# SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR, MEDIATED BY INTERPERSONAL EMPLOYEE CONFLICT IN MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of requirement of the award of the Doctor of Philosophy

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## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, and my three children Esha, Ubaidullah and Arfa, for their sacrifices during this endeavour. And my parents, I missed them in these three years.



#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First of all, I thank Allah who gave me life and then blessed me with the strength to accomplish this work. The author would like to express his sincere appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Prof. Dr. Rosmaini Tasmin for his through guidance and support in this journey. This work was not possible without his leadership, dedication, mentorship and affection. I also thank my co-supervisor Dr. Muhammad Imran Qureshi, senior lecturer UNIKL for his input and contribution in my study. I also thank all my teachers throughout my career whose contribution made it possible for me to reach here.

I am also thankful to Universti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) for the very good learning environment and the research grant they provided so I could manage to stay abroad, meet necessities of life and complete PhD.

My gratitude to my parents who gave me passion to get education, and it was not possible without them to reach here. Similarly I acknowledge the role of my siblings Dr. Zonash and Engr. Asim for their love and support. I also thank my in-laws for all the encouragement during this journey.

The most important contribution goes to my husband, Dr. Muhammad Shafiq for motivating me to take this step and complete it. And my beautiful children who were always with me despite all hardships and sufferings of this journey. It was their love and support which made it possible. In the end I can only say 'THANK YOU ALLAH, ALL PRAISES TO HIM'.

#### **ABSTRACT**

In contemporary work environment, universities seek to maximize academicians' performance. Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is beneficial for organizations so universities expect the academicians to engage in OCB. As, OCB is not rewarded so academicians lack in its practice. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the factors which impact the OCB of academicians in Malaysian universities. This study investigated the effect of the five constructs of Servant Leadership on OCB of academicians in MTUN universities. Additionally, Interpersonal Employee Conflict (IEC), is natural and inevitable in any organization but have not been studied between Servant Leadership and OCB. To fill this gap, this quantitative study investigated the mediating role of IEC between servant leaders and OCB. Unit of analysis of this study was the academicians of MTUN universities. Study was conducted using a survey questionnaire distributed to 684 academicians of MTUN using stratified proportionate systematic sampling, mostly through online resources. Variance-based structural equation modelling was used to perform the analysis, using SmartPLS3 and SPSS Version 25. Results revealed that four of the five constructs of Servant Leadership were positively and significantly related to OCB, while IEC had a negative relationship with OCB. Servant Leadership constructs also had a negative relationship with IEC. Results revealed that IEC mediated the relationship between Servant Leadership and OCB. The findings have implications for academic leaders to practice Servant Leadership to foster academicians' OCB and manage interpersonal conflicts. This study revealed that practice of servant leadership by academic leaders positively influence academicians' OCB despite the presence of interpersonal employee conflicts. It is recommended to perform this study in the private universities in future, moreover, it is recommended to perform this study on non-faculty employees of public and private universities in different countries.

#### ABSTRAK

Dalam suasana persekitaran pekerjaan yang kontemporari, Universiti sentiasa berusaha untuk memaksimakan prestasi dikalangan ahli akademik. Gelagat kewarganegaraan organisasi (OCB) adalah bermanfaat kepada organisasi. Oleh itu, universiti mengkehendaki ahli akademik melibatkan diri dalam OCB. Namun, disebabkan OCB tidak diberikan ganjaran yang sewajarnya, amalan OCB adalah kurang di kalangan ahli akademik. Oleh kerana itu, adalah menjadi keperluan untuk menjalankan kajian berkaitan faktor yang memberi kesan terhadap amalan OCB dikalangan ahli akademik di Universiti Malaysia. Kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji lima konstruk kepimpinan servant ke atas OCB di kalangan ahli akademik dari rangkaian Universiti Teknikal di Malaysia (MTUN). Tambahan lagi, konflik di kalangan pekerja (IEC) adalah biasa berlaku secara alami dan tidak disedari dalam sesebuah organisasi. Namun, hubungan antara kepimpinan servant dan OCB belum pernah di kaji. Kajian ini adalah untuk mengisi kekurangan yang terdapat pada kajian lepas dengan menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif bagi memeriksa peranan IEC sebagai pengantara antara kepimpinan servant dan OCB. Responden dalam kajian ini adalah terdiri dari ahli akademik di rangkaian universiti MTUN yang berstatus sepenuh masa. Sebanyak 684 borang kajian telah diedarkan kepada ahli akademik universiti MTUN dengan menggunakan kaedah persampelan sistematik berkadaran rawak berstrata. Kebanyakkan soalan kajian diedarkan melalui atas talian. Varian asas permodelan persamaan struktur telah digunakan dalam analisis data dengan menggunakan SmartPLS3 dan SPPS versi 25. Keputusan analisis menunjukkan empat daripada lima ciri kepimpinan servant mempunyai hubugan yang positif dan signifikan kepada OCB. Manakala IEC mempunyai hubungan negatif dengan OCB. Hubungan negatif juga di tunjukkan antara Kepimpinan servant dan IEC. Keputusan analisis juga mendapati IEC memainkan peranan sebagai perantaraan antara hubungan kepimpinan servant dan OCB. Kajian ini memberikan implikasi kepada pemimpin akademik untuk mempraktikan kepimpinan *Servan*t bagi tujuan memupuk amalan OCB dan pengurusan konflik di kalangan akademik Kajian ini juga telah membuktikan bahawa praktis kepimpinan *servant* oleh pemimpin akademik secara positif mempengaruhi OCB walaupun terdapat konflik di kalangan pekerja. Adalah di cadangkan untuk menjalankan kajian yang sama di universiti swasta pada masa hadapan. Disamping itu adalah dicadangkan juga untuk menjalankan kajian yang sama di kalangan bukan ahli akademik di universiti awam dan swasta di negara lain.



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#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*ETP* - Economic Transformational Program

*HOD* - Head of Department

*HEC* - Higher Education Commission

*IEC* - Interpersonal Employee Conflict

ICOS - Interpersonal Conflict Organizational Scale

*KPI* - Key Performance Indicators

*LMX* - Leader-Member Exchange

*MTUN* - Malaysian Technical University Network

NKEA - National Key Economic Area

OCB - Organizational Citizenship Behavior

PLS - Partial Least Square

*POB* - Positive Organizational Behavior

SL - Servant Leadership

*SLQ* - Servant Leadership Questionnaire

SET - Social Exchange Theory

SEM - Structural Equation Modeling

UTHM - Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

UMP - Universiti Malaysia Pahang

UTeM - Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka

*UniMAP* - Universiti Malaysia Perlis

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#### **CHAPTER 1**

#### INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Chapter started with the background of leadership and employee organizational citizenship behaviour, while the interpersonal conflict is also discussed. The problem statement is elaborated with the gaps in the research and its purpose. Nest are the formulated objectives and questions of this research in light of the formulated problem statement. The significance of this study is discussed, and the scope of the study is defined. In the end, operational definitions of the study variables are presented before the conclusion of first chapter.

## 1.2 Research background

Leadership is a vast and developed arena of knowledge, with a collection of styles and theories, for the followers and particular situations. There have been numerous changes on the focus of leadership research. Initially, what leaders do was main focus, giving prominence to style of leadership. There are many proposed definitions of leadership in the past, mostly determining leadership as a process, encompassing shared vision and goals in a group (Schreuder *et al.*, 2011). According to Alok (2014), "leadership is defined as a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and

coherent". Use of leadership characteristics, for instance, values, beliefs, character, ethics, skills, and knowledge are used to achieve this. Leadership styles and approaches can vary, based on the organizational environments, such as in corporate firm, family business, charity institute, and university.

A successful education system, which is the backbone of any nation, is dependent on better quality leadership (Peleg, 2012). In contemporary organizations, only those individuals are accepted as leaders in any group who possess attributes of leadership (Silva, 2014). Today's uncertain academic environment has many challenges for universities in the heat of competition. The effective leadership provides driving force to cope with these challenges by boosting academic performance and achieving goals of the universities. Shafie, Baghersalimi & Barghi (2013) described the significance of leadership in organizations with special focus on the biggest asset of any organization, which is its employees. "The main drivers of organizations are usually employees, they give life to the organizations and provide goals" (Shafie *et al.*, 2013). To get the best from the academicians, it is imperative to give direction and mental peace through leaders. Since effective leadership is the main aspect for improving the employee performance of most of the universities. It is vital to have leadership characteristics for contemporary academic leaders to be effective (Thrash, 2009).

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) is discussed as contextual performance of employees or extra role performance (Bambale, 2014). Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, (2005) defined it as "individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization." OCB is defined as employee behavior that exceeds the outlined job specifications. It helps to achieve organizational goals indirectly or directly (Organ *et al.*, 2005). Other scholars defined OCB as "participating in activities or actions that are not formally a part of the job description, but that benefit the organization as a whole" (Borman, 2004). These extra-role "behaviors are considered to support the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance in the organization" (Organ *et al.*, 2005). OCB has been the focus of the organizational research since 30 years (Organ *et al.*, 2006). But there was scarce research, on the

academicians' OCB in Malaysian universities. Generally, OCB promotes the effective working of the universities and academicians' performance. This voluntarily behavior of employees is important in educational sector, the added role of citizenship is done with the formal official responsibilities (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). An effective leadership approach drives its employees to perform more than assigned tasks and become a contributor to the organization by performing OCB (Taleghani & Mehr, 2013). This study investigate the attributes of servant leadership that eventually enhance the effectiveness of academicians' OCB in Malaysian universities.

Academicians are the main contributor to the educational achievement of the university, and its departmental performance (Mahdinezhad & Suandi, 2013). Moreover, improving employee performance is very important for the sustainability of any organization (Arslan & Staub, 2013). As Wang, Tsui & Xin (2011), mentioned the limited research in the important area of a leadership role on the performance of academicians in educational institutes. There are numerous studies to find the relationship of leadership styles and employees' performance but rarely research is conducted for academicians (Anyango, 2015; Pradeep & Prabhu, 2011; Rasool, Arfeen, Mothi & Aslam, 2015). Role of the leader is critical in boosting employee OCB which in turn helps to achieve organizational objectives (Barbutto & Wheeler, 2006). Furthermore, Manzoni & Barsoux (2002) stated that organizational success is achieved through the enhanced OCB which can be achieved a strong leader-employee relationship. Creation of pervasive social context helps a servant leader to influence follower's behavior positively (Walumbwa, Hartnell & Oke, 2010). The employees getting candid care from a servant leader pays back with positive behavior. This study is based on "Social Exchange Theory of Blau", according to this, "the followers who received genuine care from a servant leader would repay back with positive attitudes and it is a form of exchange in response to the leader's behaviour". Consequently, servant leadership is described for empowering employees, maintaining good values leading towards OCB (Vondey; 2010). However, in any organization, effectiveness steps of leadership, could also be hampered by having conflicts among employees.

A conflict usually arises in today's competitive workplace and it impacts the organization positively or negatively. It takes place when a disagreement occurs between two or more people or countries because of contrasting or different behaviors,

opinions, perceptions, and attitudes. Conflict in any organization is an important and inescapable stressor of the workplace. The extent to which a person has negative social interactions with other employees of the organization are represented by interpersonal conflict. It is also linked with emotional exhaustion and negative emotions (Frone, 2000; Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Liu, Spector & Shi, 2007). It is a common source of work stress that can be associated with adverse outcomes for its victims. Interpersonal conflict is relatively more dangerous to functioning of any institution than task conflict, because of its impact on OCB is relatively stronger. The organizational conflicts may be based on their task and relationship and can damage culture, and performance of the organization, alongside the moral of the employee. This common point of view is supported by Siddiqui (2013), "organizations conflict arises between the employees when their perspectives, values or opinions are disagreeing in relation to the attainment of particular goals or the methods adopted to accomplish them". Contemporary challenging academic environments are in constant need to instantaneously increase profit and maintain employee well-being. Quality of life depends on the quality of our leaders (Bennis, 2009). Better academic environment through better leadership helps universities to reduce turnover rate which is a challenge in the contemporary world (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2003). Throughout human history, difference always leads to conflict. Conflict is not always negative, but it should be managed by leaders. If the conflict is not managed properly, then it can become a serious problem in any organization and can create a chaotic condition that makes employee unable to work together.

Leadership behaviours are being extensively argued in the contemporary literature due to the dynamism of the working environment, which is described as diverse and globalized. Employees of the organizations, have to work and interact with colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds, linguistically different, contrasting lifestyles, and from extensively dissimilar belief systems (Lui & Stack, 2009; Park, Arvey & Tong, 2011). On the same lines, due to diverse cultures among employees of universities of Malaysia, there are many possibilities of interpersonal conflict among them. Jehn & Chatman (2000) found that individual differences such as cultural background and ethical diversity impact overall group performance. Conflict occurs due to job stress and conflicts are one of the main sources of job stress, which shows

that interpersonal employee conflict leads towards job stress rise and vice versa (Friedman, Tidd, Currall & Tsai, 2000). Though, less research exists to investigate the relationship of different leadership approaches on interpersonal conflict. Jehn, Greer, Levine & Szulanski, (2008) suggested that interpersonal employee conflict are the stressors that effect on OCB. According to Vartia & Leka (2011), interpersonal employee conflicts in the organization is an important factor contributing to work stress.

The concern over leadership styles and their relationships to employee performance has caused universities to focus on improving leadership and management methods. Leadership philosophy emphasizing on employees growth towards efficient task accomplishment, self-motivation, community first and leadership nurturing is the servant leadership (Grieves, 2010). Employees get the benefit of this approach when the leader practicing servant leadership approach, creates an environment to empower employees and provide them opportunities to utilize their capacities to full potential (Northouse, 2018). Education and health are the main sectors where servant leadership is being used. In this study, impacts of servant leadership attributes were investigated on the academicians' OCB in the Malaysian Technical Universities Network (MTUN). It is elaborated that servant leaders in the higher education generate trust, engagement, satisfaction, and hope in employees. It was written by Parris & Peachey (2013) that as servant leadership preserves and build a community in making a better society and use good practices of business, therefore, it was helpful in the higher education sector. Therefore, this study pursued to investigate the impact of servant leadership attributes such as "altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, and organizational stewardship" among academicians' OCB in Malaysian universities.

Servant leadership is a highly recommended leadership approach for empowering followers in the education sector (Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002), which lead to inspiration and OCB. When an academic leader possesses the right kind of leadership skills, they can help in developing academicians' OCB. Effective leadership in universities is not a solo journey, so development and growth of academicians are necessary (Mendels, 2012). Servant leaders cultivate a culture of OCB because it is favourable for university success and development. Academic

institution can be made more productive by together work of leaders and its followers (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

In this study, the academic leaders of these four technical universities including Head of Department (HODs) are viewed as servant leaders, as they are practicing the attributes of servant leadership. The followers of this study are considered as academicians (Professor, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, and Lecturers) of these four (UTHM, UMP, UTeM, and UniMAP) technical universities of Malaysia. Though, the research between servant leadership and OCB relationship is relatively limited and novel in Malaysia so more efforts are required to investigate the impact of servant leadership in this country and specifically in higher education sector (Al Haj, Sarimin, Nasir & Yusof, 2012). This study, consequently, desires to fill the gap by performing empirical research on the relationship between servant leadership and OCB in the Malaysian academic perspective. This study also aims to investigate the mediating role of interpersonal employee conflict between the relationships of servant leadership and academicians' OCB of Malaysian universities. Although, several researchers stress that conflict management represents an important role of leader, very few empirical studies have examined that how servant leadership influence on workplace conflicts. Therefore, to fill this gap this study is conducted to examine how servant leadership empirically influence workplace interpersonal conflicts in Malaysian universities.

#### 1.3 Problem statement

Education is the most important area of Malaysia's 'Economic Transformation' program. According to Yahya, Mansor & Warokka (2012), education in Malaysia has been contributing to the state's aspiration. Besides, Yahaya, Chek, Samsudin & Jizat, (2014) also found in the 'Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015', the emphasis of the government on the importance to develop world-class educational institutions, and world-class leadership in universities. Therefore, there is a need for effective leadership in higher education institutions to achieve the country's thrust to be included in developed countries (Muniapan, 2008). It can be concluded that for the

successful education system, the most essential elements are the best quality of leadership and teaching (Peleg, 2012).

Podsakoff et al. (2000) explained the meaning of OCB as discretionary, which means that, in an organisation, there is less chance of any reward or recognition of it. OCB is beneficial for organizations to sustain long-term profitability. Therefore, universities today constantly expect the academicians to engage in OCB. Erturk (2015) "reported academics perform the task of teaching that is a complicated activity requiring professional reasoning. Khan, Rashid & Vytialingam (2016) |highlighted that most universities do not place academicians' citizenship as an important criteria for promotion based on an interview conducted in their study among academicians. It was highlighted as a concern that contributions to research through publications and to obtain grant funding were main criteria of academicians' promotion decisions. It was further identified in their study that a few universities and educational institutions provided a clear importance for academic citizenship service or contributions. When behaviour is not rewarded, chances are minimal that employee exhibit proactive behaviours. Moreover, academic institutions in Malaysia have issues to sustain and improve their OCB over the long period of time (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014). According to this paper, the issues of lack of lecturer's competency especially soft skills are among prominent reasons of lack in quality of education leading to unemployed graduates. They reported that academicians of the public university of Malaysia had performed their in-role such as task performance, but require more focus to perform informal duties such as OCB.

The "level of performance of any education system can be judged by the quality of its employees" (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). McKenzie & Santiago (2005), also endorsed that, high-quality "teachers and leadership are considered among the most important causes for developing an education system". MTUN universities require academicians who are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to support and drive the economy, by performing their formal as well as informal responsibilities in universities (Ismail & Abiddin, 2014). Furthermore, 'National Key Economic Areas' anticipated to generate up to additional 3300000 opportunities of jobs, and to create till 2020 approximately 1300000 jobs related to Technical and Vocational Training, thus 1.6 million TVET graduates were required till 2020 (Unit,

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