010._Servant_leadership_An_empirical_study.pdf

by Ismi Rajiani

SERVANT LEADERSHIP: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF INDONESIAN MANAGERS ACROSS DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS

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Abstract: Servant leadership, a concept developed in the West which means being servants at heart who also lead, is still in debate whether it exists in the East especially Indonesia which is a highly diverse country. The study examines the differences in servant leadership among Indonesian managers with different ethnicities. Respondents were asked to rate the practice of servant leadership of their direct superiors measured by Ehrhart's questionnaires which composed of 7 dimensions. By using 370 superiors with Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Minang, and Chinese ethnicities, this study found all ethnic groups practiced servant leadership but only Minang and Javanese managers had significant difference. Minang managers practiced higher degree of servant leadership than Javanese managers. This finding suggests that although servant leadership is applicable in Indonesia, cultural values of ethnic groups influence the practice of servant leadership. It is confirmed that servant leadership is universally practiced but cultural values have an influence on its practice.

Introduction

Leadership is one of the most significant factors contributing to the success of an organization. It has been argued that leadership paradigm has been shifted from power to empowerment (Cheong et al, 2019). Servant leadership, an example of leadership style that fits in the empowerment leadership paradigm, was chosen to be the focus of this study. In a meta study by Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, and Wu (2016), it was found that servant leadership showed more promise as a stand-alone leadership style that is useful for leadership researchers and practitioners to understand its linkage to a wide range of outcomes.

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As servant leadership is a concept developed in the West, it is still in debate among leadership researchers whether its practice does exist in other contexts or not. According to Hofstede et al, (2015), due to the different cultural characteristics and the unique situation in each country or region, no management or leadership theories can be applied to every part of the world. Hence, it is interesting to analyze its practice in the East especially Indonesia which is a highly diverse country with more than 240 million people and approximately 300 ethnic groups. The objective of this study is thus to investigate whether there is difference of servant leadership practiced across different ethnicities in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Servant Leadership

The servant leadership concept has its root from the basis of charismatic leadership theory (Graham, 1991). The first use of the term "servant leader" was by Robert Greenleaf in 1969 and it has been highly recognized for over a decade (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). A servant leader blends being a servant and being a leader. The term was first coined in 1969 by Robert K. Greenleaf. According to Greenleaf, "The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead." (VanMeter et al, 2016). Moreover, Davis (2017) described servant leaders as servants at heart who also lead. It is not done out of self-interest, rather it is done for the benefit of others. Servant leaders give their first priority to serve others by seeking the needs, wants and wishes of those to be served before aiming to lead. When these servant leaders know how to support those they serve, their next obligation is to lift up those being served. In the meantime, the followers who are being served may decide to meet the needs of others through their own servant leadership behavior.

Many have defined servant leader behavior as actions that place an emphasis on the individual self-esteem and self-worth of followers and lift up the desire to become servant leaders at the same time(Spears, 1998). Birkenmeier et al. (2003) argued that servant leaders go beyond their personal self-interest and aspire in order to fulfill the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of others. Smith et al. (2004) have proposed that servant leadership would create a more "spiritual generative culture" because the servant leader begins with a feeling of altruism and egalitarianism. They believe a servant leadership culture plainly focuses on the needs of followers over organizational success.

The servant leader "must attend" to the followers and "stand for what is good and right, even when it is not in the financial interest of the organization" (Yukl, 2002, p.404). Lubin (2001) stated that a servant leader's first responsibilities are the

relationships and people, and that this relationship takes precedence, or priority, over the task and product.

The concept of servant leadership focuses on the interests, development, and empowerment of followers with a final objective of achieving a shared vision within an organization (Greenleaf, 1977). A servant leader's prime motivation is the desire to serve followers which in turn leads to accomplishing shared goals. In other words, leaders' values of their consideration for followers or those being served, integrity, and competence, being all necessary to promote an interpersonal trust, are essential ingredients in servant leadership.

Indonesian Culture

Noesjirwan (1978) conceptualized Indonesian cultural values as sociable or maintaining friendly relationship with everyone, community-oriented (rather than individual-oriented), and focusing on a steady life style of harmonious and restrained (rather than indulgent) behavior. However, cultural values of different ethnic groups in Indonesia are not identical (Rajiani & Kot, 2018). For example, Javanese (the predominant ethnic group) always puts first the community interest than on personal interests (Herusatoto, 1985), while Sundanese people (the second largest ethnic group) was claimed by Rosidi (2009) as individualistic. Rajiani & Pypłacz (2018) confirmed that Indonesia is a culture with high power distance, collectivism, femininity, low uncertainty avoidance, and short-term orientation.

According to Hannay (2008), Indonesia has a mix of culture that does facilitate and does not facilitate servant leadership. Collectivism, femininity, and low uncertainty avoidance are cultural characteristics that are in line with servant leadership. High power distance and short-term orientation cultures of Indonesia are not in a favor for servant leadership. On the other hand, Choi and Yoon (2005) claimed that self-sacrificial behaviors, which are the major characteristics of servant leaders, are considered as effective leadership behaviors in regardless of low or high power distance and individualistic or collectivistic cultures. Nevertheless, Pekerti and Sendjaya (2010) believed that self-sacrificial behaviors are more applicable in a society with community-oriented values while agreeing that power distance is not related with self-sacrificial leading behaviors. Pekerti and Sendjaya's argument was based on their study which concluded that servant leadership or self-sacrificial leading style is widely practiced and accepted in both Australia and Indonesia which have dissimilar (or even opposite) cultural values. While Australia society exhibits in-group collectivism and egalitarianism with an individualistic and low power distance values, Indonesia society exhibits mutual assistance with a collectivistic and high power distance values. That is, self-sacrificial leaders who place other people's needs over and above those of their own are considered as effective leaders in either an egalitarian culture like Australia or a paternalistic culture like Indonesia. In other words, power distance is not found to be

an important facilitating value for servant leadership practice (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010).

To prove which argument is correct, whether servant leadership should have certain contexts (Choi & Yoon, 2005; Hannay, 2008) or it is universally practiced (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010), the focus of this paper is on the difference between Javanese and other major ethnicities in Indonesia. Since Javanese is the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, most people often assume that Javanese culture is a representative of Indonesian culture. This argument might be misleading since each ethnic group has its own cultural values which could impact leadership style in particular.

Methodology

Measures

A survey methodology was undertaken in this study. Raters were asked to rate their perceived direct superiors' leadership style. Ehrhart's (2004) measures of servant leadership were adopted due to the proven construct validity and reliability from the testing with 370 employed university students as a sample and several analyses. The questionnaire was developed in English by Ehrhart (2004), which has seven dimensions of servant leadership behavior, i.e., (1) forming relationships with subordinates, (2) empowering subordinates, (3) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (4) behaving ethically, (5) having conceptual skills, (6) putting subordinates first, and (7) creating value for those outside of the organization. Each dimension has two items, totaling 14 items as shown in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire was later translated to Bahasa Indonesia. Back translation to English was performed afterwards. The back translated version was then compared with an original English version. A final Indonesian version was pre-tested with a class of one Master program at one of the leading universities in Indonesia. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a great extent). Demographic and other related information of both raters (subordinates) and persons being rated (direct bosses or leaders) were collected, e.g., gender, age, marital status, education background, years of work experience, and position.

Sample

Sample of this study is primarily alumni of one Master program in business and management at one of the leading universities in Indonesia. The program has been well established for more than 20 years and has more than 4,000 alumni who work in both governmental and private sectors. The web-based survey was sent via email in 2018 to 1,900 alumni who have traceable email addresses. The total number of respondents who replied was 425 with useable number of 370. Thus response rate of this study was 18.63%.

Table 1: Ethnic Group of Respondents

	Respondents		Respondent's Superiors	
	N	N%	N	N%
Javanese	172	44.10	160	41.88
Sundanese	37	9.49	36	9.42
Batak	29	7.44	19	4.97
Minang	29	7.44	24	6.28
Malay	16	4.10	13	3.40
Chinese	87	22.31	97	25.39
TOTAL	**370**		**349**	

Majority of superiors rated by respondents were male (83.3% of total sample) and aged between 35 and 54 years old (38.8%). The majority was Javanese with 41.9% of total superiors rated, which was concordant with the Javanese representation in Indonesia of 41.6% (Suharno, 2007). Chinese was the second largest group (25.4%) because most of the respondents worked in private sector; and according to Suryadinata et al. (2003) in Jakarta where most sample live and work, Chinese was the fourth largest ethnic group after Javanese, Betawi, and Sundanese.

Data Analysis

Non-response bias was first tested in order to confirm that the respondents well represent the population (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). Early respondents, those who responded within one week, and late respondents who responded within two months or after the follow up mail, were compared in various aspects. Age, length of service in current organization, and length of service in current position of respondents themselves and of bosses rated by respondents were compared by using t-tests. It was found out that there is no significant difference among these characteristics between the early and late respondents (p-value > 0.05). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for servant leadership was performed. Cronbach alpha and composite reliability are much higher than the accepted value of 0.70.

Results

Independent sample t-tests were undertaken between factor scores of Javanese and those of Sundanese, Batak, Minang, and Chinese with significant level at 0.05 for each pair (Table 2). The average means of raw score of servant leadership among six ethnic groups show that only Minang, Sundanese, and Batak were perceived to have a higher degree of servant leadership than the average of Indonesian of 3.12. Javanese, Chinese, and Malay bosses were, on the contrary, perceived to have a lower degree of servant leadership than the average Indonesian with Malay as the lowest. Among six

ethnicities, the only difference of perceived servant leadership that is statistically significant is between Javanese and Minang. According to the mean of raw score of servant leadership shown in Table 2, while Minang managers were perceived with the highest degree of servant leadership, Javanese managers were perceived with the second lowest degree.

Table 2: Comparison of Javanese and Other Five Ethnicities

Ethnicity	Mean of raw score of servant leadership	Mean of factor score of servant leadership	Sig 2-tailed
Javanese	3.045	-0.094	
Sundanese	3.271	0.187	0.158
Batak	3.210	0.108	0.434
Minang	3.536	0.506	0.005**
Malay	2.960	-0.175	0.793
Chinese	3.062	-0.064	0.823

Note: Significance p-value for two-tailed t-test: ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

As mentioned previously, Indonesia is a highly diverse country with approximately 300 ethnic groups including Chinese immigrants. Studying management and leadership styles in a country with many ethnics like Indonesia has to be done carefully since the results cannot be generalized across subcultures. For example, Selvarajah and Meyer (2008) found that each of three main ethnic groups (Chinese, Indians, and Malays) in Malaysia has distinctive leadership behavior.

Average mean of perceived servant leadership among Indonesian managers was reported as 3.12 out of scale of 5. It can be confirmed to a certain extent that servant leadership does exist in the Indonesian work setting. This result is contradictory to the wide belief that people from high power distance countries (e.g., Asian countries and Indonesia in particular) would prefer to be told what to do by their superiors. However, the findings are in line with Pekerti and Sendjaya's (2010) study that servant leadership is highly compatible in community-oriented culture, of which Indonesia is ranked very high on collectivism (Hofstede, 1991).

Indonesian managers are commonly believed to practice so-called traditional, patrimonial, and hierarchically oriented management. However, Habir and Larasati (1999) found that as these managers have embraced more Western values either through education or other international experience, they tend to adopt different management style from the typical management style mentioned. Young (1994) also found a similar support that as Indonesian managers are becoming more Westernized (those who get MBA education), they are more like American.

Minang managers had the highest servant leadership compared to the other five ethnic groups. Therefore, only Minang and Javanese managers had significant difference in practicing servant leadership. Javanese always puts first the community interest than on personal interests (Herusatoto, 1985) whereas Minang people (or often called Padang or Minangkabau) respect for togetherness (Chandra, 2004). Both ethnicities are thus claimed as being more collectivistic rather than invidualistic. However, the difference in the practice of servant leadership may be better explained by the difference in other ethnic groups' cultural values. In Javanese culture (especially Central Javanese), there is an institutionalized separation between superiors and subordinates which creates the likelihood of mutual isolation (Mulder, 1989), in which superiors are more likely to become arrogant and subordinates are passively resisting. On the other hand, Minang people never like authoritarian attitude, therefore there is no gap between superior and his/her subordinates because position of each person is the same as the others (Sjarifoedin, 2011).

In Minang community, only the functions and roles are different from one another, but as a human being, everyone has equal position. Minang people believe that every member of a group is complementary based on his/her functions and responsibilities (Sjarifoedin, 2011). Therefore, mutual respect is highly appreciated in Minang people. In other words, there is harmony in relationships. Minang people also uphold the egalitarian values. Minang managers were perceived high in behaving ethically because in their society, they are required to comply with rules and regulations and follow the guidelines and instructions given by the higher authorities (Sjarifoedin, 2011). All duties are everyone's responsibility because mutual help and support is an obligation. Therefore, respondents perceived Minang manager as their role model.

It can be discussed from the results of this study that although both Javanese and Minang people value togetherness, the high value of hierarchy among Javanese inhibits the practice of servant leadership in comparison with Minang which has less stratification or hierarchy. The argument that collectivism culture match with servant leadership which is claimed by Choi and Yoon (2005), Hannay (2008), and Pekerti and Sendjaya (2010) are in line with the result of this study. The result is also consistent with Hannay (2008) who believed that high power distance does not match with servant leadership. Additionally, this study supported the statement of Pekerti and Sendjaya (2010) who believed that self-sacrificial behaviors are more applicable in a community-oriented society rather than a society with high power distance.

The results can also be clearly explained by a fine classification of collectivism (as well as individualism) attributes by Triandis (1995). Triandis (1995) had referred to a study by Markus and Kitayama in 1991 that there are four kinds of self which are independent or interdependent and the same or different. The combinations of these four types can be categorized into (1) independent/same or horizontal individualism,

(2) independent/different or vertical individualism, (3) interdependent/same or horizontal collectivism, and (4) interdependent/different or vertical collectivism. In both individualist and collectivist cultures, the vertical dimension means accepting inequality and rank determines privileges. On the contrary, the horizontal dimension emphasizes that people should be similar on most attributes, especially status or equality is more accepted. In other words, vertical dimension is related to a higher degree of power distance while horizontal dimension is related to a lower degree of power distance.

Both Javanese and Minang people are both community-oriented or collectivist. The difference between the two ethnicities is in their acceptance of hierarchy. While Javanese do accept hierarchy or inequality, Minang tend to appreciate a society with less hierarchy and value egalitarian. From Triandis' (1995) classification, Javanese culture is better defined as vertical collectivism whereas Minang culture is better termed as horizontal collectivism.

In sum, this study concludes that the practice of servant leadership is expected to be higher in a culture that values sameness (horizontal) rather than a culture valuing difference (vertical). Put it simply, power distance reduces the degree of servant leadership practiced. However, it cannot be concluded from this study that servant leadership is more dominant in collectivist or individualist cultures as both Javanese and Minang are collectivistic. What can be concluded from this study is that servant leadership is expected to be practiced more in horizontal collectivist culture than in vertical collectivist culture. Some scholars have argued that servant leadership should have certain contexts (Choi & Yoon, 2005; Hannay, 2008), while others claimed that servant leadership is universally practiced (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The findings of this study show that servant leadership is universally practiced but cultural values influence the practice of servant leadership.

Conclusion

An important and unique theoretical contribution of this study is its being first research to explore the difference in servant leadership across major ethnicities in Indonesia. Ethnic differences were found to exist. It implies that generalization of Indonesian leadership and/or management styles could be misleading.

A practical implication of this study is its application for employees working cross culturally. First, it is useful for those who work with Indonesians to understand that there is difference of cultural values across ethnicities. Applying the same working method or leadership to all Indonesians is not an efficient practice. Second, it is confirming that servant leadership is a culture bound concept. It is certain that servant leadership is practiced in a different degree across countries since testing within one country does show the difference across ethnicities differing in cultural values.

Despite a large number of respondents in this study, some limitations are noted for an improvement in future studies. The first limitation is the fact that most of the respondents are located only in Jakarta. Although Jakarta has represented Indonesian population well in terms of ethnic distribution, future research should consider gathering questionnaire from other cities from different parts of Indonesia, for example, Medan (North Sumatera), Surabaya (East Java), and Makassar (South Sulawesi). Liden and Antonakis (2009) argued that context should be put more attention in leadership studies. Contexts do vary and thus should be captured in explaining leadership phenomenon. It is possible that the workplace location has an influence on how people behave.

The second but minor limitation is the adoption of the instruments developed in the West in the Indonesian setting. The instruments were however pretested with Indonesian managers. Since the aim of this research is to test whether the servant leadership concept exists in an Indonesian work setting or not, the established instruments from the West were just then adopted. Developing the leadership instrument exclusively for the Asian context would be a possible future research.

Potential future research topics are many. First, it is interesting to explore whether there are differences in the use of servant leadership across generations as Irhamahayati et al, (2018) and Abbas et al, (2018) have also found the conflicts in the workplace by the differences between the young and the old generations at the Indonesian public sector workplace. Other interesting research questions are 'Does organizational culture have an impact on the practice of servant leadership?', and 'In which organizational contexts or situations will servant leadership lead to a higher organizational commitment of the followers?'

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SŁUŻEBNE PRZYWÓDZTWO: BADANIE EMPIRYCZNE INDONEZYJSKICH MENEDŻERÓW W RÓŻNYCH GRUPACH ETNICZNYCH

Abstrakt: Przywództwo w służbie, koncepcja rozwinięta na Zachodzie, która oznacza bycie sługami w sercu, którzy również przewodzą, jest wciąż w debacie, czy istnieje na Wschodzie, szczególnie w Indonezji, która jest krajem bardzo zróżnicowanym. Badanie bada różnice w kierowaniu sługami wśród indonezyjskich menedżerów o różnych grupach etnicznych. Respondenci zostali poproszeni o ocenę praktyki kierowania sługami przez swoich bezpośrednich przełożonych, mierzonej kwestionariuszami Ehrharta, które składały się z 7 wymiarów. Korzystając z 370 przełożonych pochodzących z Jawajczyków, Sundańczyków, Bataków, Minangów i Chińczyków, badanie wykazało, że wszystkie grupy etniczne praktykowały sługę przywódczą, ale tylko menadżerowie z Minang i Jawajczyków mieli znaczącą różnicę. Menedżerowie z Minang ćwiczyli wyższy stopień przywództwa w służbie niż

menedżerowie jawajscy. To odkrycie sugeruje, że chociaż przywództwo w służbie ma zastosowanie w Indonezji, wartości kulturowe grup etnicznych wpływają na praktykę przywództwa w służbie. Potwierdza się, że przywództwo sług jest powszechnie praktykowane, ale wartości kulturowe mają wpływ na jego praktykę.

Słowa kluczowe: przywództwo w służbie, grupy etniczne, Indonezja

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仆人领导：不同族裔群体的印尼经理的实证研究

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摘要：仆从式领导是西方发展起来的一种概念，意味着在心上也要担当领导者的仆人，关于它是否存在于东方，尤其是在印度尼西亚这样一个高度多样化的国家，仍存在争议。该研究考察了不同种族的印度尼西亚管理人员在仆人领导上的差异。受访者被要求通过埃哈特（Ehrhart）的问卷（由7个维度组成）对他们的直接上级进行仆人领导的行为进行评分。通过使用370名爪哇人，Sun丹人，巴塔克人，米南人和中国人的上级，该研究发现所有族裔都实行仆人领导，但只有米南人和爪哇人的经理有显着差异。与Javanese经理相比，Minang经理的仆人领导程度更高。这一发现表明，尽管仆人领导在印度尼西亚适用，但族裔群体的文化价值观影响着仆人领导的实践。可以肯定，仆人的领导是普遍实行的，但是文化价值对其实践有影响。

关键词：仆人领导，种族群体，印度尼西亚

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