



Assessment of servant leadership and ethical climate: The case of administrators and supervisors

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership and ethical climate are philosophies in which the leader's goal is to serve humanity ethically. This study assessed the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors in a private hospital. This descriptive comparative correlational research study surveyed 111 employees using a validated and reliable researchers-made instrument. The researchers used the mean, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson Product Moment of Correlation Coefficient to analyze the findings. The results showed that administrators and supervisors have a high level of servant leadership and adhere to ethical practices. This implies that the supervisors were into pro-social development to perform their moral obligations in their working environment. This study also proved a positive correlation between servant leadership and ethical climate. It is therefore recommended to further promote servant leadership and practice of ethical climate in the workplace through training programs that will raise awareness about these concepts.

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INTRODUCTION

A leader's primary responsibility is to develop their subordinates exercising his authority (Ünsal & Usta (2021). Leaders must be committed, excellent communicator, decisive, knows how to delegate tasks, and most importantly empowers their subordinates (Akparobore & Omoisekejimi, 2020; Olanrewaju & Okorie, 2019). Effective leadership entails an understanding of the organization and focuses on human communication among and between its people (Banwart, 2020). Moreover, effective leaders provide motivation and encouragement to their team members by keeping them focused on the organization's goals (Leithwood, 2019) and sustaining their business in the face of problems (Fraboulet, 2021). According to Pranitasari (2020) and Košičiarová et al. (2021), the effectiveness of leadership and organizational trust directly influences work motivation.

Servant leadership is based on the philosophy of serving others and prioritizing others' needs over him/herself (Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020). Servant leaders focus on the growth and development of their members and the success of the organization (Franco & Antunes, 2020). It aims to empower its people by developing their personal qualities holistically (Eva et al., 2019). From this perspective, servant-leaders oversee the people and manages the resources of the organization (Saleem et al., 2020; Reyes, 2019). Robert Greenleaf introduced the philosophy and practice of servant leadership in the 1970s, however, its concept was already existing even in ancient times (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Serrat & Serrat, 2017), and has evolved through various influences across the globe (Gandolfi et al., 2017).

Traditionally, leadership command and control styles are linked with hierarchy giving structure to power and authority inside an organization (Clark, 2019; Serrat & Serrat, 2017). Eva et al. (2019) mentioned that to address the challenges in the 21st-century working environment there is a need to shift towards servant-oriented leadership. However, Giambatista et al. (2020) emphasized that organizational culture greatly influences the practice of servant leadership. Practicing servant leadership in an organization can yield an increase in employee productivity contributing to the organization's success (Brohi et al., 2018). On the other hand, ethical climate refers to the organizational process, policies, and workplace practices encompassing moral values (Menes & Haguisan III, 2020). Additionally, ethical climate pertains to the perception of employees on what can be considered right behavior and coincides with ethical norms (Grobler, 2017; Newman et al., 2017). It is part of the organization's working environment where ethical norms are defined by the organization's behavior (Wirsén, 2018). According to Tsvyk & Tsvyk (2019), the most important values include professionalism, mutual responsibility, and moral values. Values, like moral principles, are conceptions of what is believed to be good and what should or should not be done (Twito-Weingarten & Knafo-Noam, 2022). These values and principles strengthen the moral relationship between the management and the employees (Shakarov, 2021).

According to Frömmer et al. (2021), authentic leadership is positively correlated with finding a voice in an organization and this can improve moral efficacy. An employee's moral potency is crucial to identifying the intent, beliefs, and efficacy of a person to face ethical challenges (Peng et al., 2017). Leaders who have high regard for ethical climate can be attributed to positive organizational citizenship behavior (Aloustani et al., 2020). Additionally, the practice of an ethical climate can significantly help the employees to make ethical decisions and have a positive attitude in the workplace (Newman et al., 2017). Mohd Mustamil & Najam (2020) emphasized that servant leadership and ethical climate are crucial to encourage ethical conduct in the workplace. The productivity of the employees is deeply influenced by the practice of servant leadership and the ethical climate of their superiors driving the organization to its success (Wirsén, 2018). The concepts of ethics and leadership have been and will continue to be interconnected (Sherif, 2019). Slack (2020) found out that familiarity with servant leadership affects employee engagement and organizational ethical climate. For servant leadership, this study was anchored on the concept of Clark (2019). While in terms of ethical climate, this was supported by the concept of Cullen et al. (1993). The study of Clark (2019) provides insight into the instrument's capability adapted for self-assessment to measure servant leadership accurately. It also indicates the respondents' relationship in self-perceived leadership characteristics based on demographic factors. Hai and Van (2021) said that servant leadership is a holistic approach promoting group collaboration and cooperation especially in making decisions.

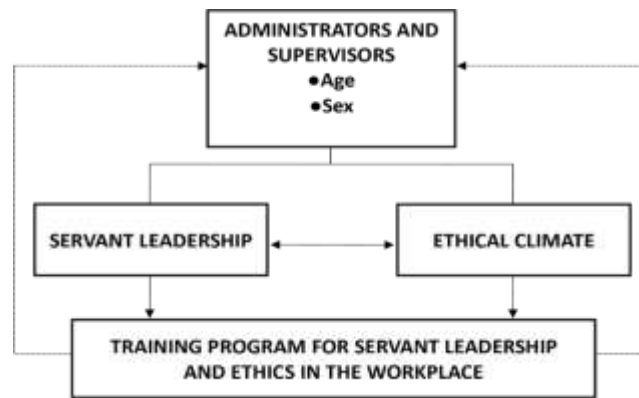


Figure 1. Schematic diagram

As presented in figure 1, this study measures administrators' and supervisors' servant leadership and ethical climate in a private hospital. To further measure the level of servant leadership and ethical climate, respondents were grouped according to their age and sex. The results of this study could help assess the level of practice of servant leadership and ethical climate in the workplace yielding to the development of training programs promoting these concepts. Leadership is a critical aspect of the success of an organization (Heyler & Martin, 2018) and so is the ethical climate (Aloustani et al., 2020). However, servant leadership and ethical climate with the extent of their practice in an organization have not been explored. Additionally, the relationship between servant leadership and ethical climate was not shown in other literature. With this, the researchers aimed to assess the level of practice of servant leadership and the organization's ethical climate to improve the organizational workplace environment. In addition, this study may develop strategies to improve employees' retention rate and further develop servant leadership skills and ethics in the workplace.

OBJECTIVES

This study assessed the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors of a private hospital in Negros Occidental. Specifically, the study answered the following:

1. What is the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors when taken as a whole and grouped according to age and sex?
2. Is there a significant difference in the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors when grouped according to age and sex?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of servant leadership and the ethical climate?

METHODS

Design

The researchers used descriptive-comparative and correlational research designs to determine facts that would help the organization assess the leadership style and ethics in the workplace. In this study, the researchers described servant leadership and ethical climate and their relationship.

Respondents

The researchers surveyed 111 employees using a simple random sampling technique. The respondents were composed of 36 (32%) administrative staff and 75 (68%) medical staff.

Instrument

The researchers utilized a researcher-made instrument which was divided into two parts. The first part has 30 questions about servant leadership while the second part has 36 questions about ethical climate. The instrument used the following rating scale: 4 = always; 3 = often; 2 = sometimes, and; 1 = never. The instrument was validated by a pool of experts and was subjected to a reliability test. The instrument is valid when it measures what it intends to measure (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). The instrument was validated by fifteen (15) experts with a content validity index of 0.727 proving it valid. Moreover, the instrument is deemed reliable if the results of the study are consistent over time (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). The researchers conducted a reliability test on thirty (30) non-actual respondents. Using Cronbach's alpha the reliability index was 0.952 and 0.932 for servant leadership and ethical climate respectively, proving the instrument reliable.

Data collection

The researchers obtained permission from the management before distributing the survey to the respondents. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were oriented about the process of answering the survey. After the data collection, the researchers tabulated the data and analyzed the findings. Since the pandemic was not yet over, the researchers observed safety protocols in the validity, reliability, and data collection. Every process was documented and coordinated with the designated person to ensure accuracy and accountability.

Ethical considerations

This study protected the human subjects through appropriate ethical principles. The researchers provided the respondents with a written informed consent form indicating the purpose and implication of the study. The participation of the respondents was voluntary and they were assured that they can withdraw their participation at any given time. All information from the respondents was kept private and confidential.

Data analysis

The researchers used mean and standard deviation to measure the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors. While a *t*-test was used to determine the significant differences between the variables. Finally, the Pearson product-moment of correlation was used to determine if the variables were significantly correlated with each other.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the results of the findings and discusses their implications. It shows the level of servant leadership and the ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors of a private hospital. Additionally, it will also show the correlation between servant leadership and ethical climate.

Table 1. Level of servant leadership of administrators and supervisors

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
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Age			
Younger (n=66)	3.36	0.519	Very High
Older (n=45)	3.30	0.510	Very High
Sex			
Male (n=29)	3.35	0.459	Very High
Female (n=82)	3.31	0.534	Very High
Taken as a Whole (n=111)	3.33	0.514	Very High

When taken as a whole, the results showed that the mean score for servant leadership was 3.33 with an SD of 0.514, indicating that administrators and supervisors have a very high level of servant leadership. When grouped according to age, both younger (mean = 3.36; SD = 0.519) and older groups (mean = 3.30; SD = 0.510) rated the level of the servant leadership of administrators and supervisors as very high. Moreover, when respondents were grouped according to sex, male (mean = 3.35; SD = 0.459) and female (mean = 3.31; SD = 0.534) also rated the level of the servant leadership of administrators and supervisors as very high. The result implies that respondents see a very high level of servant leadership in their administrators and supervisors. This indicates that administrators and supervisors act as servant leaders to effectively motivate and manage their respective departments. This is a good indication that the organization is performing very well – an effective servant leadership style would lead to a much better possession in the future. The findings concurred with the study of Lo et al. (2020) that showed that managers have similar concepts of servant leadership promoting leadership philosophies of collaboration, creativity, and promoting morality-centered self-reflection. According to Reyes (2019), the function of a leader should be aligned with the organization’s vision that is anchored on servant leadership

Table 2. Level of ethical climate of administrators and supervisors

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Age			
Younger (n=66)	3.43	0.442	Very High
Older (n=45)	3.37	0.453	Very High
Sex			
Male (n=29)	3.34	0.455	Very High
Female (n=82)	3.43	0.443	Very High
Taken as a Whole (n=111)	3.40	0.445	Very High

When taken as a whole, the results showed that the mean score for the ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors was very high (mean = 3.40; SD = 0.445). When grouped according to age, both the younger group (mean = 3.43; SD = 0.442) and the older group (mean = 3.37; SD = 0.453) rated the level of the ethical climate of administrators and supervisors as very high. When respondents were grouped according to sex, both males (mean = 3.34; SD = 0.455) and females (mean = 3.43; SD = 0.443) also rated the level of the ethical climate of administrators and supervisors as very high. This indicates that the respondents were very satisfied with their administrators' and supervisors' behavior and ethics in the workplace. This proves that administrators and supervisors are practicing a high level of ethical climate in the workplace ensuring that their practice is adhering to the ethical standards of the organization. Having the right attitude and behavior to work would boost the people's morale, leading to success and achievement of organizations' goals and objectives. Wirsén (2018) revealed that respondents gave high mean scores to the ethical climate of supervisors in the aspects of age, sex, years of service, and educational attainment. Perceptions of ethical climate are attributed to perceived organizational support and commitment of the employees (Zagenczyk et al., 2021). Those who have high moral and ethical values are

expected to be more knowledgeable of ethical problems, thus, they will be more likely to form righteous judgments (Jones, 2019).

Table 3. Significant difference in the level of servant leadership of the administrators and supervisors when grouped according to age

Age	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig (2-tailed)	Sig @0.05	Status of Acceptance
Younger	66	3.36	0.519	0.548	No significant difference	Accepted
Older	45	3.30	0.510			

Table 3 showed no significant difference in the level of servant leadership when respondents were grouped according to age, with a p-value of $0.548 > 0.05$. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted. The result indicates that both younger and older respondents' see their administrators and supervisors perform very well as servant leaders and effectively manage the organization. The study of Miao et al. (2021) also did not find sufficient evidence of a difference in the level of servant leadership between younger and older groups. However, Giolito et al. (2021) argued that servant leadership is positively correlated with age, gender, and tenure. Managers who are servant leaders encourage their members to innovate and promote social responsibility (Broch et al., 2020).

Table 4. Significant difference in the level of servant leadership of the administrators and supervisors when grouped according to sex

Sex	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig (2-tailed)	Sig @0.05	Status of Acceptance
Male	29	3.35	0.459	0.864	No significant difference	Accepted
Female	82	3.31	0.534			

Table 4 showed no significant difference in the level of servant leadership when respondents were grouped according to sex with a p-value of $0.864 > 0.05$. Hence, the hypothesis was accepted. Both male and female respondents have the same level of assessment of their administrators' and supervisors' level of servant leadership. The result revealed that both groups are much fulfilled by the servant leadership style practiced by the administrators and supervisors in the workplace. The result was supported by Ünsal and Usta (2021) and Murphy et al. (2020) studies, where they concluded that males and females have the same perception about the practice of servant leadership. According to Lemoine and Blum (2021), sex has important implications for the effectiveness of servant leadership. In another study by Sims et al. (2021), they found out that gender is not associated with leadership style or mentoring.

Table 5. Significant difference in the level of ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors when grouped according to age

Age	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig (2-tailed)	Sig @0.05	Status of Acceptance
Younger	66	3.43	0.442	0.499	No significant difference	Accepted
Older	45	3.37	0.453			

Table 5 showed no significant difference in the level of ethical climate when respondents were grouped according to age with a p-value of $0.499 > 0.05$. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted. Both younger and older groups have the same perception of the ethical climate of their administrators and supervisors. Both groups believed that

correct behavior and ethics were promoted in their respective departments. According to Al Halbusi et al. (2020), managers and supervisors are motivated to practice ethical leadership because they can shape the ethical climate in the organization. Otaeye-Ebede et al. (2020) said that employees gain a positive perception of the workplace environment when clear ethical standards are in place.

Table 6. Significant difference in the level of ethical climate of the administrators and supervisors when grouped according to sex

Sex	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig (2-tailed)	Sig @0.05	Status of Acceptance
Male	29	3.34	0.455	0.372	No significant difference	Accepted
Female	82	3.43	0.443			

Table 6 showed no significant difference in the level of ethical climate when respondents were grouped according to sex with a p-value of $0.372 > 0.05$. Male and female respondents have the same level of observation of the ethical climate of their administrators and supervisors. Both groups were very satisfied with the behavior and ethics employed by the administrators and supervisors in the workplace. Furthermore, ethics in the workplace plays a significant role in motivating and encouraging employees to be more determined and productive in their job. A similar study revealed no significant difference in the ethical climate of immediate heads when respondents are classified according to sex (Abdullah, 2014). Employees who see their organization and leaders as ethical have a positive impact on their business (Clark, 2019). According to Garcia and Acosta (2017), ethical behavior influences the employees' efficiency, satisfaction, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Table 7. Relationship between servant leadership and ethical climate

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Coefficients	P-Value	Significance @ 0.05	Status of Hypothesis
Servant Leadership and Ethical Climate	0.722	0.500	0.000	Significant	Rejected

Finally, Table 7 revealed that servant leadership and the ethical climate are positively correlated with each other with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. This indicates that when supervisors have a high level of servant leadership, then the ethical climate is also high and vice versa. The results agree with the study of Ghalavi and Nastiezaie (2020), which concludes that there is a positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior attributing to ethical climate. Additionally, Serrat and Serrat (2017) have identified leadership as critical to establishing and maintaining ethical climates.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of the study indicates that the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of supervisors in a private hospital in Negros Occidental were very high. This is an indication that supervisors were into nation-building and pro-social development. The study showed that administrators and supervisors are already embracing servant leadership in the organization. This empowers the team as it puts the team members first and considers the overall objectives and purpose of the organization. Moreover, it also focused on the ethics of decision-making and actions to impact the workforce's behavior, motivation, and effectiveness.

This study also concludes that the perceptions of both younger and older groups do not vary significantly as they assessed the level of servant leadership and ethical climate of their administrators and supervisors. This is also the same when the respondents were grouped according to sexes. This indicates that regardless of groupings,

employees see their administrators and supervisors practicing servant leadership and have a very high level of ethical climate. These findings showed that the organization has clear ethical standards and moral obligations to its employees. Moreover, the administrators and supervisors are leading and serving their subordinates towards the success of the organization. Finally, this study concludes that servant leadership and ethical climate were positively correlated with each other. This indicates that administrators and supervisors should practice both servant leadership and maintain an ethical climate at all times. This is an important attribute of the administrators and supervisors that can make their members follow their lead.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Results showed that administrators and supervisors have a high level of servant leadership and ethical climate, however, there are still some areas that are below the norm which leaves room for improvement. This study recommends looking at these weaknesses to further improve the current system and further promote servant leadership and improve the organization's ethical climate. It is also recommended to propose a training program that will promote servant leadership to be inculcated as a value for future supervisors. Additionally, it is recommended to further strengthen the practice of servant leadership because it shows a strong and positive relationship to having a good ethical climate.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to the practice of administrators and supervisors only. It would be a great addition to the academic community if future research will be conducted to assess the employees' knowledge and practice of servant leadership and ethical climate. This study was also conducted during the pandemic resulting in restricted conduct of data collection. It would be a great opportunity to observe and interview the employees personally to further understand their understanding and practice of servant leadership and ethical climate.

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