



**LINKING SERVANT LEADERSHIP TO ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP
BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC STAFF: A MEDIATING ROLE OF
ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE FOR CREATIVITY**

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: this study aimed to expand research regarding the role of servant leadership (SL) on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as little studies have examine SL – OCB relationship in the OCB literature, especially in academic sector. Additionally, little or no research has examined the explanatory pathways linking SL with OCB. The present study examined whether organizational climate for creativity (OCC) mediates the relationship between SL and OCB.

Method: Academic staff (N = 358; mean age = 38.29 years) randomly selected from three public universities located in Southeast Nigeria, completed the servant leadership scale, organizational climate for creativity scale, and organizational citizenship behavior scale and provided relevant demographic information.

Results: Analysis indicated that SL was positively and significantly linked to OCB. The mediator path was significant which implies that OCC was a pathway through which SL influences OCB. **Conclusion:** perception of OCC is an important avenue through which SL exert great influence on lecturer's tendency to exhibit OCB in their academic jobs in the university.



Keywords: Servant Leadership, Organizational climate for creativity and organizational citizenship behavior

Introduction

The work environment is fast changing from the traditional static system to a more dynamic one, characterized by constant change. Due to exigencies accomplished with change in work setting, it becomes difficult for management to adequately identify and describe job roles for employees that can guarantee efficient and effective performance, hence, the crucial need for organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is referred to as a set of discretionary workplace behaviors that exceed one's basic job requirements. They are often described as behaviors that go beyond the call of duty (Organ, 1988). Examples of such behaviors are helping others who may have heavy work loads (altruism), going beyond minimum expectations (conscientiousness), avoiding unnecessary complaining (sportsmanship), serving on committees (Civic virtue), and communicating appropriate information (courtesy). Research has empirically demonstrated that higher levels of employees' OCB activities often increase the propensity of individuals, teams, and organizations' effective performance in the modern competitive work setting (Wanger & Rush, 2000; Gahangir et al., 2004; Podsakoff, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009).

Similarly, in a specific context of university work settings which is the focus of this research, lecturers provide critical service roles to students and the university community. We therefore argue that development of education cannot be separated from the lecturers' citizenship behaviors that are of benefits to students, colleagues, university community and society at large. Research on organizational citizenship behavior has been very few in the area of education, especially in a sample of academic staff of higher institutions in Nigeria. Nigerian universities in recent times are lagging behind in the competitive web-ranking of quality academic activities both at the global level and in Africa continent (Nnedum, 2016). Given that empirical studies associate OCB with high performance (Gan & Yusof, 2017), looking at factors that can significantly enhance lecturers' OCB is a priority for universities in Nigeria to come up to standard.



One factor we consider in this study is organizational climate for creativity. We argue that If OCB is a free oriented behaviors, it is likely that motivation for OCB will to a large extent depends on perceived climate for creativity. Good climate elicit good behaviors. However, providing good climate will much depend on the leadership. Good leadership will increase good climate perception in terms of cooperation, help, autonomy, relations, innovation and attachment to the job (Suraraz et. al., 2013).

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One leadership type we consider in this study is servant leadership which has the philosophy of helping employee's development and well-being in the organization as priority (Luo & Zheng, 2018). Servant leadership is characterized by leader serving others rather than being served. The environment provided by servant leaders is characterized with love, good interpersonal relationship, autonomy, altruistic help, team work spirit, and stewardship (Eva et. al., 2019). Previous research has found significant relationship between such servant leadership and OCB (Gan & Yusof, 2017; Ehrheart, 2004).

However, by lens of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997) which emphasizes learning by association and modeling, servant leadership models behaviors and environment that characterized with spirit of love, oneness, altruist help, support, which are imitated by subordinates; all which have the likelihood of increasing positive organizational climate, that will in turn influene OCB as other workers copied the behavior consciously or unconsciously by imitation. Thus, we expect that servant leadership will influence both organizational climate for creativity and organizational citizenship behavior.

Further, researchers have extensively examined organizational and personal antecedents and consequences of OCB as reviewed in two meta-analysis study on OCB literature (Poddsakoff el.



A., 2009; Jahangir et. al., 2004) but the mechanism processes of these relationships have not been explored. Meanwhile, scholars have posited that little studies have considered servant leadership and organizational climate for creativity in OCB literature (Gan & Yusof, 2017). This study aimed to examine the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior among academic staff in Nigeria University, and further explore the mediating role of organizational climate for creativity in the relationship between servant leadership and proactive work behavior.

Research Question

The following research questions were raised to guard the study:

1. Will servant leadership influence organizational citizenship behavior among lecturers
2. Will servant leadership be related to organizational climate for creativity
3. Will organizational climate for creativity relate to organizational citizenship behavior of lecturers
4. Will organizational climate for creativity mediate the relationship between servant leadership and OCB

Purpose/objectives of the study

1. To determine the relationship between servant leadership and OCB
2. To examine the relationship between servant leadership and OCC
3. To investigate the relationship between OCC and OCB
4. To explore the mediating role of OCC in SL- OCB relationship

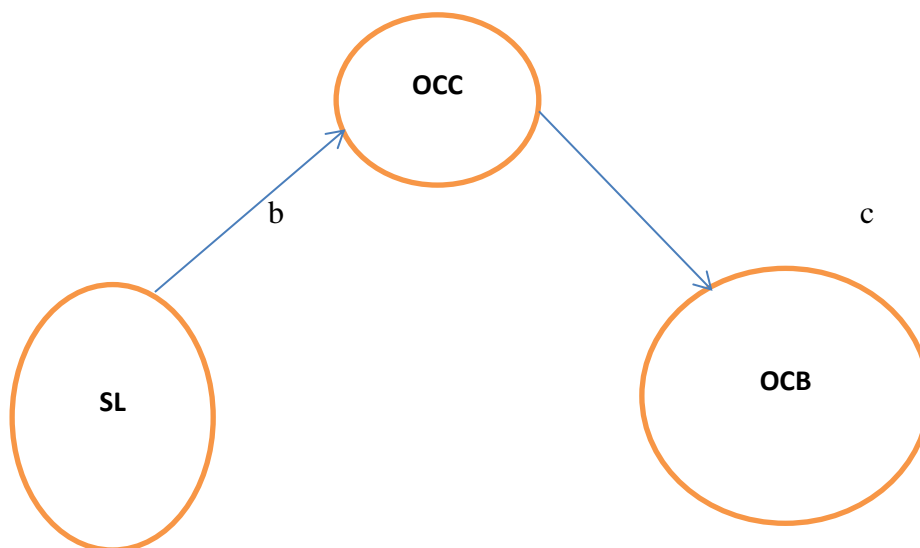




Figure 1: Conceptual model: organizational climate for creativity mediates the relationship of organizational climate for creativity on organizational citizenship behavior

Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership is significantly and positively related to organizational citizenship behavior

Hypothesis 2: servant leadership is significantly and positively relate to organizational climate for creativity

Hypothesis 3: organizational climate for creativity is significantly and positively relate to organizational citizenship behavior

Hypothesis 4: organizational climate for creativity mediates the relationship between organizational climate for creativity and organizational citizenship behavior

Methods

Participants and setting

Participants comprised academic staff members from two public universities in the Southeast region of Nigeria (average years of service is 9 .63 years, $SD = 3 .12$) . The participants consisted of 96 male and 62 female academic staff. Their ages ranged from 27–59 years, with a mean age of 38.29 years ($SD = 4 .26$). Of the 156 academic staff that participated, 73 were from the social sciences, 55 from arts, and 28 are from the natural sciences colleges.

Measures

All the instruments used in this study were already established scales. They include proactive organizational climate scale (OC- S), and servant leadership scale, and organizational citizenship behavior scale. To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument, we reworded some items were necessary to reflect university work context and the participants. All the



measures adopt a seven-point likert response format, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree”, to 7 = “strongly agree.

Organizational climate for creativity scale

Organizational climate for creativity were measured with the short version 15-item organizational climate scale developed and validated by Surarez et.al (2013). It is a measure of quality of work environment that refer to the degree of employees feel cooperation, relations, innovation and participation opportunity, work organization and attachment to the job. Sample items include: “the relationship with my bosses (HOD/Dean) are good”, and “My bosses (HOD/Dean) listen to my suggestions in about work in the department” “In my job, innovative contributions from staff are appreciated”. The cronbach’s alpha (reliability) of the short version of organizational climate scale as obtained by the authors was .94, and the scale achieved a Cronbach’s α reliability coefficient of .78 in the present study

Servant Leadership Scale (SL-S).

To measure servant leadership, we adapted a 23-item scale developed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006). This scale contains five components of servant leadership: altruistic calling, persuasive mapping, emotional healing, wisdom, and organizational stewardship. This study utilized a holistic measure of servant leadership to examine its mediating effect. The overall servant leadership score was obtained by summing up all scores for the five dimensions. Samples items is “my leader (HOD/ Dean/ Vice Chancellor) puts staff or my best interest ahead of his / her own (altruistic calling), “my leader (HOD/ Dean/ Vice Chancellor) offers compelling reasons to get lecturers to do things” (persuasive mapping), “my leader (HOD/Dean/Vice chancellor) is one I turn to if I had a personal trauma” (emotional healing), “my leader (HOD/Dean/Vice Chancellor) always seem alert to what is happening around him / her (Wisdom), and “my leader (HOD/ Dean/ Vice Chancellor) believes that the university needs to play a moral role in society (organizational stewardship).. The developer of this scale (Bartuto & Wheeler, 2006) assessed the internal reliability for self-version of its dimensions which ranged from .68 to .87, and the



rater version ranged from .82 to .92. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the 23-item total scale is 0.94.

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) scale

Organizational citizenship behavior was measured with the 24-item organizational citizenship behavior scale that contain five dimensions namely; altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue (Podsakoff, et. Al., 1990). OCB items contained both positive and negative worded items. One example of the positively worded items is "I do not take extra break", and one example of the negatively worded sample item reads; "I always find fault with what my university is doing". However, we were conscious of the reverse scores for the negative worded items during coding so as to maintain uniformity across board in the scoring pattern. The overall OCB score was derived by summing up scores of the five dimensions. In all, higher score indicated higher organizational citizenship behavior. The study showed a good reliability with cronbach alpha coefficient score of .79 in the current study.

Control Measure

We control for participants demographics, including gender (0 = male; 1 = female), age and tenure (both measured in years). Previous research has indicated that gender, age, tenure were relatively important to employee attitude and behaviors (Wang et al., 2018). Based on this, these three demographic variables were entered as controlled variables in the main analysis

Design/Statistics

The statistics applied for the analysis were descriptive, Pearson moment correlation, and Hierarchical multiple regression. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, version 23.0 was utilized.

Results

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbach Alpha Reliability, and Inter-correlation Result

Variables	Mean	Std	1	2	3	4	5	6
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	: Dev.					
1. Gender	1.42	.59	-			
2. Age	45.68	7.85	.07	-		
3. Tenure	10.56	6.84	.03	.63**	-	
4. SL	4.82	1.25	.09	-.07	-.05	(.94)
5. OCC	5.28	.98	.06	.08	.07	.41*** (.79)
6. OCB	4.79	.85	-.10*	.13*	.11*	.53*** (.78)
						.34***

* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $P < 0.001$

(Note . $N = 158$. Cronbach's α for applicable scales are reported in parenthesis along the diagonal. Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female; age and Job tenure were coded in years (i.e, they were entered as they were collected). organizational citizenship behavior, servant leadership and Organizational climate for creativity were coded, such that higher scores indicated high perception or performance of these variables).

In the results of the bivariate correlation presented in Table 1, none of the three demographic variables tested was significantly related to two predictor variables of this study (i.e. organizational climate for creativity and core self-evaluation). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has a significant negative relationship with gender ($r = -.10$, $p < .05$), and significant positive relationship with age ($r = .13$, $p < .05$) and tenure ($r = .11$, $p < .05$).

Among the key variables of interest, the three variables of interest were all related; thus, hypothesis 1 – that servant leadership will significantly relate to OCB ($r = .53$, $P < .000$), and hypothesis 2 – that organizational creativity will significantly relate to OCB ($r = .034$, $p < .000$) were all confirmed. Cronbach's alpha for all the scales is within acceptable limits (>0.7).

Analysis of the Mediation Effect:

In testing for the mediating role of organizational climate for creativity, we examined and be assured of meeting the condition for mediation as postulated by Baron and Kenny (1986); the conditions stipulate that the independent variable (servant leadership) must be related to outcome variable (organizational citizenship behavior), and to moderator (organizational climate for



creativity), and that the moderator variable must be significantly related to dependent variable. These conditions were all satisfied, as the three key variables in this study were found correlating significantly with one another (see table 1). The final condition which is the point testing the moderation states that the weight of the coefficient of the relationship between the dependent variable and the outcome must either be reduce in its level of significant (partial mediation), or seized to be significant at all (full mediation) at the presence of the mediator.

Table 2: The mediating role of servant leadership in the relationship between organizational climate for creativity and organizational citizenship behavior

Variables:	Model 1			Model 2			Mode 3		
	β	SE	Sig	β	SE	Sig	β	SE	Sig
Gender	-.10*	.16	.043	-.09*	.14	.041	-.10*	.12	.042
Age	.13*	.09	.030	.10*	.08	.043	.12*	.08	.035
tenure	.11*	.37	.037	.09	.36	.069	.11*	.32	.038
SL				.53***	.04	.000	.18**	.03	.008
OCC							.40***	.04	.000
R ²	0.02			0.42			.056		
R ² change	0.02			.038			.052		
F-change	F(2,154) = 3.63*			F(2,153) = 21.63***			F(1,152) = 3.63*		
F-value	F(2, 154) = 3.63*			F(3, 154) = 12.06***			F(4, 152) = 3.63*		

*** = $P < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $P < .05$

Given that all the participant demographic variable of gender, age, and tenure (tested as covariance in this study) was significantly related to OCB as shown in both table 1 and 2, we decided to control their effects in the test of hypotheses using regression analysis. Regression analysis performed under model 1 as presented in table 2 which contain only the three control variables show that these control variables altogether explained 2% ($R^2 = 0.02$) of the total variance in OCB, which is found to be significant [$F(2, 154) = 3.63, p < .05$].

Further, as organizational servant leadership was added in model 3, the regression analysis indicated that it significantly and positivity predicted OCB ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$) after controlling for the effect of gender, age, and tenure. Moreover, this result reveals that for every one-unit increase in SL, employees OCB rises by .41units. However, SL added in model 2 explained an



additional significant 38% of the total variance in OCB (R^2 change = 0.38, $F(2,153) = 21.63$, $p < .000$) far and above the three control variables.

In model 3 where the mediating effect was being tested, by adding organizational climate for creativity (the moderator) together with servant leadership (being the predictor) in model 3, it was observed that the magnitude of the standardized coefficient scores of SL in predicting OCB, though was still significant but seriously reduced from the initial 0.53 to 0.18; indicating partial mediation; to imply that SL influence lecturers OCB through the cognitive process of perceived OCC; thus, SL increases workers (lecturers) perception of OCC which in turn increase their OCB.

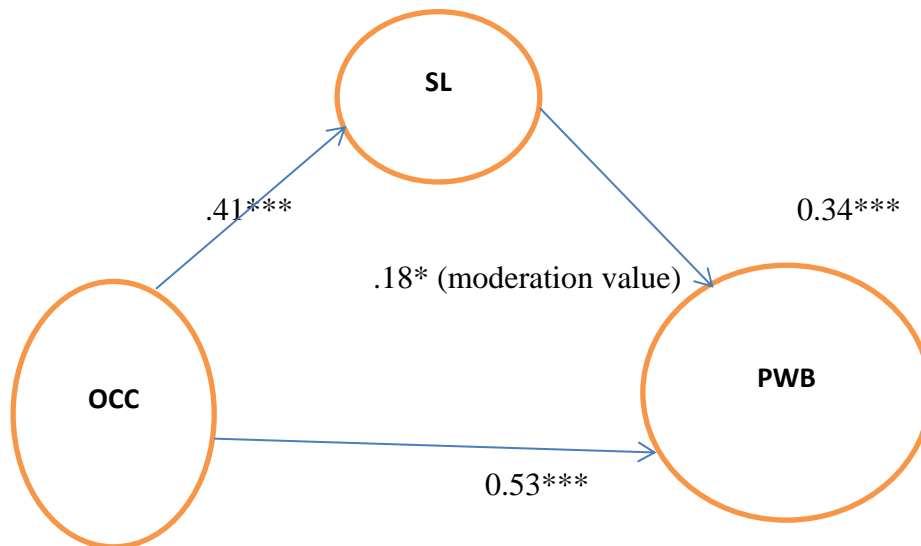


Figure 1: Empirical model of the mediating role of core self-evaluation in the relationship between organizational climates for creativity and proactive work behavior

Discussion:



We tested a mediation model to investigate whether organizational climate for creativity mediate the effect of servant leadership on OCB among Nigeria university lecturers. We expected that the positively significant relationship between SL and OCB would be transmitted through organizational citizenship behavior. We found that increased servant leadership (SL) was associated with greater performance of OCB. Organizational climate for creativity (OCC) mediated the associations between SL and OCB, which implies that OCC was a pathway through which SL influences OCB of lecturers in the university work context. This stands the only study that has examine the mediation of OCC in SL-OCB yo our best knowledge. Therefore, this finding is novel. However, the evidence of effect of servant leadership in our study is consistent with the finding of two previous study (Gan & Yosuf, 2017; Ehrhart, 2004). The positive behavior from servant leadership such as helping the growth of followers, is important to influence the willingness of employees to show OCB (Ehrhart, 2004)

Theoretical implication

Based on OCB theory (OCB), lecturers' perception of servant characters of their university top leadership team influences their OCB performance in the university context. However, organizational climate serves as a pathway through which servant leadership influence OCB performance among lecturers. Thus servant leadership increases the cognitive perception of OCC which in turn increase OCB.

Practical implication

This study enhances the understanding of the underlying mechanism or process through which servant leadership take to influence OCB among lecturers. The result demonstrated the mediating role of OCC in enhancing the effects of servant leadership on OCB model. Based on the findings, it is suggested that university have to adopt servant leadership style as strategy that will increase work climate for creativity since evidence have demonstrated that such organizational climate compliments the effect of servant of servant leadership on OCB.

Limitations of the study and directions for further research



The small sample constrains the generalizability of findings. Future research should utilize a larger sample size so that the results may be more generalizable to the entire population of academic in Nigeria. Another shortcoming of the present study is that the data were collected using self-report measures only, raising concerns regarding effects of common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Additionally, this study is cross-sectional, and it has all the weaknesses of cross-sectional research, especially common method bias. Longitudinal studies would shed more light on the temporal dynamics of the pathways of relationship manifested in the current study. We cannot claim to have found causal associations, based on the current research.

Conclusion

Our findings underscore the crucial role played by the organizational work climate for creativity created by servant leadership to increase lecturers OCB among lecturers in the university. When servant leadership is practices, it provide environment good enough to be perceived by lecturers as avenue to reciprocate the organization of their good gesture by going beyond their stipulated job roles to contribute more to organization.

Originality of this work

This study addresses the unexplored mediating effect of OCC in the relationship between servant leadership and OCB and offer new direction for servant leadership proactive work behavior research.

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