

Original Research Article

The impact of Servant Leadership and Psychological Safety on Socially Responsible Leadership in Ugandan Public Universities

ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of servant leadership, psychological safety and socially responsible leadership in the context of public universities in Uganda. The article aims to highlight the significance of fostering a safe and inclusive environment within academic institutions, and the role of leaders in promoting ethical and socially responsible practices. It explores the significance of these concepts in creating a conducive, inclusive, and empowering environment for staff. Through the examination of existing literature and research, this article emphasizes the importance of Servant Leadership, Psychological Safety and Socially Responsible Leadership for the well-being and success of staff within public universities in Uganda. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Servant Leadership, Psychological Safety and Socially Responsible Leadership in Ugandan Public Universities. Using a cross-sectional and correlational design, useable questionnaires were received from 214 respondents from Public Universities in Uganda. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Results indicate that Servant Leadership and Psychological Safety are positively and significantly related with Socially Responsible Leadership. This study provides insights on the initial understanding of the association between Servant Leadership, Psychological Safety and Socially Responsible Leadership using evidence from Public Universities in Uganda.

Keywords – Servant Leadership, Psychological Safety, Socially Responsible Leadership, Public Universities, Uganda

1. INTRODUCTION

Continuous social challenges in the world today, demand for socially responsible leaders. Social challenges are a crisis phenomenon that covers spheres of human life and communities and therefore these challenges demand for leaders with social and inclusive values [1] who are socially responsible. Socially responsible leaders are those leaders with inclusive values and aim at attaining organizational or societal goals with ethical manners [2]. On the other hand, socially responsible leadership (SRL) as a process is viewed in a perspective of inclusivity, ethical, responsibility, capability among others [3]. SRL helps the organizations to engage with the real-life concerns of its employees, customers and other stakeholders. For example, globally this has been witnessed in the actions exhibited in Marriott hotel, SouthWest Airlines, among others [4]. The SRL values in these companies have contributed to their high performance and these have been listed among the best 100 performing companies in the world. Further empirical evidence on SRL in the confederation of British Industry in 2020 indicated a wrapping 90% of the respondents demanding for socially responsible leaders [5].

There are a number of factors that contribute in building SRL in organizations and these include servant leadership abilities, psychological safety, organizational culture, personality among others [6]. However for this study, servant leadership (SL) and psychological safety (PS) will be considered as building factors for SRL among university staff holding leadership positions at different levels. SRL is significantly positive

to SL [7]. SL is viewed as a commitment for one who serves others beyond self. SL is characterized by number factors including stewardship, building community, listening, holistic approach to work, commitment to growth of people among other factors [8]. Servant leaders focus on addressing the needs of their followers implying their ability to improve their SRL abilities in organizations [6]. Servant leaders through their actions develop a strong and highly engaged workforce, which can be a considerable source of SRL for their organizations. For example Marriott hotels promote SRL within the company which is included in their mission statement, “serve their world with supporting the communities in which one lives and work” [9]. However much as these are witnessed in such companies, there is no clear understanding of whether SL contributes in developing SRL in University setting in Uganda. Much as SL and PS have been embraced in the world-over, there is no clear empirical evidence of those variables in Uganda, as there are many social inequalities in organizations. In Makerere University and Kyambogo University, a number of management issues ranging from failure to present staff issues before government have been reported which has led to numerous staff strikes. The mistrust and unfair staff representation at public universities might be attributed to lack of socially responsible leaders [10].

Several mechanisms link SRL and PS hence organizations need an examination to understand its impact [11]. PS is defined as a state of mind wherein followers consider themselves protected to openly share without risking their work or career [12]. “PS enables employees to engage, connect, change and learn new ways of executing their tasks and contributing their quota to the development of the organisation without any fear of being punished. Research shows *how organizations can foster PS and doing so depends on leaders at all levels demonstrating SRL behaviors that help their employees thrive*” [13]. Investing in SRL can equip leaders to embody these behaviors and cultivate PS across the organization.

SRL has been supported theoretically by SL theory that underpins grounds for which a leader should serve others before self hence building them holistically, empowering them and building their wellbeing [14]. The SL theory has much provided grounds for leaders to thrive in organizations hence terming them as socially responsible leaders. Such leaders with SL attributes have been able to build sustainable organizations with leaders who are psychologically safe and those that advocate for social inclusion for all. Therefore this study will consider SL theory as a grounding theory for SRL and PS among staff holding leadership positions in Public Universities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Servant leadership

“Servant leaders are self-motivated and internally driven to implement the behaviors and exhibit the characteristics of servant leadership” [15]. [16] Studied “servant leadership at the academic level and across organizational disciplines. Through their research, they concluded that specific situations dictate the leadership style necessary to address the needs of the followers. However, researchers continue to identify servant leadership as appropriate and effective in religious organizations including educational settings which is why we need the study in an academic setting”. [14] contended “servant leadership emerged as a global phenomenon by the early 1970’s. Greenleaf, as the theorist credited for introducing the concept of servant leadership to the mainstream though of leadership theory, stated that great leaders result from leaders that see themselves as servants” [14]. “Therefore, the primary motive of a servant leader is to serve rather than lead. Greenleaf further suggested that the best test on the effectiveness of a servant leader is on whether they can build and maintain common good within an organization and society” [14]. “It should also be noted that it is not only the leader who has to serve but also the organization in order for servant leadership to be effective” [14]. Through ongoing research into servant leadership and exploring its application in multiple settings including organizations and businesses, [16]

contended that servant leadership is becoming more widely accepted in organizations which is so for academic institutions.

Servant leadership starts with desire. [17] agreed with Robert Greenleaf's original notion in the 1970s about servant leadership, which highlighted the intrinsic feeling of leaders wanting to serve. That selfless desire to serve establishes servant leaders as being servants first and leaders second. A leader's greatness is built upon the practice of serving other people [18] and although servant leaders are servants first, they can be great leaders because "leading and serving are two sides of the same coin". The essential skills, knowledge, and character traits that are consistently understood as leadership staples are still required to lead people; the difference becomes apparent in the leader's value system based on the leader's actions and interactions with people. "Servant leaders genuinely care about people and will sacrificially serve and focus on their followers' needs and leaders are often developed and discovered by those acts of service and stewardship" [19].

2.2 Psychological safety

"Psychological safety is an individual's perception concerning the consequences of risk-taking, others' well-being, and admitting mistakes" [20]. "It refers to a situation where employees believe that they will not be punished for raising their voices and ideas, reporting mistakes, and sharing opinions" [21]. Psychological safety is the state of mind wherein people consider themselves protected to openly share ideas without risking their work, rank or career [12]; and has been positively associated with several outcomes for example work engagement, creativity and performance [22]. Followers consider themselves protected and tend to have better health and well-being working under supportive and moral managers or organizations. Since emotions are contagious, leader's standards of integrity, morality and fairness positively affect follower's mood, self-esteem, meaningfulness, sense of security, trust and psychological safety. Followers working under such leaders feel that it is appropriate to work with such bosses since they do not backstab or seldom cheat. Also, they do not have a threat to their work and have greater involvement, ownership and autonomy at work; thereby as reciprocity, it enhances both psychological safety and work satisfaction [23] in organizations. Prior research supports that the link between leadership and work satisfaction is mediated by psychological safety [24].

Psychological safety has been found to affect employees' work engagement. For example, studies of [24] reported "a strong positive association between psychological safety and employees' work engagement". Similarly, [25] found that "a psychologically safe environment improved employees' work engagement. The results of these studies point to the fact that in organisations where employees are psychologically safe, they become focused on accomplishing the goals despite the discomforts that inevitably come along with new experiences and ideas. It should be noted that in the university settings, employees' psychological safety is particularly relevant because it enables them to be dedicated and committed to influence the achievement of intended learning outcomes". [25] reported that "psychological safety mediated employees' job commitment and engagement. Psychological safety, therefore, brings a shared belief held by employees of a team that makes that team safe for interpersonal risk-taking". Similarly, [26] in a study concluded that "psychological safety is associated with the learning behaviour of workers which consequently affects the job performance of employees". According to [24], "they found out that intervention at the workplace that focus on the psychological safety of employees would contribute to their work engagement, as the feeling of psychological safety allows employees to show much concern, vigor and dedication. According to Anecdotal evidence, it's observed that when individuals do not feel psychologically safe, their willingness to engage in experiences that would facilitate their development and work is hampered".

2.3 Socially responsible leadership

“The concept of ‘socially responsible leadership’ has been developed due to various scandals regarding the responsibility of several multinational companies towards the environment and society, correlated with increasing concerns for sustainability” [2]. “The concept is centered on the sustainable relations between organisation leaders and stakeholders that are meant to lead to beneficial results for society and environment. For that reason, socially responsible leadership objectives gained attention because of the realization of the need to constitute sustainable mutual relationships with stakeholders, environment and society. Furthermore, it also refers to the ability to flexibly deal with organisational change and engaging in dialogue and partnerships with various members of society” [27]. [28] defines responsible leadership as “a relational and ethical phenomenon, which occurs in social processes of interaction with those who affect or are affected by leadership and have a stake in the purpose and vision of the leadership relationship”.

Other perspectives highlight the need for socially responsible leaders to behave both ethically and effectively [29] and to extend the notion of responsible leadership from single individuals (the great leader concept) to all levels of the organisation [2]. “From these perspectives, we can broadly define socially responsible leadership as a multilevel phenomenon involving individuals, groups and organisations that emphasizes leadership effectiveness, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholders and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable practices. More recently, a ‘socially responsible leader’ has been defined as one who creates a culture of inclusion built on solid moral ground” [30]. Therefore, following [31], “SRL can be viewed as a process of inclusion to attain group, organisational and societal goals with ethical manners. It was indicated that SRL includes the social-relational processes of individual managers and collectivities that actively involve stakeholders so as to function consistently as an ethical and socially responsible organization” [31]. [32] stated that “responsible leadership was a condition that included the positive climate, positive calling orientation, positive connections and positive communication to enable positive dynamics and highest human potentialities in the organisational activities”. Supporting that statement, [33] indicated that “socially responsible leadership was not simply about the attributes of the individual leader, but must also take into consideration the entire system, which includes factors such as the contextual environment, the internal environment and the process system”. [34] suggested that “socially responsible leadership includes three critical components: values-based leadership, ethical decision-making, quality stakeholder relationships. Given a focus on these dimensions, we may view SRL in the context of socially responsible manners and morality-based relationships with respect to the variety of stakeholders”. Lastly, the theory of responsible leadership for performance (RLP) proposed by [35] offered “an appropriate framework that addresses leadership that focuses on both performance as well as responsibility. It frames leadership as a performance system of interacting inputs, processes, outputs, feedback and boundaries where each variable has an impact on the others”.

2.4 Servant leadership, Psychological safety and socially responsible leadership

While there is limited literature associating psychological safety with servant leadership, studies as shown above have attempted already to demonstrate the implication each of these variables has on socially responsible leadership [36]. As such, the combination of both psychological safety and servant leadership is expected to have an enormous effect in influencing socially responsible leadership.

Given that organizations mostly academic institutions are often complicated, Leaders can play a critical role in employees’ psychological safety [37] by dealing with employee challenges. Servant leadership is also essential in facilitating employees by creating a safe working environment where employees’ mistakes are tolerated. Previous research found out that socially responsible leaders focus on encouragement by empowering and lifting those who work for them [38]: always look after staff’s needs and work for the self-development of subordinates [39]. So, such a leader naturally safeguards the psychological safety of the employees. Such leaders follow the open communication approach. Leaders’

accessibility to employees sends signals that it is safe to approach them. This high quality interpersonal relationship between a leader and his/her subordinate facilitates the introduction of psychological safety [40]. In addition, these behaviors can create a safe and resourceful work environment, which may make the organization a more attractive place to work for as shown [41]. In other words, socially responsible leadership might enhance the perceived attractiveness of the organization and consequently amplify organizational identification. Previous research provides supportive empirical evidence that servant leadership, psychological safety and socially responsible leadership can augment employees' identification with their organization [42]. However there has not been research relating all these three variables in an academic institution setting hence need to study these variables in academic institutions in Uganda particularly in those public universities in the central region.

H1: there's a positive significant relationship between servant leadership and socially responsible leadership

H3: there's a positive significant relationship between psychological safety and socially responsible leadership

H2: there's a positive significant relationship of servant leadership and psychological safety towards predicting socially responsible leadership

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Sampling

The study used a cross sectional and quantitative survey design to answer all research questions and examine the relationship of servant leadership and Psychological Safety towards predicting Socially Responsible Leadership. The study was carried-out in Public Universities in Uganda particularly in the central region. This is because these universities operate within most populated area where Socially Responsible Leadership is exercised or practiced. A sample of 250 staff from public universities in Uganda was selected using Krejcie & Morgan table [43]. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents with a 5point Likert scale was used as follows: 1 Strong Disagree (SD), 2. Disagree (D), 3 Not Sure (NS), 4. Agree (A) and 5 Strong Agree (SA). Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive and inferential analysis of measurable relationship between the study variables.

3.2 Measurement of variables

The variables were measured as follows; Servant leadership was measured using a modified tool based on earlier studies focusing on Promoting sense of community, Holistic approach to work, Listening, Commitment to growth of people [14]. Psychological safety was measured using a modified tool based of earlier scholars such as [21] measuring Job engagement, learning from failure, Organizational commitment, Creative work environment whereas Socially responsible leadership was measured using a modified tool used by earlier scholars measuring Morality, Social responsibility, Capability [44].

3.3 Validity and reliability

To achieve content validity, the questionnaire included a variety of questions on the study variables; relationship between psychological safety, servant leadership and socially responsible leadership. The questions based on earlier instruments/tools and information gathered in the literature to make sense of what respondents should respond to. The questionnaire was first tested for validity using the content

validity index where experts requested to indicate the relevance of questions on the study variables; the computed content validity index (CVIs) of the objectives is above 0.7. The data collected was measured to reveal consistence in the responses. The internal consistency reliability for the measurement as a whole in this research was measured by Cronbach's Alpha after running SPSS. 'Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency that is how closely related a set of items as a group [45]. [46] defines Cronbach's Alpha as an internal consistency that shows how close related items are as a group. Cronbach Alpha was carried out to measure internal consistence among items in the group. The major ethical consideration anticipate in this study was ensured privacy of the subjects and confidentiality of their information. To ensure privacy; the subject was informed upfront that indeed their names will not be required and they have right to leave questions unanswered for which they do not offer the requisite information, and the researcher did not put the respondent under pressure, and the purposes of this research are for the academic matters and was treated confidential.

4. RESULTS

Results indicated that 55.1% of the respondents who participated in the study were males and 44.9% of the respondents were females. This shows that public universities in Uganda have more males than females. This may imply that finding employment may be harder for women that it is for men. This may be explained in social roles women play in their homes but needs further research to establish cause and hopefully increase the engagement of women in public universities in Uganda. Results depict that 54.7% of the respondents are in the age group between 31-45 years, while the lowest proportion of 2.8 % were above 56-65 years. According to the measure of highest education, majority of staff in Public Universities in Uganda are led by bachelor degree holders (43.9%) with 1% of respondents holding PhDs.

4.1 Correlation analysis

The correlation results are presented in Table 1. Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis was conducted to establish the relationships between predictor variable (servant leadership and psychological safety) and the outcome variable (socially responsible leadership). The intention was to evaluate whether relationships existed between predictor variables and the outcome variable. Pearson's correlation coefficient, r , was used because it is a parametric statistic and requires interval data for both variables. Bivariate-correlation analysis was performed and Pearson correlation coefficients were generated to measure the direction and size of the relationship between the study variables. However among the correlations presented in the table below, there are high correlations and these are for attributes that define the variables that are against the other variable.

Table 1: Correlation Results

Summary of Pearson Correlation Results			
	1	2	3
Servant Leadership (1)	1		
Psychological Safety (2)	.721**	1	
Socially Responsible Leadership (3)	.361**	.419**	1

**** Correlation Is Significant At The 0.01 Level (2-tailed).**

Source: Primary Data

4.2 Linear Regression analysis

Regression analysis was carried-out to find out the predictability of the predictor variables to the outcome variables. The linear regression analysis was used to predict the value of the outcome variable based on the value of the predictor variables.

Table 2: Linear Regression results

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.428a	0.183	0.175	0.64055	0.183	23.625	2	211	0	2.017
a Predictors: (Constant), Psychological Safety, Servant Leadership										
b Dependent Variable: Socially Responsible Leadership										
Coefficients										
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.				
		B	Std. Error	Beta						
1	(Constant)	3.061	0.18		16.981	0				
	Servant Leadership	0.079	0.057	0.123	1.374	0.171				
	Psychological Safety	0.246	0.067	0.33	3.674	0				
a Dependent Variable: Socially Responsible Leadership										

Source: Primary Data

5. DISCUSSION

The results in the findings indicate that servant leadership and psychological safety have an effect on socially responsible leadership. And the presence of the two variables brings about socially responsible

leadership in the public universities. The results in the tables above indicate that servant leadership and psychological safety predict 17.5% of socially responsible leadership (Adjusted R Square = .175). The findings indicate that servant leadership and psychological safety have an effect on socially responsible leadership. And the presence of the two variables brings about socially responsible leadership in the public universities. While there are limited studies associating psychological safety with servant leadership, studies of [47] have attempted already to demonstrate the implication each of these variables on socially responsible leadership.

Given that organizations mostly academic institutions are often complicated, Leaders can play a critical role in employees' psychological safety [48] by dealing with employee challenges. Servant leadership is also essential in facilitating employees by creating a safe working environment where employees' mistakes are tolerated. The findings are also backed by the study of [49] found out that socially responsible leaders focus on encouragement by empowering and lifting those who work for them, always look after staff's needs and work for the self-development of subordinates. So, such leaders naturally safeguard the psychological safety of the employees. "Such leaders follow the open communication approach. Leaders' accessibility to employees sends signals that it is safe to approach them. This high quality interpersonal relationship between a leader and his/her subordinate facilitates the introduction of psychological safety" [49]. "In addition, these behaviors create a safe and resourceful work environment, which may make the organization a more attractive place to work" [2]. In other words, socially responsible leadership enhances the perceived attractiveness of the organization and consequently amplifies organizational identification as shown [2]. Previous studies of [47] provide "supportive evidence that servant leadership, psychological safety and socially responsible leadership can augment employees' identification with their organization".

CONCLUSION

The study also indicates that servant leadership and psychological safety have an effect on socially responsible leadership. And the presence of the two variables brings about socially responsible leadership in the public universities in Uganda. There are a number of limitations to this study; first the scarce literature on socially responsible leadership in Uganda, Africa and the world in general in regards to University leadership. Second, the study focused on cross-sectional research design, the behavior of variables over a long time could not be analyzed which restricted the applicability of the variables as longitudinal study which may give different results from those obtained. Third, the study used a questionnaire which limited respondents' views about socially responsible leadership which are outside the closed-ended questions. A follow-up with an interview guide would have informed us of the reasons why respondents held certain views.