



The Role of Collaborative Culture between Servant Leadership and Project Success

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Abstract

This study examines the complex connections between servant leadership (SL), collaborative culture (CC), and project success (PS) in the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sector in Kabul, Afghanistan. The objectives were to analyse the direct influence of servant leadership on PS and to explore the intermediary function of CC in the connection between SL and PS. An adopted structured survey was used to collect data from a varied sample of 230 respondents from various NGOs in Kabul. To identify the underlying relationship, statistical analysis was performed using regression analysis and Hayes' Process Macro. The results highlighted the enormous impact of servant leadership on PS, as demonstrated by a large cause-and-effect relationship. Furthermore, the statistical significance of the correlation between CC and PS was confirmed. Significantly, the study found that collaborative culture plays an important role in mediating the relationship between SL and PS, serving as a channel for their connection. The findings of this study expand our comprehension of leadership dynamics in the Afghan NGO sector. They highlight the significance of cultivating collaborative cultures and using servant leadership to improve the effectiveness of projects.

Keywords

Servant Leadership, Collaborative Culture, Project Management

Introduction

In contemporary and complex work environments, firms are increasingly acknowledging the need of competent leadership approaches in attaining successful results. Historically, project management primarily emphasized technical aspects (Khalil, Ihsan and Khan, 2023). However, there is now a growing trend in the literature to consider projects as behavioural systems, recognizing the importance of human behaviour (Nauman et al., 2019) in achieving successful project implementation and completion. Studies have shown that leaders have a crucial role in accomplishing many organizational goals, such as the success of projects (Oh et al., 2021).

Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) identified three elements that contributed to the failure of projects in achieving favourable results. The elements include the organizational foundation, the external environment, and the technology framework (Baker, 2011). Leadership, corporate culture, corporation project knowledge base, and to management support are the factors that may be held responsible for failure in the organizational setting (Khalil et al, 2023). Failure in the external environment is associated with rivals, suppliers, consumers, vendors, government, and education. Technological framework failure may result from issues with hardware, software, telecommunications, or a combination of these areas (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). According to Ellahi et al (2022), project failure was mostly associated with the organizational environment and may be attributed to factors such as inadequate leadership, organizational culture, lack of integration, and insufficient commitment from top management.

Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of different leadership styles, including authentic leadership (Nawaz & Tian, 2022), shared leadership (Imam & Zaheer, 2021), and transformational leadership (Fareed, et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the significance of servant leadership (SL) in project management literature is still at a nascent phase

(Nauman et al., 2022). Therefore, Malik et al., (2022) calls for further research to examine the effect SL on PS.

The favourable influence of SL on project teams stems from its focus on prioritizing the development and welfare of all persons engaged in the project (Ellahi et al., 2022). By prioritizing tasks, it creates a work environment that is favourable and effective, leading to enhanced performance of the project team. The preliminary phase of study in this field suggests the possibility of future investigation into the impact of SL on PS (Nauman et al., 2022; Ellahi et al., 2022).

Although the importance of SL in achieving positive organizational and project results is increasingly acknowledged, there is still a lack of research on the specific ways in which SL affects PS. In particular, the role of collaborative culture as a mediator in this relationship has not been extensively studied. Although previous research has examined the positive correlation between SL and PS (Khan et al., 2022), as well as the significance of team effectiveness in promoting innovation and performance (Yousaf et al., 2021), there is a lack of studies that specifically investigate how SL enhances PS through fostering CC.

Moreover, the current body of research provides limited and incomplete understanding of the interrelated dynamics between SL and collaborative culture in the specific context of project management. It is essential to fill this research vacuum in order to improve our knowledge of leadership in project environments and provide practical guidance to project managers and organizational leaders who want to improve PS by using SL techniques.

This research makes a substantial contribution to the comprehension of SL specifically in the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Kabul, Afghanistan. The study explores how SL ideas are used inside Kabul NGOs, offering detailed insights into the manifestation and operation of these leadership techniques in the socio-cultural and organizational context. Having this comprehension is essential for organizational leaders working in a sector where proficient leadership is vital for navigating intricate socio-political situations and attaining significant influence. Additionally, the research seeks to provide practical guidance for leaders in Kabul NGOs by identifying and emphasizing SL techniques that might improve leadership methods in the sector. This study delves further into the role of SL in fostering a supportive organizational culture in Kabul NGOs. It highlights strategies for building resilient teams that can effectively tackle the specific problems faced in the Afghan environment. The study aims to enhance the influence of local leaders in Kabul NGOs by highlighting the fundamental concepts of SL, such as empowerment and nurturing development.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

Servant Leadership Theory

Robert Greenleaf's notion of SL revolves upon the idea of leading through demonstrating generous service. Greenleaf's concept places a strong focus on serving others before aiming to be a leader (Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014). The defining characteristic of SL is the servant leader's unwavering commitment to ensuring the satisfaction of others' fundamental needs. The ultimate measure of successful SL is in the extent to which individuals being served undergo personal growth and advancement, leading to improved well-being, enhanced wisdom, more independence, and a greater inclination to serve others (Greenleaf, 1970).

SL is a component of a wider body of leadership literature that explores the ethical and moral factors that influence the actions of leaders, encompasses ethical leadership, genuine leadership, and spiritual leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Shamir & Eilam-Shamir, 2005; Fry, 2005). Although there are parallels between the concepts, each one has distinct goals, assumptions, and underlying beliefs. In a literature analysis conducted by Lemoine, Hartnell, and Leroy, the authors examine the conceptual borders and intersections of ethical, genuine, and SL. The review emphasizes the unique emphases of each leadership style, including normative norms, self-awareness, and stakeholder attention, respectively (Lemoine et al., 2019).

Theoretical theories that underpin servant, ethical, and genuine leadership differ. SL is in accordance with moral consequentialist philosophy, which prioritizes the satisfaction of stakeholder needs. Ethical leadership is based on a deontological perspective, which prioritizes strict adherence to ethical principles and regulations. An authentic leader is one who adheres to the principles of virtue ethics, which place an emphasis on being aware of oneself and integrity. The latest meta-analysis on the topic was done by Hoch et al. (2018), who looked at various leadership styles and how they

assembled up against transformational leadership. The findings showed that ethical and authentic leadership did not offer any extra advantages, but SL stood out by showing significance importance in organizational outcome (Hoch et al., 2018).

Servant Leadership and Project Success

Project success is a complex notion that involves the attainment of predetermined goals and objectives within a specified set of constraints. Project success is often assessed by measuring the degree to which it fulfils its technical requirements, remains within budgetary limitations, conforms to predetermined schedules, and provides the anticipated level of quality (De Wit, 1988; Abu Amuna, 2019). Aruna (2012) defines PS as an extraordinary result that exceeds the original expectations. Ashley, Lurie, and Jaselskis (1987) define successful projects as those that strictly comply with the budget, time, and quality specifications specified in the contract. According to Sanvido et al. (1992), PS is determined by the degree to which the project achieves its objectives and meets expectations, including technical, financial, and educational factors.

Project success assessment extends beyond time, money, and schedule indicators; it now encompasses a multitude of unique aspects that impact project results. The transitory character of projects, together with limitations such as scope, time, and money, presents a difficult framework for evaluating the influence of leadership. Prior studies have shown that good attributes of leadership, such as SL, have a beneficial impact on project results (Bilal et al., 2020). Servant leaders may promote the development and success of their followers by prioritising their interests and encouraging cooperation (Harwardt, 2020; Liden et al., 2014). Leadership of this kind is linked to heightened involvement among subordinates (De Clercq et al., 2014) and a favourable emotional disposition towards everyday tasks (Page & Wong, 2000).

Preliminary empirical research shows encouraging outcomes, suggesting that SL has a beneficial influence on the levels of performance in projects, teams, and individuals (Gwaya et al., 2014; Liden et al., 2014; Nauman et al., 2022; Holtzhausen and de Klerk, 2018). Subsequent studies have further substantiated the notion, demonstrating a notable and favourable impact of SL on the achievement of projects (Harwardt, 2020; Yousaf, 2018).

H1: Servant leadership has a significant and positive effect on project success.

Servant Leadership, Collaborative Culture and Project Success

The significant effect of cultural dynamics and varied leadership styles on project teams has been recognized as crucial aspects that greatly define the core principles of the system inside organization (Heifetz, 1994). According to Hofstede (2011), culture has a powerful influence on people' thoughts by establishing distinctive shared values that are unique to certain groups. Empirical evidence consistently supports the notion that culture has a favorable influence on cognitive reasoning processes (Shiraev & Levy, 2010).

Accordingly, Hurley and Hult (1998) provide a definition of a collaborative culture as the extent to which individuals within a group actively assist and support each other in their work (p. 47). Given this, it is important to examine how SL at the person level enhances team-level performance by fostering a collaborative culture among individuals within the project setting. Oliver and Reddy (2006) argue that leadership is a key aspect that significantly impacts the knowledge culture inside an organization. Moreover, previous studies suggest that different leadership styles have a significant impact on the development of collaborative cultures, which in turn results in improved organizational performance (Xie et al., 2018).

According to Grey (1989), collaboration is not only a technique, but a dynamic way for people with different viewpoints on a subject to participate in constructive exploration of their differences. Through this collective endeavour, they aim to find answers that go beyond their own, restricted perspectives on what can be accomplished. A collaborative culture arises as a potent catalyst, working together to reduce rivalry among employees and promoting a greater readiness to exchange vital knowledge (Szulanski, 1996).

It is crucial to connect this concept to SL, especially when considering the achievement of project goals. The concept of SL, which is defined by qualities such as modesty, compassion, and a dedication to the development of team members, inherently corresponds with the fundamental nature of cooperation. Leaders that exemplify the ideals of SL priorities the collaborative exploration of multiple opinions, fostering an atmosphere where team members feel acknowledged, esteemed, and motivated to provide their distinct insights.

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The claim made by Wallace and Mello (2015) that a culture of collaboration disrupts the pattern of assigning blame is highly relevant. Servant leaders cultivate an environment of cooperation and shared responsibility, enabling teams to collaboratively establish common objectives and do activities that extend beyond individual duties. This proactive procedure, aided by SL, expedites the recognition of issues and fosters a feeling of organisational collaboration.

In order to have a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between SL, collaborative culture, and project outcomes, it is crucial to analyse how particular behaviours and traits linked to SL have an impact on individuals. SL, with its focus on humility, empathy, and dedication to the development of team members, may help foster a collaborative culture within project teams. Gaining a deep understanding of these subtle distinctions can offer significant perspectives on how leadership methods affect the cooperative dynamics of project teams and, as a result, influence the overall success of the project.

H2: Collaborative culture significantly mediate the relationship between servant leadership and project success.

Conceptual Model

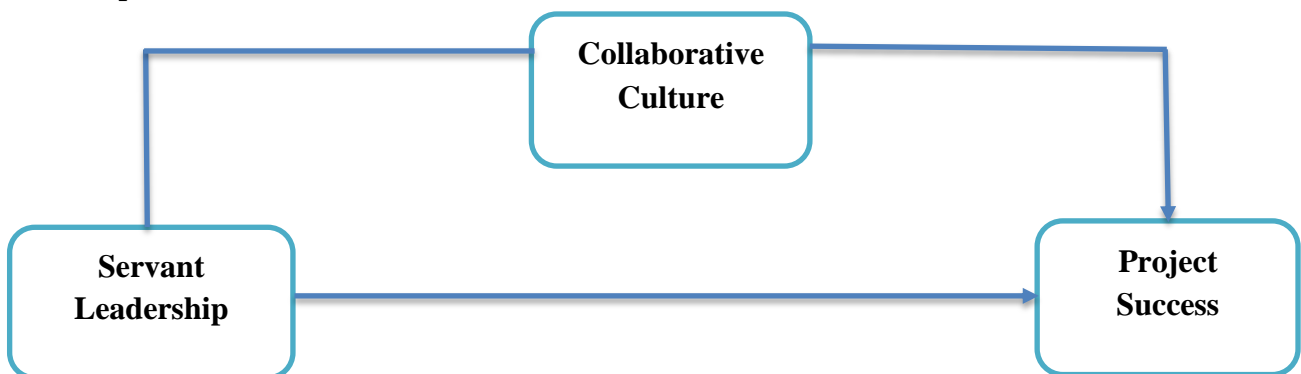


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Source: Author

Methodology

This study adopts a deductive and quantitative research methodology to investigate the relationship between SL, collaborative culture, and PS. The deductive approach involves the development of hypotheses based on existing theoretical frameworks and prior research findings. In this context, our hypotheses propose that collaborative culture mediates the relationship between SL and PS. To test these hypotheses, we employ quantitative research methods, utilizing structured surveys to collect data from participants within the project management context. The survey instrument is designed to capture responses related to perceived SL behaviours, the extent of collaborative culture within project teams, and the overall success of projects.

Population and Sample

The population under consideration for this study comprises (NGOs) operating in Kabul, Afghanistan. Kabul, as the capital and largest city of Afghanistan, is a dynamic and complex environment where NGOs play a crucial role in addressing various socio-economic challenges. Given the unique context of Kabul, characterized by its socio-political intricacies and the on-going process of post-conflict reconstruction, understanding the dynamics of SL, collaborative culture, and PS within the NGO sector holds particular significance. The sample for this study consists of 250 respondents from diverse NGOs in Kabul, selected based on a similar research framework employed in the context of project management (Khalil, Ihsan, & Khan, 2023; Elahi et al., 2022). The sample size aligns with the recommendations of Memon et al. (2018), ensuring statistical robustness and representativeness within the specific context of Kabul's NGO sector. This purposive sampling approach is designed to capture a comprehensive perspective on SL, collaborative culture, and PS in the targeted NGOs, contributing valuable insights to the broader understanding of leadership dynamics within the unique Kabul setting.

Instrumentation

The development of the questionnaire for this study followed a meticulous process to ensure reliability and validity in capturing the key constructs of SL, PS, and collaborative culture. An adopted structured questionnaire was utilized as the primary instrument for data collection. Items

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related to SL were adapted from Liden et al. (2015), which is a condensed version of the original scale developed by Liden et al. (2008), comprising seven items. PS was assessed using a 14-item scale adapted from Aga et al. (2016), grounded in the work of Pinto and Prescott (1990). Collaborative culture was measured through three items developed by Hurley and Hult (1998) to assess the degree of collaboration within the project team. Gopal and Gosain (2010) employed an identical measurement instrument as previously utilized in the literature. To maintain consistency, all items across the three constructs were evaluated using a five-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results

Frequency Distribution of Demographics

Table 1 presents a comprehensive examination of the frequency distribution of important sample variables, revealing the demographic information of the participants in the research. The factors contained in this table are gender, age, education level, professional experience, and job classification. The table seeks to provide significant insights into the variety and representation within the research cohort by systematically presenting these crucial sample properties.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	167	72.6
	Female	63	27.4
Age	15-25	41	17.8
	26-35	112	48.7
	36-45	65	28.3
	46 & Above	12	5.2
Education	Matric	11	4.8
	Intermediate	29	12.6
	Graduate	87	37.8
	Master	103	44.8
Experience	1-4	51	22.2
	5-8	58	25.2
	9-12	76	33.0
	13 & above	45	19.6
Designation	Project Manager	49	21.3
	Team Lead	85	37.0
	Supervisor	58	25.2
	Sub Ordinate	38	16.5

Reliability Analysis

Table 2 shows the reliability analysis of all the construct of the study. The construct of SL consists of seven items, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.882. Similarly, the concept of CC is measured with three questions, which have shown strong reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.786. The variable PS consists of fourteen items, and the data obtained showed a strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.828.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

S.No	Variable	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	SL	07	0.882
2	CC	03	0.786
3	PS	14	0.828

Note: SL denotes servant Leadership; CC denotes collaborative culture; & PS denotes Project Success

Model Summary

In Model 1, the statistical output shows that the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.7402. The model's R-square, also known as the coefficient of determination, is 0.5480. Within this particular situation, a R value of 0.7402 indicates a robust positive association. The R-square coefficient of determination, which is 0.5480, signifies that around 54.8% of the variation in the dependent variable can be accounted for by the independent variable(s) included in the model. Hence, the model explains a significant amount of the variability in the dependent variable, indicating a moderate to high capacity to make predictions. (See table 3)

Table 3: Model Summary

	R	R-square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
Model 1	.7402	.5480	.2565	276.3845	1.0000	228.0000	.0000

Hypotheses Testing

The regression coefficients in Model 4 indicate the precise correlations between the variables in the regression equation.

The regression analysis reveals that the coefficient for the relationship between SL (SL) and Project Success (PS) is 0.7164. The coefficient has statistical significance with a t-value of 16.6248 and a p-value less than 0.0001. Hence, concluding that SL has a significant and positive effect on PS.

Similarly, the coefficient for the path from CC to PS is 0.1258, indicating a favourable correlation. The coefficient is statistically significant with a t-value of 2.3000 and a p-value of 0.0224.

The role of CC as mediation with path from SL to CC to PS has a coefficient of 0.0901. The Lower Limit Confidence Interval (LLCI) and Upper Limit Confidence Interval (ULCI) values shows both are positive with no zero interval, indicating that CC significantly mediate the relationship between SL and PS.

Model 4: Regression Coefficient

Path	Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.1234	.1686	6.6623	.0000	.7911	1.4556
SL → PS	.7164	.0431	16.6248	.0000	.6315	.8013
CC → PS	.1258	.0547	2.3000	.0224	.0180	.2335
SL → CC → PS	.0901	.0360	2.5027		.0134	.1564

Conclusion

With an emphasis on the relationship between SL, CC and PS, this research aims to explore the complex dynamics within the NGOs sector in Kabul, Afghanistan. The research aimed to achieve two main objectives: firstly, to examine the direct impact of SL on project performance in NGOs in Kabul, and secondly, to analyse the role of collaborative culture as a mediator in the link between SL and PS.

The dataset was collected from a sample of 230 respondents, who were representatives of different NGOs, was comprehensive and valuable for our studies. By utilizing regression analysis and the Process Macro of Hayes, the study revealed significant insights that enhance our comprehension of leadership dynamics in the distinct setting of NGOs in Kabul.

The analysis of the causal relationship between SL and project performance revealed a significant coefficient of 0.7164. The results of this study, shown by a highly significant t-value of 16.6248 and a p-value less than 0.0001, conclusively demonstrate that SL has a substantial and beneficial impact on the success of projects in the selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This finding is consistent with previous research that highlights the beneficial effects of SL on organizational results (Nauman et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2020). It underscores the significance of leadership styles within the NGO sector in Kabul.

Subsequent investigation concentrated on the relationship between a collaborative culture and the achievement of project objectives. The coefficient found, which is 0.1258, together with a t-value of 2.3000 that is statistically significant and a p-value of 0.0224, suggests a positive association between collaborative culture and PS. This implies that promoting a cooperative culture has a beneficial impact on the success of projects (Hunter et al., 2013). The importance of this discovery rests in acknowledging the influence of organizational culture on project results, especially within the distinct context of NGO activities in Afghanistan.

A significant part of our study was the assessment of the mediating function of collaborative culture in the link between SL and PS. The data revealed a substantial mediating influence of CC in the relationship between SL and PS, supporting previous studies such as Liden et al, (2014). This emphasizes the essential function of a collaborative culture as an intermediary, offering understanding into the mechanisms by which SL impacts the success of projects in Kabul's NGO sector.

Upon analysing these data, it becomes clear that effective leadership, namely in the form of SL, has a crucial impact on moulding project outcomes inside non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kabul. The positive direct impact of SL on project performance underscores the significance of leadership strategies that prioritize the welfare and development of team members. The mediating function of collaborative culture simultaneously highlights the connection of leadership and organizational culture, underscoring the necessity of a comprehensive approach to leadership in this particular setting.

This study not only adds to the scholarly debate on leadership in NGOs, but also provides practical insights for leaders and organizations working in Kabul, Afghanistan. Understanding the important influence of SL and the function of collaborative culture helps guide efforts to build leadership skills and implement strategies to improve PS in the specific socio-cultural context of NGOs in Kabul.

Future Research Directions

Although this study investigates the relationship between SL and PS with mediating role of CC within the NGOs sector of Kabul, Afghanistan. Further study should examine how contextual variables within the Afghan NGO sector influence the connection between SL, collaborative culture, and PS. Comprehending the impact of contextual elements on the dynamics of NGOs in different areas of Afghanistan, given their distinct character and unique problems, might offer customized insights for leadership approaches.

Furthermore, investigating further possible mediators and moderators in the context of SL, collaborative culture, and PS within Afghan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offers opportunities for future study. Examining mediators such as employee empowerment or organizational learning processes might provide a more detailed comprehension of the methods by which SL impacts PS. In addition, considering characteristics such as team diversity and external stakeholder connections can provide insight into the contextual elements that either boost or limit the influence of SL and collaborative culture on the success of a project.

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