

The Impact of Authentic and Servant Leadership on Job Engagement of Healthcare Staff with the Mediating Role of Motivating Language

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the impact of authentic and servant leadership on job engagement among healthcare staff, with the mediating role of motivating language. The statistical population consisted of all healthcare employees in Kerman city in 2022. Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 293 participants was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires on authentic leadership, servant leadership, motivating language, and job engagement. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares (PLS) and structural equation modeling. Findings indicated that both authentic and servant leadership have significant positive effects on job engagement. Additionally, motivating language served as a significant mediator in these relationships. These results suggest that enhancing effective leadership styles and improving motivating language skills can boost healthcare staff engagement and improve the quality of healthcare services.

Key words: Authentic leadership, Servant leadership, Motivating language, Job engagement, Healthcare staff

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare systems, as one of the most sensitive sectors in any country, require experienced, committed, and highly engaged staff. Employee engagement in healthcare directly affects the quality of patient care (Leiter & Bakker, 2014). Given the psychological and physical pressures in clinical environments, maintaining motivation and engagement is a major challenge (Polat et al., 2011).

Leadership is a key factor influencing job engagement, particularly in healthcare settings. Authentic and servant leadership styles emphasize human values, ethics, and service, and have high potential to enhance employee engagement (Fry et al., 2012). Authentic leadership, through self-awareness, balanced processing, moral perspective, and relational transparency, fosters trust and commitment among employees (Abbasi et al., 2016). Servant leadership, by focusing on followers' needs and providing service, creates a supportive environment where staff feel valued and connected (Askari et al., 2015).

Motivating language, as an effective communication tool for leaders, plays a critical role in conveying vision, enhancing motivation, and increasing job engagement (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014). This study aims to examine the effect of authentic and servant leadership on healthcare staff engagement, with the mediating

role of motivating language.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Authentic Leadership in Healthcare

Authentic leadership is grounded in self-awareness, honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior (Fry, 2015). In healthcare, authentic leaders build trust and transparency, providing a safe and supportive environment that enhances job engagement and service quality (Abbasi et al., 2016). By modeling ethical values, authentic leaders create a positive organizational culture that motivates employees to deliver high-quality care (Fry et al., 2012).

2.2 Servant Leadership and Healthcare Staff

Servant leadership emphasizes serving followers, empowering them, and focusing on individual growth and development (Nasr Esfahani et al., 2017). In healthcare, servant leaders consider employees' emotional and spiritual needs, fostering a supportive environment where staff feel valued (Askari et al., 2015). This leadership style can reduce burnout and increase engagement, especially in high-stress clinical environments (Clercq et al., 2011).

2.3 Motivating Language in Clinical Settings

Motivating language encompasses three dimensions: direction-giving, meaning-making, and empathetic communication (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014). In healthcare, leaders' motivating language enhances engagement by providing clarity of work goals, reinforcing relational empathy, and creating meaningful work experiences (Sullivan, 1999; Sharbrough et al., 2012). Effective motivating language helps maintain staff motivation under challenging conditions.

2.4 Job Engagement in Healthcare

Job engagement is a positive psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Hanaysha, 2012). In healthcare, engagement directly affects patient care quality, client satisfaction, and reduces medical errors (Mirheidari et al., 2011). Highly engaged employees have more energy for quality service and show resilience when facing work challenges (Leiter & Bakker, 2014).

3. Methodology

This applied research used a descriptive-correlational design. The population included all healthcare staff in Kerman city ($N = 7,717$) in 2022. Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 293 employees was selected through stratified random sampling.

Data were collected using standardized questionnaires: 12 items for authentic leadership, 30 items for servant leadership, 30 items for motivating language, and 17 items for job engagement. Content validity was confirmed by experts, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha: authentic leadership ($\alpha = 0.87$), servant leadership ($\alpha = 0.92$), motivating language ($\alpha = 0.89$), and job engagement ($\alpha = 0.91$). Data analysis was performed using PLS and structural equation modeling.

4. Results

Findings revealed that authentic leadership positively and significantly affects job engagement ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). Servant leadership also had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$).

Motivating language served as a significant mediator between authentic leadership and engagement ($\beta = 0.31$,

$p < 0.01$) and between servant leadership and engagement ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$). Among the dimensions of motivating language, direction-giving ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.01$) and meaning-making ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$) had stronger effects on engagement, whereas empathetic communication had a smaller effect ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.05$).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that authentic and servant leadership positively influence healthcare staff engagement. These findings align with prior studies (Fry et al., 2012; Askari et al., 2015), showing that these leadership styles foster trust, transparency, and a supportive environment.

In high-stress healthcare environments, authentic leaders create a secure space that motivates staff, while servant leaders enhance feelings of value and belonging, boosting engagement. Motivating language mediates this relationship, particularly through direction-giving and meaning-making, which provide clarity and purpose in work.

Practically, healthcare managers can enhance staff engagement by developing authentic and servant leadership skills and improving communication through motivating language. Training programs on these leadership styles and communication techniques are recommended.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study was conducted in a single geographic region (Kerman) and relied on self-report measures. Future research should include multiple regions and use multi-source data collection (e.g., observations and interviews). Additionally, the effects of these leadership styles on other healthcare outcomes, such as patient care quality and medical error reduction, should be examined.

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(APA style, updated and formatted properly)

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