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IMPACT OF FEMALE SERVANT LEADERSHIP STYLE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN BEIJING'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to investigate study the impact of female servant leadership on employee engagement. The study was quantitative using questionnaire to collect data from 406 employees working in public universities in universities in Beijing city, China using convenience sampling. The study employed descriptive including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation while using multiple regressions to analyze data, test variables, and test hypothesis. The results revealed that the employees' working experience levels with female leaders suggests varying perspectives on leadership dynamics. To understand the longitudinal aspect of leadership influence. The varied lengths of experience with female leaders suggest a broad range of perspectives that enrich discussions on leadership dynamics and its impact over time. Regarding the skills that are seen as most effective in driving engagement, the results revealed that female leaders are perceived positively for their empathy, persuasive communication, active listening, adaptability, and innovative thinking. The results also revealed significant positive perception of female leaders' competencies directly relates to their effectiveness in enhancing employee engagement. Finally, the results revealed that female leaders' ability to understand and respect cultural differences within the team is noted, emphasizing the importance of cultural nuances in leadership effectiveness in public higher education institutions in Beijing city, China.

Keywords: Corporate Language, Relationship-Oriented Cultural Difference Acceptance, Communication Performance, Electronic Industry Employees

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Introduction

Higher education service in China grows up fast in line with the country's socioeconomic development. Beijing, as the capital city of the world's most population, is home to more than 90 colleges and universities which most well-known institutions (universities) are public universities. The city has 1,073,000 students in both undergraduate and graduate levels studying in the city's higher education institutions (Wu, 2017). Currently, females play more roles in higher education and many play leadership roles even in managerial positions. Trend in global academic seems increasing roles for the positive impacts of female leadership particularly in the focus of employee engagement. Boonkerdlum et al. (2017) found that female executives could lead the team to reach its goals. While the city Beijing is advanced for its modernism, it remains tied to its traditions, especially when it comes to perceptions about gender and leadership in works and influence on their works and leadership styles which finally represent their ability to inspire their employees' work engagement. This study seeks to further study the roles of female servant leadership and employee engagement of employees in Beijing's higher educational institutions. It ventures beyond mere representation, delving deep into the qualitative aspects of leadership, aiming to ascertain whether the global findings on the positive impacts of female leadership hold true in Beijing's distinct context.

Literature Reviews

Greenleaf (1970) first presents that servant leadership approach has gained significant attention in organizational management due to its emphasis on serving others and fostering collective growth and a paradigm shift from traditional hierarchical leadership to a servant-first mindset. In practice, the leaders act as stewards who prioritize the needs of their team members, empower them to explore their potential, and raise a culture of service and collaboration. Van Dierendonck (2011) points out that servant leadership is characterized by empathy, listening, stewardship, empowerment, and commitment to the growth of others. Empathy enables leaders to understand the experiences and emotions of their team members while promoting trust and psychological safety within the team. In addition, listening involves active engagement with followers' viewpoints and concerns, creating a culture of open communications; stewardship entails a sense of responsibility for the well-being and development of followers, emphasizing long-term organizational sustainability over short-term gains. Empowerment involves delegating authority and providing support to enable followers to achieve their goals autonomously. Finally, commitment to the growth of employees reflects leaders' dedication to supporting the potential and success of their followers.

Sendjaya et al. (2008) indicate servant leadership has demonstrated its positive effects on various organizational outcomes, including employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. Liden et al. (2008) found that servant leadership positively predicts follower trust, organizational identification, and extra-role behaviors. Ruiyao et al. (2023) reveal a positive correlation between female leadership and elevated levels of team creativity which is a key component of employee engagement and organizational success. Spears & Lawrence (2002) and Van Dierendonck & Patterson (2015) support the idea that servant leadership offers practical implications for leadership development, organizational culture, and employee engagement initiatives. Moreover, integrating servant leadership into performance management systems and reward structures can incentivize leaders to prioritize servant behaviors and outcomes (Sendjaya et al., 2020). Liu (2013) states traditional gender roles in China often emphasize male leadership, posing challenges for female leaders. Eva et al. (2019) finds that Female leaders who practice servant leadership are capable of creating a supportive and empowering environment, leading to higher job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Leung et al. (2021) agree that female leaders act as role models for both staff and students, promoting gender equality and fostering a more inclusive in Chinese higher

educational institutions can significantly impact employee engagement. Eagly & Carli (2003) indicates that women often excel in collaborative and community-oriented leadership, which can enhance employee engagement. Yinhan et al. (2013) find female leaders in Chinese universities confronting challenges and opportunities including societal perceptions, institutional biases, and individual competencies.

Liang (2022) advocates for the efficacy of situational leadership, highlighting its adaptability as a catalyst for enhancing employee engagement. Leaders who possess the capacity to adjust their leadership approach according to the unique needs and preferences of their team members are better positioned to cultivate an engaged workforce. This adaptive leadership style facilitates personalized interactions with employees, thereby fostering engagement through a nuanced understanding of individual employee requirements. Wei & Bunchapattanasakda (2024) find the employees in education institutions' attitude towards female executives in overall was high satisfaction and motivation. Koenig et al. (2011) find that female leaders surpass in interpersonal skills and collaborative efforts, which are crucial for enhancing employee engagement. Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) support that female leaders are particularly effective in roles that require interpersonal interaction and team cohesion. Van Dierendonck & Patterson (2015) and Sousa & Van Dierendonck (2017) find that servant leadership particularly creating supportive and motivating work environment create higher levels of employee engagement. Albrecht et al. (2018) find that management practices are crucial for maintaining high levels of employee engagement. From the above information, we can hypothesize as following:

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant influence of Servant Leadership on Employee Engagement.

H2: There is a significant influence of Servant Leadership on Management Functions.

Methodology

This study is a quantitative research design using survey questionnaire to collect data from 406 employees sample size derived from Cochran (1977) sample size determination $385 + 5\%$ who work in public universities in Beijing city, China using convenience sampling approach. The population are employees who have experience working with female leaders within 5 universities in the 'Project 211,' the Chinese governmental initiative aiming to elevate the research standards of high-level universities environment and can provide in-depth insights into the leadership dynamics, and their female leaders' servant leadership impact on employee engagement. The semi-structured questionnaire passed the IOC test with the Cronbach's alpha reliability > 0.9 which is acceptable level. For data analysis, the study employs descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to describe the participants' demographic profiles. Since this study aims to predict the impact of female servant leadership on the employee engagement, the multiple regression is used to test variables, analysis, and test hypotheses.

Findings and Discussion

The results from this study find that majority of the participants are males (52.96%), ages are between 31-35 years old (24.14%), hold doctoral degrees (48.03%), are marriage (67%), have experience working with female leaders 1-4 years (29.6%). The participants perceived that female leaders encourage innovative and long-term thinking beyond daily operational task at high level ($\bar{x} = 3.83$, S.D. = 1.285), female leaders promote a sense of community and collaboration among team members at high level ($\bar{x} = 3.86$, S.D. = 1.261), female leaders address performance issues and implementing corrective measures ($\bar{x} = 3.84$, S.D. = 1.284), female leader balances and providing direction with encouraging input and feedback from team members ($\bar{x} = 3.85$, S.D. = 1.263), and finally, participants perceived the appreciation by the

female leaders for their contributions at high level ($\bar{x} = 3.83$, S.D. = 1.264). The results reveal that all the analysis results from employees' participating in this study are at a high level. The results from multiple regressions analysis to test the impact of servant leadership components included in this study are listening, empathy, healing, conceptualization, and foresight on employee engagement. The test results are present below:

Table 1 Relationship between Servant Leadership and Employee Engagement

Model	Unstandardized	Coefficients	Standardized	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
	0.121	0.062		1.948	0.025
Listening	0.201	0.039	0.208	5.178	0
Empathy	0.206	0.038	0.211	5.413	0
Healing	0.181	0.036	0.186	5.045	0
Conceptualization	0.222	0.037	0.235	5.999	0
Foresight	0.158	0.036	0.164	4.351	0

*Sig < .05, **Sig < .01, ***Sig = .000

Consequently, the test results present the acceptance of H₁, confirming the presence of a significant impact of female servant leadership on employee engagement.

Y = employee engagement, X1 = listening, X2 = empathy, X3 = healing, X4 = conceptualization, X5 = foresight

$$Y = 0.121 + 0.201 * X1 + 0.206 * X2 + 0.181 * X3 + 0.222 * X4 + 0.158 * X5$$

Table 2 Relationship between Servant Leadership and Management Functions

Model	Unstandardized	Coefficients	Standardized	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
	0.049	0.047		1.045	0.029
Listening	0.161	0.029	0.166	5.482	0
Empathy	0.208	0.029	0.214	7.244	0
Healing	0.188	0.027	0.194	6.95	0
Conceptualization	0.222	0.028	0.235	7.94	0
Foresight	0.21	0.027	0.218	7.662	0

*Sig < .05, **Sig < .01, ***Sig = .000

The results from Table 2 reveal a statistically significant positive correlation of substantial magnitude was evident between servant leadership and management functions. Consequently, the findings confirm the acceptance of H₂, indicating a significant impact of servant leadership on management functions. Overall, the following regression equation was derived between the variables:

Y = management functions, X1 = listening, X2 = empathy, X3 = healing, X4 = conceptualization, X5 = foresight

$$Y = 0.049 + 0.161 * X1 + 0.208 * X2 + 0.188 * X3 + 0.222 * X4 + 0.21 * X5$$

Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Result
H1: There is a significant influence of Servant Leadership on Employee Engagement.	Accepted
H2: There is a significant influence of Servant Leadership on Management Functions.	Accepted

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to investigate the impact of female servant leadership style on employee engagement within public higher educational institutions located in Beijing city, China. The study surveyed respondents drawn from these institutions, providing insights into the dynamics of leadership and engagement within this context. The findings reveal that most employees who work in the public universities of “921” project are young ages and hold higher degrees of doctorate. A particular note is the diverse age distribution and varying levels of experience with female leadership among the respondents. This diversity underscores the importance of considering a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences within female leadership dynamics and organizational policies. Additionally, the significant proportion of married respondents highlights the intersecting dynamics of work-life balance and family commitments, emphasizing the imperative for leaders to support employees in managing these dual responsibilities effectively.

The study’s results reveal positive perceptions of female leaders among employees in the public higher education institutions under the “921” project in Beijing. The high recognition for the female leader with servant leadership style’s empathetic communication, strategic acumen, and commitment to personal and professional development. These attributes align closely with contemporary leadership theories emphasizing servant leadership styles, which prioritize empathy, collaboration, and employee well-being. Moreover, management functions such as planning, organizing, directing, and control mechanisms emerge as pivotal factors in fostering employee engagement and organizational success. Effective planning processes, clear direction from leadership, supportive behaviors, and fair control mechanisms collectively contribute to cultivating a positive work environment where employees feel valued, motivated, and committed to organizational goals. In light of these findings, organizations are encouraged to prioritize initiatives aimed at promoting gender diversity in leadership roles, fostering a culture of inclusivity and support, and investing in leadership development programs that prioritize empathy, collaboration, and employee engagement. Furthermore, future research endeavors could delve deeper into the longitudinal effects of different leadership styles and management functions on employee well-being, organizational performance, and sustainability, thus offering valuable insights for organizational practice and scholarly inquiry alike.

Findings from this study reveal significant positive relationship between Chinese female leaders in higher education institutions in Beijing with servant leadership style and employee engagement. The results are in line with Van Dierendonck & Patterson (2015) who find that servant leadership positively impacts employee well-being and engagement, which in the end can lead to higher organizational effectiveness. The findings also reveal significant influence of Chinese female leaders in higher education institutions in Beijing with servant leadership style on management functions. The findings from this study are in-line with Albrecht et al. (2018) who reveal the significance of management functions in creating structured and motivating work environments that encourage high levels of employee engagement.

Implications

The findings also confirm that female servant leadership roles have positive impact on employees’ engagement. The findings from this study also confirm that female leaders with servant leadership style in Beijing public higher education institutions are eligible to fulfill the

management functions of their organizations. It underlines the critical importance of promoting gender diversity within leadership roles in higher education institutions as Ely et al. (2011) support that diverse leadership enhances organizational dynamics and outcomes by bringing varied perspectives, and innovative approaches for the organizations' growth and sustainability. The findings from this current study also contribute to the concepts or theories related to servant leadership on two dimensions. First, the findings as new knowledge to confirm that the female servant leadership have positive impact on employee engagement under Beijing tradition which no previous study has done in this area before. Secondly, the findings from this study also to confirm the impact of female servant leadership on the employee engagement in the public higher education institutions under the project "921". However, in order to in-depth confirm the findings from this study, further steps of in-depth interview with the stakeholders may provide better results.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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