examines the relevant literature based on factors affecting workplace happiness in public healthcare organizations in the UAE. This review shows these factors and explains them in detail about how they affect happiness in the work environment in UAE public organizations. This study contributed to the body of knowledge in servant leadership and happiness at the workplace. The outcome of this study will be reflected on the performance of healthcare institutions in UAE, particularly increasing the happiness of staff in health industry. However, the recommendations at the end of this study setup a guideline for SEHA to other organizations working in the same field to understand how servant leadership contributes to the happiness of Emirati workers and their performance.

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