International Journal of Hospitality Management 51 (2015) 147–156

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Hospitality Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhosman

Servant leadership, social exchange relationships, and follower's helping behavior: Positive reciprocity belief matters

Wen-Chi Zou[a], Qing Tian[a,*], Jia Liu[a,b]

[a] Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China
[b] City University of Macau, Macau, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 27 October 2014
Received in revised form 22 July 2015
Accepted 28 August 2015

Keywords:
Servant leadership
Positive reciprocity belief
LMX
TMX
Helping behavior

ABSTRACT

This study examined how leader-member exchange (LMX) and team-member exchange (TMX) mediate the relationship between servant leadership and helping behavior. The bootstrapping results involving 300 five-star hotel employees and their 80 immediate supervisors revealed that (1) LMX and TMX respectively mediated the relationship between servant leadership and helping behavior, (2) positive reciprocity belief moderated the relationship between servant leadership and LMX, (3) positive reciprocity belief moderated the relationship between servant leadership and TMX. Furthermore, moderated mediation analysis demonstrates that (4) the mediated relationship linking servant leadership with helping behavior via LMX is stronger when positive reciprocity belief is high, and (5) the mediated relationship linking servant leadership with helping behavior via TMX is stronger when positive reciprocity belief is high. We discuss theoretical and practical implications and recommend future research.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Hospitality industry is one of complexities with growing competitive pressures. In order to improve operations and enhance the competitive advantage for the service organization, researchers and practitioners have come to view leadership as an effective lever (Brownell, 2010; Yang and Lau, 2015). Studies revealed that effective leadership can remedy the deficiencies of hotel work which include seasonal work, long work hours, high turnover rates among frontline workers, and the routine nature of many jobs (Koyuncu et al., 2014; Kusluvan et al., 2010). Against this background, researchers and practitioners have been trying to explore the most effective leadership style that can not only motivate followers and achieve service organizational goals effectively and efficiently, but also serve the needs of followers and larger communities both within and outside of organizations (Alexakis, 2011; Brownell, 2010; Liden et al., 2008). Among these leadership studies, servant leadership is regarded as one of the most idealized leadership styles for the hospitality industry, because servant leadership enhances collaboration and motivates followers to achieve service excellence, and also cultivates more morality-centered self-reflection by leaders than other leadership styles (Alexakis, 2011; Brownell, 2010; Hunter et al., 2013; Koyuncu et al., 2014; Parris and Peachey, 2013; Ruschman, 2002; Wu et al., 2013). The original idea of servant leadership is accredited to Christianity and the ancient teachings of Jesus: "Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant." (i.e., Luke 22: 26). In the scripture, Jesus gave instructions about the qualities and the role of the leader (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). It reflects that servant leadership is embedded in the leader–follower relationship along with genuine concern and servers the followers (Greenleaf, 1977; Van Dierendonck and Nuijte, 2011). This essence of servant leadership cultivates long-term and unspecified mutual obligations (Blau, 1964) in the work team as demonstrated by leader-member exchange (LMX) and team-member exchange (TMX) for individuals as well as those among the leader and group members (Liao et al., 2010).

Despite the promising progress of servant leadership study in the hospitality industry, there are many unanswered questions regarding the mechanism that can explain the effectiveness of servant leadership, and these very questions have spawned some new and exciting research streams within the hospitality context. First, the researchers revealed that servant leadership is a particularly effective leadership style for the hospitality industry (Brownell, 2010). However, scant studies have empirically examined the mechanism through which servant leadership influences the social exchange (affective process) among the followers in a work team (e.g., Wu et al., 2013). Furthermore, since the work team as the primary work unit gets more and more popular in

---

[*] Corresponding author at: School of Business, Macau University of Science and Technology, Avenida Wai Long, Taipa, Macau, China.
E-mail address: qtian@must.edu.mo (Q. Tian).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.08.012
0278-4319/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

service organizations (Mesmer-Magnus and DeChurch, 2009), the social exchange (LMX and TMX) becomes an important way to help us understand the internal function of a work team (Erdogan and Liden, 2002; Liao et al., 2010). Although scholars found that high quality LMX and TMX can influence service employee's attitudes and behaviors individually and positively (Banks et al., 2014; Lam, 2003; Liden et al., 2000; Wu et al., 2013), few studies have included simultaneous leader and teammate versions of social exchange relationships in a hospitality context. In order to advance the literature, we use social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960) as overarching theories in our study to develop a framework that integrates the theories of servant leadership, LMX, and TMX together to examine the impact of servant leadership on hotel employee's helping behavior empirically.

Second, previous studies on leadership in the hospitality industry mainly focused on the leader-centric perspective (Brownell, 2010) which demonstrated that the characteristics of leader that help the followers to develop a social exchange with the leader, and the way of social exchange between leader and follower impacts followers' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Alexakis, 2011; Babakus et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2013). Though the research results provided some knowledge about leadership and social exchange, most of them have neglected to note that the individual characteristics (e.g., emotion or personality) of the follower as recipients, can determine the reaction to the leader's initiative behaviors in social exchange (Shamir et al., 2007; Yukl, 2006). This difference of followers' characteristics arouses academic attention of leader and followers' social exchange studies from the follower-centric perspective (Meindl, 1995). In order to develop the literature of servant leadership and social exchange in a hospitality context through follower-centric perspective, this study utilizes positive reciprocity beliefs as the individual difference to examine whether it can influence the social exchange relationship of hotel employees. In addition, we conduct this study in a Chinese managerial context, which is a relation-centered where the followers will hold strong social-emotional value which prioritize relationships first, and believe transactions and mutual benefits will follow (Yang and Lau, 2015; Yen et al., 2011). It reflects the essential idea of social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity. Although this kind of social-emotional value will make the followers reciprocate with their servant leaders, they are differing in their levels of reciprocity in a social exchange process. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that the followers who hold a high level of positive reciprocity belief will appeal to servant leaders more than those who hold a low level in a Chinese managerial context of the hospitality industry.

Third, the existing studies revealed that the hospitality context is an aggregated process which involves the employees highly interacting with and dependent on each other (Kim et al., 2011). In this situation, the extra role behavior of employees to help their coworkers is very constructive for reaching the servicing goals of the work team. However, not all the employees will intend to go "above and beyond" to help their coworkers (Ma and Qu, 2011). Although, researchers have suggested some effective ways to motivate the hospitality employees to help their coworkers, such as the social exchange in influencing employees' helping behavior in the hotel context (e.g., Kim et al., 2011), more knowledge needs to be further explored. For example, previous studies focused mostly on the influence of social exchange between the employees and their leader (LMX) on helping behavior (e.g., Euwenma et al., 2007; Ilies et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011; Wayne et al., 2009), however, the social exchange partners of employees include not just their leaders, but their coworkers as well. Till now, only a few studies have analyzed how the social exchange among the employees (TMX) influence their helping behavior toward coworkers (Ma and Qu, 2011). Hence, we are going to address these two social exchange types of the hospitality employees together and link them to helping behavior in this study which can develop the literature and facilitate a more meaningful managerial practice in the hospitality industry.

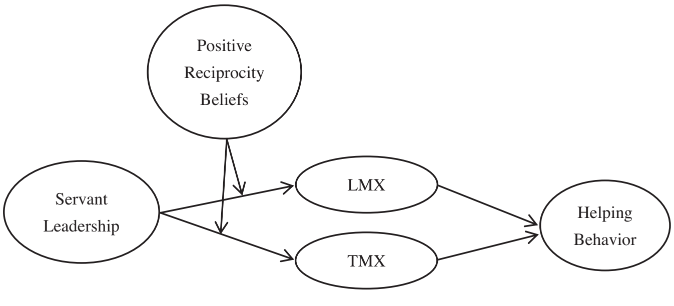

Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

In sum, the current study will try to advance the literature of servant leadership and social exchange in the hospitality industry by making a connection from servant leadership to LMX and TMX simultaneously, which, in turn, will make a connection to helping behavior of hotel employees. We will also examine the moderating effect of individuals' positive reciprocity beliefs on the relationship between servant leadership and LMX, and TMX. Fig. 1 visually depicts the overall hypothesized framework.

2. Theory and hypothesis

Servant leadership has been defined as "the leader who manages organizational challenges by subordinating personal interests to those of organizational stakeholders and who see leadership as an opportunity for service to individual, organization, and community rather than as a vehicle to attain personal power and prestige" (Reed et al., 2011, p. 416). The characteristics of servant leadership can be summarized from two perspectives: one is caring for followers' interests which can reflect going beyond a self-interest trait of servant leadership; the other is that the ultimate goal of servant leadership is not only achieving the goals of the organization, but also caring about the benefits to other stakeholders and communities (Ehrhart, 2004; Greenleaf, 1977; Peterson et al., 2012; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2010). The empirical research of Liden et al. (2008) testified this argument and identified some key dimensions to measure servant leadership behaviors. The dimensions include empowering subordinates, helping subordinate growth and success, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, conceptual skills, and creating value for the community (Liden et al., 2008; Ehrhart, 2004). These characteristics and behaviors make the servant leader manage his or her work group through example rather than by simply dictating service policy for the service organization, which can create and maintain an effective and positive service climate in the service industry context (Babakus et al., 2015; Gonzalez and Garazo, 2006). Additionally, the characteristics and behaviors of servant leader can also help him or her embed in the leader–follower relationship along with genuine concern for followers and cultivates long-term and unspecified mutual obligations. It reflects the essential idea of social exchange theory and norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). In this process, servant leadership provides socio-emotional resources and other particular benefits over a lengthy period to the followers, and then, the followers feel an obligation to reciprocate the servant leader. Scholars use LMX and TMX to describe the phenomena of social exchange in the work team (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Seers, 1989). LMX represents the reciprocally social exchange between servant leader and follower based on trust, loyalty, and obligations. TMX represents the employee's social exchange with the other group members in terms of the reciprocal contribution of

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1009274

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/1009274

Daneshyari.com