Good example of article review on main point

Technology, Innovation

Article summary: Does servant leadership foster creativity and innovation? A multi-level mediation study of identification and prototypicality

The main goal of the multi-level study conducted by Yoshida D. T. et al. (2013) was to assess how servant leadership influences employee creativity and team innovation simultaneously. Businesses often gain their competitive advantage through employees that come up with creative, innovative ideas and work as a team to implement them. However, although these factors are highly interdependent, prior researches only focused on either creativity or innovation. No fundamental attempts were made to study how certain leadership behaviors simultaneously affect these two aspects on different levels. Former researches examined how transformational leadership or leader-member relationship influenced employee creativity. As it was mentioned above, the study by Yoshida D. T. et al. was focused on a different leadership model – servant leadership.

Servant leadership is to some extent similar to transformational leadership, but contains distinctive empirical and qualitative differences. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to overachieve and perform at astonishing levels, and the main focus is put on the company's goals. A servant leader also inspires people to demonstrate outstanding results, but the major emphasis is put on the followers' development and growth, which are prioritized over organizational or leader's goals. Consequently, servant leadership establishes a work environment that fosters a sense of fairness, trust and psychological safety, thus contributing to employee creativity.

Because a servant leader prioritizes interests of those who he leads over his own, leadership becomes an instrument to serve, making these two seemingly opposite processes almost interchangeable. As a result, within a team context, such a leader impersonates the majority of positive qualities that the team strives to have, and prototypically represents its most desirable key components.

Based on the concept of relational identification, the authors suggest that servant leaders' major focus on development and growth of their followers fosters feelings of safety and security, and projects a belief that their leader associates with ' normative behavioral expectation' (Yoshida et al., 2013). This results in leader identification, because the followers are encouraged to define themselves within the context of leader-follower relationship, and they become genuinely motivated to reach their goals.

Additional implication of this fact is that servant leaders are perceived as prototypical leaders who impersonate the values of the team for the benefit of the team members instead of their personal desires and aspirations. Also, prototypical leaders are more likely to motivate the team to put their collaborative effort into development of creative ideas.

Finally, the authors assume that alongside leader identification and prototypicality, individuals are much more likely to demonstrate innovativeness and creativity when the team climate encourages such outcomes.

The fact that servant leaders put an incredibly high priority on the development of their followers results in positive emotions that, in turn, frequently motivate employees to search for new ways to solve problems

and hence demonstrate creativity. As a result, when followers have a positive perception of their relationships with the servant leader, they are more likely to show creativity. Therefore, hypothesis 1 states that the interconnection between servant leadership and creativity of employees is mediated by leader identification.

Because the followers view their servant leader as a role model and define themselves in the context of leader-follower relationship, they are likely to pursue those goals and objectives that benefit their development and, therefore, their leader. Those goals and objectives may not be necessarily related to creativity or innovation; they can also target other functional aspects. Therefore, innovation and creativity are enhanced through leader identification in team climates that encourage such outcomes. Consequently, the second hypothesis proposes that the extent to which leader identification mediates the interrelation between servant leadership and employee creativity is reinforced by team climates where innovation is encouraged. Within a team context, servant leaders are focused on development and well-being of the team members, and exemplify the team's beliefs, norms and values. According to the social identity theory on leadership, such leaders are perceived as group prototypical. As a result, teams feel empowered and appreciated, and are much more likely to support the leader's endeavors towards demonstrating creativity and novelty. Hence, according to the third hypothesis, the interconnection between servant leadership and innovativeness of employees is mediated by prototypicality. Because the prototypical leader reflects team's values and norms, those goals and outcomes that the leader believes to be the most advantageous to

the team are perceived as desirable. Consequently, the team climate that supports outcomes other than innovation and creativity is not likely to result in development of employee behavior that demonstrates novelty. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis proposes that the extent to which prototypicality mediates the interrelation between servant leadership and innovation is reinforced by team climates where innovation is encouraged.

Research Methods

The average size of the teams constituted 3 members, with teams that contained less than 2 members being excluded from the research. The leaders of the teams were chiefly male, on average 39 years of age, 62% of them were middle managers, and around half of them were university graduates with bachelor's degrees, and had worked for their current companies for over 5 years. Members of the team were mostly male, approximately 34 years old, the majority held bachelor's degrees, had non-managerial positions, predominantly worked in human resources and operations and production departments, and had around 4 years of work experience with their current company.

The following measures were represented: servant leadership, leader identification, prototypicality, support for innovation, and employee creativity. For each of the measures, different scales with 35, 6, 4, 8, 4, 4 distinct items were used correspondingly. Each item was rated by the team members on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 corresponding to " strongly disagree", and 5 to " strongly agree" (Yoshida et al., 2013). Additional three variables were controlled, as they strongly relate to creativity of employees: education, gender and tenure.

Research Results

For the conducted analyses to be valid, it was necessary to ensure that the data were metrically equivalent. According to the results, metrical equivalence of the two individual level variables was found to have partial support. Team-level constructs, however, were found to be metrically equivalent. Additionally, the authors found that it was not important whether the respondents were from China or Indonesia, as nationality did not have significant influence on data variability.

Main research results were provided through hypothesis testing. Testing of the first hypothesis has shown that servant leadership and leader identification were positively related, and as a result, the latter had a positive impact on employee creativity. Therefore, the authors proved the first hypothesis.

Results of testing the second hypothesis indicated that servant leadership influences employee creativity through leader identification only under the conditions of high support for innovation. Consequently, hypothesis 2 was proved as well.

Analysis of the third hypothesis demonstrated that servant leadership was strongly connected with prototypicality, which, in turn, positively influenced team innovation. As a result, the authors proved the third hypothesis. Finally, outcomes of the fourth hypothesis' testing indicated that the extent to which prototypicality mediates the interrelation between servant leadership and innovation was not directly influenced by the level of support for creativeness and innovation provided by the team climate. Hence, hypothesis 4 was not proven to be valid.

As a result of the research conducted by Yoshida D. T. et al., three of the four fundamental hypotheses were proven to be true. Therefore, we can state that servant leadership fosters employee creativity and innovation.

References

Yoshida, D. T., et al. (2013). Does servant leadership foster creativity and innovation? A multi-level mediation study of identification and prototypicality. Journal of Business Research. Retrieved from http://dx. doi. org/10. 1016/j. jbusres. 2013. 08. 013