

Chapter 1

Accountability to a Servant Leader and OCB: The Role of Follower Integrity

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that follower accountability can be influenced by both internal and external mechanisms. This chapter examines how followers' commitment to their own moral principles (internal) may be congruent, or in conflict, with a servant leader's principles (external), and thus have a positive or negative interactive effect on the followers' accountability to the leader. Furthermore, the authors examine how accountability to the leader may manifest itself through extra-role behaviors towards others within the organization. The empirical findings of this study show that when follower integrity is low, accountability can still be increased in the presence of a servant leader.

INTRODUCTION

A breakdown in the ethical fabric within organizations has increased interest in leadership research with an ethical bent. The primary role of leaders is to influence followers. Leadership that is follower-focused reflects “a broader, mutual influence process independent of any formal role or hierarchical structure and diffused among the members of any given social system” (DeRue

& Ashford, 2010, p. 627). Leaders who act as stewards of organizational resources and who see their primary objectives as serving others and developing their followers are typically referred to as *servant leaders*, and the related influence process is called *servant leadership* (Russell and Stone, 2002; Stone, Russell and Taylor, 2004).

Servant leaders provide direction for their followers by conveying “the right degree of accountability” for the leadership process to be effective

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(Van Dierendonck, 2010, p. 1234). Accountability entails a nonlinear relationship, where too much or too little may cause negative outcomes, and viewing it through the lens of interpersonal relationships, and influence processes such as servant leadership, helps us understand how leaders can enact a proper sense of felt accountability with the followers (Ferris, Lidon, Munyon, Summers, Basik & Buckley, 2009). In this regard, Burke, Simms, Lazzara, and Salas (2007) argue that both internal and external mechanisms have the potential to influence follower accountability. On the one hand, followers may feel accountable for their performance externally to their leader. On the other hand, the followers' felt accountability may be internally directed, reflecting their individual integrity as a commitment to their individual moral principles. Therefore, when followers feel accountable both to the self and to the leader, organizations do not need to design costly formal monitoring mechanisms to insure accountability.

Past research studies have empirically examined only the external or internal venues of accountability for task performance, but not the follower accountability to leader and its impact on the contextual performance (i.e., organizational citizenship behavior) of followers. In this chapter, we examine how followers' commitment to their own moral principles (i.e., follower integrity) may

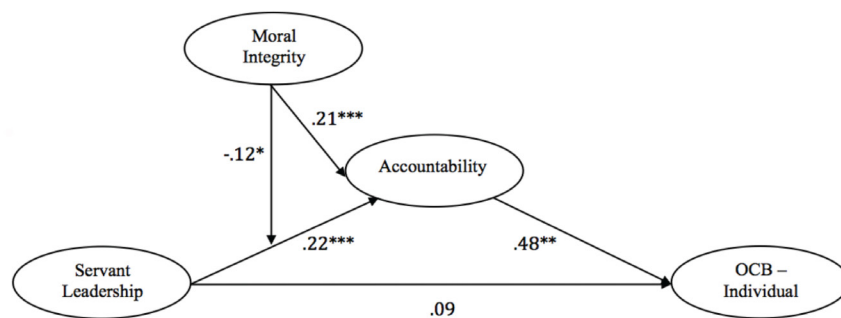
be congruent with or in conflict with the servant leader principles, and thus have a positive or negative interactive effect on follower accountability to the leader (See Figure 1). We then empirically test this interactive effect of servant leadership and follower integrity on the follower's accountability to the leader and the resulting influence on the follower's contextual performance (i.e., follower OCB).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Servant Leadership

While the organizational hierarchy often provides leaders with the position of authority, employees as followers grant legitimacy and importance mainly to those exhibiting horizontal relational leadership, which is built on trust (Balkundi and Kilduff, 2005; Mehra, Kilduff & Brass, 2001). Leadership that is relational and follower-focused inherently creates a mutual influence process that does not rely on formal roles within the organization (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). To enact such a climate of mutual influence, leaders need to gain the trust of their followers, while at the same time exhibiting accountability in the stewardship of organizational resources (Avolio, Walumbwa &

Figure 1. Model with results



* p < 0.05
 *** p < 0.001; n=228

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