A Test of the Mediating Role of Fairness Perceptions in the Relation between Servant Leadership Behavior and Job Performance

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Abstract

Beginning from the creation of mankind, leadership has always been associated with the human nature. It also, has a vital role in every organization, especially in an institution like school as being the source of scientific, social and cultural changes in every society. The study intends to further explore the relations among servant leadership behavior, perceived organizational fairness and job performance. By a conceptual model held in the study, educators' fairness perceptions in the private high schools they work were thought to have a mediating role in the relation between servant leadership behavior and job performance. Data were gathered from 300 volunteer participants working in 10 different schools in Marmara region of Turkey. The revealed results were consistent with the model suggestions.

Key words: Fairness Perceptions, Servant Leadership Behavior, Job Performance

1. Introduction

A healthy organization is the one in which the characteristics of SLs are shown by the organizational culture and are appreciated and performed by the working force and the leaders. A healthy serving organization ranks the others' needs and in this way gains a gorgeous power and force. The organization which supports the benefits of SL can expect a more dynamic relationship among the leaders and the staff (Hill, 2008).

It was emphasized by Turan (1998) that teachers would commit to work harder in a school that facilitated a higher level of interaction among the organization members. Related with this context, a servant leadership approach, which advocates forming a reliable and honest organizational environment, tending to focus on the employees rather than the organization, emphasizing caring for them, esteeming and respecting employees and realizing the importance of working with them (Letting 2004), may contribute to improve teachers' performance for the school. In this respect, a servant leadership approach, which focuses on serving teachers (Russel and Stone 2002), acting to develop teachers, stimulating participation in decision-making, sharing leadership and suggesting the effective and sincere communication will positively affect school performance.

Besides, almost all of the studies in this field have been exclusively undertaken in the Western context. Furthermore, with the increasingly globalized economy in which most organizations operate, it would be beneficial to know whether fairness perceptions were able to motivate employees of different cultural backgrounds to perform as suggested by Lam et al., (2002). Whereas a number of researchers have investigated the impact of servant leadership on a range of organizational outcomes mentioned above, this is the first study that has sought to test the mediating role of perceived organizational fairness in the servant leadership behavior and job performance relation for education establishments.

2. Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

The research tries to further explain the relational structure among the variables 'servant leadership behavior', 'perceived organizational fairness' and 'job performance'. In the relational network, for the possible mediation effects of perceived organizational fairness, our hypotheses are suggested by means of research model depicted in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership behavior has a positive effect on perceived organizational fairness.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organizational fairness has a positive effect on job performance.

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership behavior has not a significant effect on job performance when mediated by perceived organizational fairness.
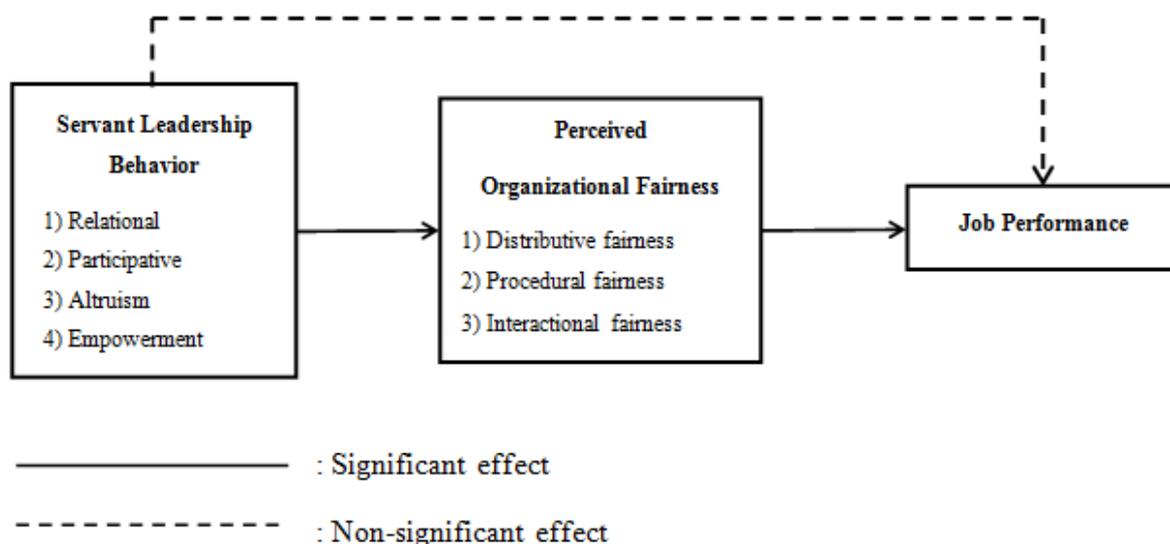
Figure 1: Conceptual Model: The full mediation effect of perceived organizational fairness

2.1. Servant Leadership

The notion of servant leadership has received growing attention and recognition in recent years (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002) and various researchers have espoused servant leadership as avalid theory of organizational leadership (Russell and Stone, 2002) with great promise for theoretical and practical development (Bass, 2000). Servant leaders place the needs of their subordinates before their own needs and center their efforts on helping subordinates grow to reach their maximum potential and achieve optimal organizational and career success (Greenleaf, 1977). Contrary to the conventional leaders, whose primary motivation was to lead others, servant leader is more motivated to serve others than to lead those (Parolini et al, 2009).

Although SL is widely believed to be a multidimensional construct and existing measures of servant leadership typically suffer from highly correlated dimensions, raising concerns over discriminate validity (Sendjaya and Cooper, 2010), it is important to overview other researchers' definitions.

According to Page and Wong (2000), servant leadership incorporates the ideals of empowerment, total quality, team building and participatory management and the service ethic into a leadership philosophy. While Laub (1999) suggesting several key steps as; listen without judgement, display empathy, be authentic , build community , share power and develop people; Smith et al. (2004), characterized servant leadership with strong follower-centric, altruistic, moral/ethical, and spiritual values. Additionally, Parolini (2005) identified servant leadership as valuing and developing people, building relational and authentic community, and providing and sharing leadership. Recently, Waterman (2011) listed the advantages of servant leadership as: valueing people and treating them as ends rather than means, enabling others to develop and flourish, showing commitment to the community, expressing a human face in an often impersonal environment, putting back the concept of caring into care, seeking to improve care through encouragement and facilitation, rather than through power and authority and improving performance by developing and nurturing followers.

Taking into consideration the cultural environment of Turkey, Oner (2008) suggested four of these dimensions which are also related with our study as relational; the act of making a genuine effort to know, understand, and support others in the organization, with an

emphasis on building long-term relationships with immediate followers (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006; Liden et.al.,2008), participative; asking for input and incorporating their feedback with forming a sense of community with a holistic approach to work based on shared decision (Greenleaf, 1977); altruism; viewing organizational growth as a long-term byproduct of the constant emphasis on the followers' growth (Stone et al., 2004) and empowerment; encouraging and facilitating others, especially immediate followers, in identifying and solving problems, as well as determining when and how to complete work tasks (Ehrhart , 2004).

2.2. Fairness Perceptions

The terms "justice", "fairness", and "equity" are used interchangeably in the literature. The organizational practices that reflect these terms consider as social values motivating behavior among individuals (Adams, 1963; Leventhal, 1980; Moorman, 1991). Organizational justice involves perceptions of fairness within organizations (Williams, 2006).

Over the last 25 years, organizational fairness or justice has become one of the most popular research areas in organizational behavior and has contributed to our understanding of people's experiences and reactions in work contexts (Colquitt et al., 2005). There are three types of organizational fairness. Distributive Fairness (justice) refers to equity of job affairs such as income, job plans, and job responsibilities. This type of justice has relationship with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions (Hoseynzade et al., 2007). It reflects how significant rewards (such as compensation) from organizational efforts are fairly distributed among employees (Farh et al., 1990; Folger and Konovsky, 1989); Procedural Fairness (justice) refers to fairness of procedures that used to determine result of decisions. In other words, this type of organizational fairness is in search of reasons of procedures justice or injustice results (Rezaeian et al., 2010). Procedural fairness is understood as the extent to which an individual perceives that outcome allocation decisions have been fairly made according to the organization's formal procedures and from the treatment given by the organization'sauthorities in enacting those procedures (Moorman, 1991). Interactional Fairness (justice) refers to fairness behaviors that organizations have with personals at the areas of theirj obs. This type of fairness refers to methods of data Exchange and justice behaviors with personnels (Aryee, et al., 2004).

Regarding fairness at organization leads to organization's survival, stability, and personnels' progress. Perception of justice at organization has negative relationship with tendency to absence, job desertion, resignation, deport, turbulence, and physical and mental illness (Robins, 2006). Perceptions of fairness tapped into employee beliefs about the fairness of their social and economic exchanges with organizations. If exchanges were deemed fair, the employees would be more likely to reciprocate the fairness by performing in ways that benefit the organization.

2.3. Job Performance

The meaning of job performance has evolved over the last four decades. Motowidlo (2000) explained job performance as the summation of individual behaviors over a given period of time that contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. Griffin et al., (2007), developed this performance construct as task performance; describing actions and behaviors related to the production of a goods or the provision of a service and appearing on an employee's formal job descriptions (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002) and contextual performance; including a variety of non-job specific behaviors (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993) and a set of interpersonal and volitional behaviors that support the broader social and psychological context in which the organization's core work is accomplished (Motowidlo, 2000; Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 1996).

Because of the growing attention to view job performance on a broader scope comprising of both task and contextual-related elements in the past decade (Aryee et al., 2004; Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Byrne and Hochwarter, 2008; Conway, 1999; Hochwarter et al., 2004; Muse and Stamper, 2007; Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 1996; Welbourne et al., 1998), we gathered these two dimensions in the name of overall job performance for our study.

2.4 Servant Leadership Behavior and Fairness Perceptions:

Organizational fairness is related with the idea that an action or decision is morally right, which may be explained according to ethics, religion, fairness, equity, or law. People are naturally attentive to the justice of events and situations in their everyday lives, across a variety of contexts (Gopanzano, 2009). Individuals react to actions and decisions made by organizations every day. An individual's perceptions of these decisions as fair or unfair can influence the individual's subsequent attitudes and behaviors. Relatedly, some scholars revealed that perceived leadership also had a significant influence on an employee's perception of fairness (Ehrhart, 2004; Keller and Dansereau, 1995; 1998 and Oner, 2008).

Servant leadership theory places the leader in the role of a steward who holds the organization in trust (Reinke, 2004); which is more explanatory than in any other leadership. In addition, since late 1990s, studies about the SL have been enhanced through the introduction of leadership models of Farling et al. (1999), Russell and Stone (2002), Page and Wong (2000), Senjaya and Sarros (2002) and also explained by the development of instruments by Laub (1999). All the SL models of these scholars, put the trust as a prevalent variable (Joseph and Winston, 2005); as it has a close relationship with fairness.

2.5 Fairness Perceptions and Job Performance:

It was suggested by (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001) that fairness perceptions could improve organizational relevant attitudes and behaviors such as performance. When employees feel that they are being treated unequally, they will restore equity by altering their behaviors, attitudes, or both such as to be less productive or vice versa (Greenberg, 1990). By means of Adam's (1965) equity theory; the human motivation which is affected by the outcomes they receive for their inputs, may cause the positive relationship between distributive justice and performance (Pierce and Gardner, 2002). In other words, organizational justice refers to gum that leads to personnels convene and work together effectively (Cropanzano et al., 2007). Within this respect, some researchers like Williams (1999) and Moon et al. (2008), came to the conclusion that both task and contextual performance were positively affected by the perceptions of the distributive justice.

Additionally, many other findings recently have explained the effects of fairness on job performance; such as, (Aryee et al., 2004; Lam et al., 2002; Suliman, 2007) suggesting the effects of justice on task performance; (Aryee et al., 2004; Konovsky and Pugh, 1994; Konovsky and Organ, 1996; Moon et al., 2008; Uen and Chien, 2004) emphasizing the positive impact of procedural justice on different forms of contextual performance and (Aryee et al., 2004; Uen and Chien, 2004; Williams, 1999) supporting relations between perceived procedural fairness and job performance. Consequently, related with our hypothese, we suggested the positive effect of perceived fairness on job performance.

3. Research method

To carry out the purpose of the study that is to explore whether perceived fairness mediated the relation of servant leadership behavior swith job performance, data were gathered using self-administered questionnaires from a sample of 300 educators within the private high schools in Marmara region of Turkey. Face-to-face interview method was utilized for conducting the educators in a total of 10 schools selected randomly from the cities

of Sakarya, Kocaeli and Istanbul. When unusable questionnaires are eliminated, the rate of return is corresponded to 75 percent. SPSS(Statistical Packagefor theSocial Sciences) 17.00 and Lisrel 8.51 programs were used for a range of analysis.

3.1. Respond sample

Of 300 educators who involved in the survey voluntarily, 35 % were females and 65 % were males. In terms of marital status, 239 respondents (80 %) were married and 61 (20 %) were unmarried. For respondents' job tenure in the institutions they work, 26 % were between 1-3 years, 45 % were between 4-6 years, 29 % were between 7-10 years. Regarding education, a majority of the sample (60 %) have Bachelor's degree and others (14 %) have Master degree. The mean age for the sample was 33 years (SD= 6 years), distributed between 21 and 30 years.

3.2. Measures

Responses were made on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A pre-test with 40 participants was applied for refining and eliminating measurement items if necessary. Developed earlier by Oner (2008), the scale of servant leadership behavior was used in this study included four dimensions: relational (10 items), participative (7), altruism (7) and empowerment (6). Perceived fairness or justice was assessed by conducting the four-dimensional measure formed and validated by Niehoff and Moorman (1993), which has three dimensions: distributive fairness (5 items), procedural fairness (5) and interpersonal fairness (4). Job performance was measured with using 6 items developed and utilized by Fuentes, Saez, Montes (2004); Rahman and Bullock (2004) and Sehitoglu and Zehir (2010). The scales obtained from previous studies were modified in a way to be accordance with the context of educational institution.
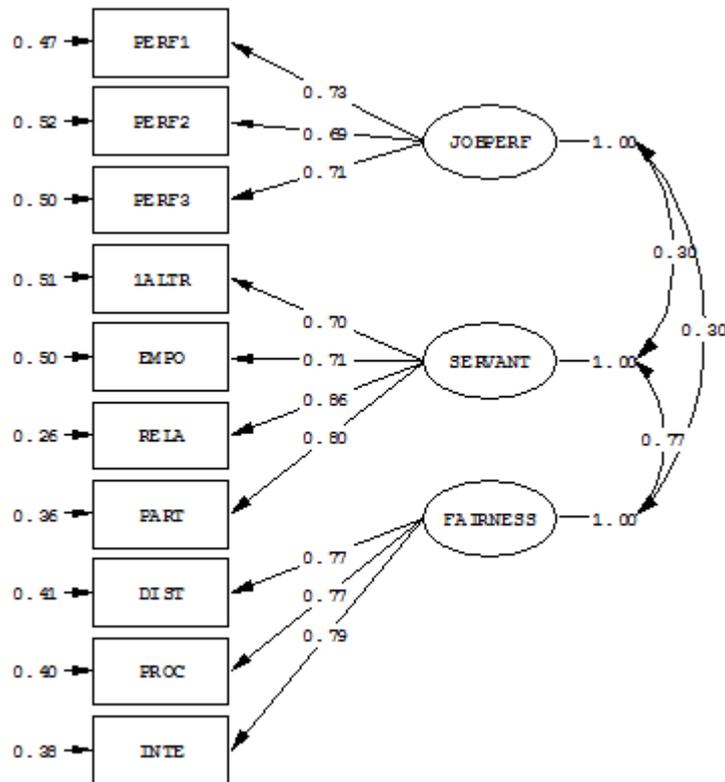
3.3.Reliability and Validity Analyses

Using the statistical package Lisrel 8.51, an array of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were performed to check the reliability and validity properties of the studied variables. Firstly, examination of exploratory factor analysis applied separately in order for each dimension of constructs to assess uni-dimensionality shows that the related items load on a single factor. The results confirm the uni-dimensional nature of all scales measuring altruism, empowerment, relational, participative from dimensions of the construct servant leadership behavior, distributive fairness, procedural fairness and interactional fairness from dimensions of the construct perceived organizational fairness and job performance. Secondly, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) carried out in order to check the constructs' multi-dimensional nature show that servant leadership behavior is composed of altruism, empowerment, relational and participative dimensions [χ^2=344.81, df=165=2.01, p=0.00; RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)=0.06; GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)=0.90; CFI (Comparative Fit Index)=0.94, NFI (Normed Fit Index)=0.89, IFI (Incremental Fit Index)=0.94, SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)=0.057], and perceived organizational fairness includes distributive fairness, procedural fairness and interactional fairness[χ^2=223.53, df=61; p=0.00; RMSEA=0.094; GFI=0.90; CFI=0.91; NFI=0.89, IFI=0.92, SRMR=0.066]. The value of the Chi- squared test statistic is found significant due to its sensitivity to large sample sizes, but all other fit indices are the within acceptable range.

Measurement model is constituted by putting all together of servant leadership behavior, perceived organizational fairness and job performance constructs after aggregating their associated items. CFA performed for the measurement model shows that χ^2 is 47.72 with 32 degrees of freedom (P-value=0.037). Other indicators of the model's fit include CFI of

0.99, GFI of 0.97, AGFI of 0.95, RMSEA of 0.041, SRMR of 0.037, IFI of 0.99 and NFI of 0.96. These statistics generally suggest that the model has a good fit with data. Through the analysis, some items are eliminated from the dimensions of servant leadership behavior and perceived organizational fairness since they create excessive inter-correlation with any latent construct in the measurement model (2 items from relational, 4 items from participative, 1 item from altruism, 3 items from empowerment, and2 items from the procedural fairness). As shown in Table 1, all factor loadings, which ranges from .69 to .86, are found significant at the 0.01 level (with the lowest t-value being 11.43).

The values of Cronbach alpha indicate that all constructs for the relative scales have a high reliability value. The alpha values are found .85 for the construct 'servant leadership behavior', 82 for the construct 'perceived organizational fairness' and 75 for the construct 'job performance', which are higher than 0.60 as suggested by Nunnally (1978). For all, composite reliability and average variance extracted estimates are well-above the critical value of recommended by Hair et al. (1998).Additionally, discriminant validity is confirmed for all constructs since the variance extracted estimates from each construct exceed the squared correlation between each construct in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The reliability and validity statistics are shown by means of Table 1.

JOBPERF :Job performance

SERVANT:Servantleadership behavior

FAIRNESS:Perceivedorganizational fairness

ALTR: Altruism

EMPO: Empowerment

RELA: Relational

PART: Participative

DIST: Distributive fairness

PROC: Procedural fairness

INTE: Interactional fairness

Figure 2: Measurement model

Table 1: Measurement model results

Variables	Standardized factor loadings (λ)	t value	Cronbach alpha	AVE	$(r_{max})^2$	CR
1. SERVANT LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR			.85	.59	.43	.91
Altruism	.70	13.23				
Empowerment	.71	13.34				
Relational	.86	17.74				
Participative	.80	15.92				
2. PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL FAIRNESS			.82	.60	.43	.89
Distributive fairness	.76	14.59				
Procedural fairness	.78	14.73				
Interactional fairness	.78	15.11				
3. JOB PERFORMANCE			.75	.58	.06	.88
Perf1	.73	12.06				
Perf2	.69	11.43				
Perf3	.71	11.68				

FIT INDEX

Chi-Square=47.72, df=32, P-value=0.03648

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.99

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.97

Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.95

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.041

Standardized RMR = 0.037

Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.99

Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.96

A t-value larger than 1.282 corresponds to *$p<0.10$, a t-value larger than 1.645 to **$p<0.05$, and a t-value greater than 2.326 to ***$p<0.01$, and n.s.: non-significant. (AVE=Average variance extracted, CR=Composite reliability).

3.4. Tests of Hypotheses

The descriptive statistics and the bivariate correlations across the constructs in the study were given in Table 2, providing a general depiction of the relationships of interest. Job performance is found to have a significant correlation with not only servant leadership behavior ($r=.247$, $p=0.01$) but also perceived organizational fairness ($r=.231$, $p=0.01$). To explain mediating role of fairness perceptions in the relation between servant leadership behavior and job performance, structural equation model was performed using a *statistical software* package Lisrel 8.51. The model depicted in Figure 2 contains three distinct paths (1) from servant leadership behavior to perceived organizational fairness, (2) from perceived organizational fairness to job performance, and (3) from servant leadership behavior to job performance. The resulting fit indices indicated an acceptable fit [x^2/df=47.72/32=1.49, p-value=0.037, CFI=0.99, SRMR=0.037, RMSEA=0.041, GFI=0.97, AGFI=0.95, NFI=0.96,
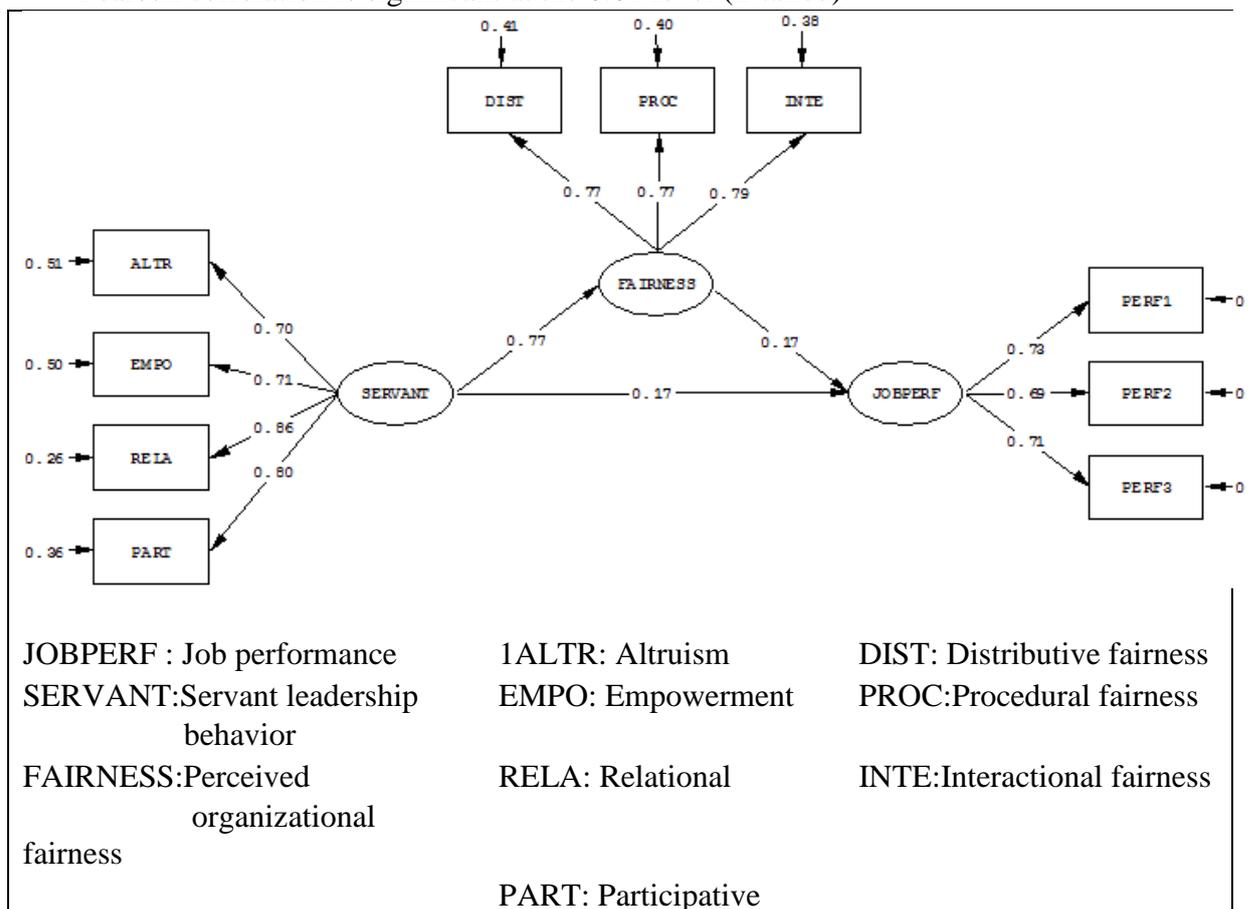
IFI=0.99], and the variance observed in perceived organizational fairnessand job performance was %37 and %9, respectively.

The path linking servant leadership behavior to not only perceived organizational fairness (estimate=.77, p<0.01) but also job performance (estimate=.17, p<0.10) was found significant, but the path linking servant leadership to job performance is found insignificant (estimate=.17, n.s.). As such, contrary to expectations, the full mediating effect of perceived organizational fairness in the relation between servant leadership behavior and job performance was not confirmed. Instead of this, servant leadership behavior is found as a predictor of both perceived organizational fairness and job performance. Specifically, the explicative power of servant leadership behavior is more substantial in magnitude for perceived organizational fairness.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlations across variables		
			SERVANT	FAIRNESS	JOBPERF
(1) Servant leadership behavior (SERVANT)	3.73	.59	1		
(2) Perceived organizational fairness (FAIRNESS)	3.68	.64	.658**	1	
(3) Job performance (JOBPERF)	3.94	.62	.247**	.231**	1

**. Pearson correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

JOBPERF : Job performance	1ALTR: Altruism	DIST: Distributive fairness
SERVANT:Servant leadership behavior	EMPO: Empowerment	PROC:Procedural fairness
FAIRNESS:Perceived organizational fairness	RELA: Relational	INTE:Interactional fairness
	PART: Participative	

Figure 3: Conceptual Mode

Table 3: Hypotheses testing results

Hypothesized paths	Estimate	t value	Result
H1: Servant leadership behavior has a positive effect on perceived organizational fairness.	.77	11.25***	Supported
H2: Perceived organizational fairness has a positive effect on job performance.	.17	1.22 (n.s.)	Not Supported
H3: Servant leadership behavior has not a positive effect on job performance.	.17	1.30*	Not Supported

Goodness of fit index

Chi-Square=47.72, df=32, P-value=0.037

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.99

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.97

Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.95

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.041

Standardized RMR = 0.037

Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.96

Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.99

A t-value larger than 1.282 corresponds to *p<0.10, a t-value larger than 1.645 to **p<0.05, and a t-value greater than 2.326 to ***p<0.01, and n.s.: non-significant.

4. Discussion, limitations and suggestions for further studies

Servant leadership is a leadership style where leaders place the needs of their subordinates before their own needs and center their efforts on helping subordinates grow to reach their maximum potential and achieve optimal organizational and career success (Greenleaf, 1977). According to Laub (1999) and Parolini (2005), organizations that can create a healthy and servant-minded culture will maximize the skills of both their workforce and leadership. SL has been associated with many positive by-products in organizations such as: followers' emulation of selfsacrificing behaviors (Choi and Mai-Dalton 1999); turnover intention (Jaramillo et al., 2009); higher commitment (De Cremer and Van Knippenberg 2004) and performance ((McCrimmon, 2010; Pekerti and Sendjaya, 2010 and Van Knippenberg and Van Knippenberg, 2005).

In this empirical study, we have conducted the analyses that show the existence of a different relationship where perceived organizational fairness mediates the relationship between servant leadership behavior and job performance. Additionally, many other findings recently have explained the effects of fairness on job performance; such as, (Aryee et al., 2004; Lam et al., 2002; Suliman, 2007) suggesting the effects of justice on task performance; (Aryee et al., 2004; Konovsky and Pugh, 1994; Konovsky and Organ, 1996; Moon et al., 2008; Uen and Chien, 2004) emphasizing the positive impact of procedural justice on different forms of contextual performance and (Aryee et al., 2004; Uen and Chien, 2004; Williams, 1999) supporting relations between perceived procedural fairness and job performance.

According to our findings, consistent with the literature, job performance is found to have a significant correlation with not only servant leadership behavior (r=.247, p=0.01) but also perceived organizational fairness (r=.231, p=0.01).The path linking servant leadership behavior to not only perceived organizational fairness (estimate=.77, p<0.01) but also job performance (estimate=.17, p<0.10) was found significant, but the path linking servant leadership to job performance is found insignificant (estimate=.17, n.s.). As such, contrary to

expectations, the full mediating effect of perceived organizational fairness in the relation between servant leadership behavior and job performance was not confirmed. Instead of this, servant leadership behavior is found a predictor of both perceived organizational fairness and job performance.

Specifically, the explicative power of servant leadership behavior is more substantial in magnitude for perceived organizational fairness.These findings have important practical implication, as they are important for school principals to understand which factors influence performance, so that they can choose which strategies to pursue and which actions to take to maximize performance. As the leadership and the interchangeability of leadership features are improved, this will have a favorable impact on performance levels displayed. The school principals should be aware of these variables that might have significant impacts on the performance levels of the teachers. As a consequence, they can take necessary measures in order to improve the performance levels of the teachers by managing and controlling such factors. The conclusion emerging from this study is that fairness perceptions would ultimately result in positive gains. The results validate some of the key linkages and support beliefs and evidences by researchers regarding the relationships between servant leadership, organizational fairness and performance. It is also important to note that this study attempts to enrich the literature review and make a contribution in leadership and performance related studies.

Like any empirical research effort, this study contains some limitations. Firstly, our sample is restricted to the teachers of private schools. Future line of research can be extended by adding the teachers of state schools to the sample. Secondly, this study could be applied within the different regions. Thirdly, a number of other related variables such as organizational identification, organizational commitment, organizational trust, organizational silence and organizational stress could be added to the study for future research. Finally, further researches should take into consideration of different sectors in business, health and security apart from education.

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