

Effect of Servant Leadership Style on The Perceived Quality of Municipal Service Delivery: A Mediation Role of Affective Commitment: Evidence from Ethiopia, The Case of Bahir Dar City

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Abstract:

In these days, public organizations are deeply concerned with providing quality services for their respective customers. The objective of this research study is to assess the relationship between servant leadership and the perceived quality of municipal service delivery within the framework of the mediating role of affective organizational commitment in Bahir Dar City. Survey data were collected from employees, service leaders and customers. This study applied the partial least square-structural equation modeling. The study employed both the probability and the non-probability: random sampling and the purposive sampling techniques respectively. Data were gathered from 400 respondents. The results revealed that servant leadership style and affective commitment were positively and significantly related to the perceived quality of municipal service delivery. Affective commitment was found to partially mediating the relationship between servant leadership style and the perceived quality of municipal service delivery. The research study came up with that servant leadership and affective organizational commitment contributes a lot in bringing quality municipal service delivery in the research area with a propagating power of its spark to similar municipalities in developing countries as well.

Keywords: Servant leadership, affective commitment, service delivery, Perceived service quality.

1. Introduction

In these days, quality public service delivery is becoming as the forefront parameter of measuring the prevalence of good governance in many developing countries (Kulmie, Mohamud & Ibrahim, 2024; McKinsey Center for Government, 2015). Quality service delivery is the means to customer satisfaction (Guan & Sidin, 2021; Pahi et al., 2022; Zygiaris et al., 2022). However, its practical magnitude is deteriorating in most municipalities of emerging countries (Getiye & Shafe, 2023; Gurtoo & Williams, 2015; Hlongwane, 2015; Tadesse, 2019). In addition, services are not delivered in a demand-driven approach (Gurtoo & Williams, 2015). Rather, it is highly bounded to serve political circles in the expanse of tax-paying citizens. Municipal services lack innovative approaches; it is highly bureaucratic; time-killing and irritating too (Gurtoo & Williams, 2015). One of the leading causes of quality service delivery barrier is lack of employing an appropriate leadership style in the context of municipal service delivery practices (Moloto et al, 2020; Wadesango et al, 2018). Service delivery practices are not involving the people in decision making processes, so that in most cases resulted in missed-leadership behaviors (Fridah & Omwenga, 2018; Harms et al., 2018). The way municipal leaders access their customers and even their associates is not promising for customer satisfaction (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017). As the result, millions around municipalities are in critical social crisis in most developing countries (Van de Walle, 2018) while all tax-paying citizens have the mandatory rights to access quality public services in their jurisdictions (OECD, 2020; ReSPA, 2018). This situation urges urban centers of developing countries to be led by a people-first paradigm (Bayu, 2020). This leadership behavioral attribute is the inherent domain of the theory of the servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership style, as the derivative of servant leadership theory, has attributes such as the intrinsic capability of dealing with higher level of selflessness, trust and respect between leaders, associates and customers; dedication to organizational vision and growth; servant-hood natures and promoting employee and leader developments as well (Alafeshat & Aboud, 2019; Getiye & Shafe, 2023; Kulachai et al. 2023; Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2023; Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2023). Thus, servant leadership is getting ground to be the panacea for the existing municipal service delivery challenges in most developing countries, among others (Makau, 2021).

Here in Ethiopia, apart from some good achievements recorded, disturbing social chaos are observed in municipal service arenas that continued to be the contemporary challenges of local governments in the country (Abagelan, 2021; Tolla, 2009). As a constitutionally binding country, Ethiopia is expected to provide public services at an acceptable standard and quality. However, people in most municipalities are often observed in too long queues and being in critical municipal service dissatisfaction (Bakana, 2020). The services in most municipalities are critically conceded with the existence of rampant corruption (Koen, 2012) and lack of genuine urban good governance and leadership (Beshi & Beyene, 2021; Fufa, 2021; Kedogo et al, 2010).

Context wise, Bahir Dar city is experiencing untrusted social, economic and political contexts that are not promising enough to cultivate genuine and quality public services. The social context: relationship among customers, leaders and employees is not viable for free and fair quality service delivery (Getiye & Shafe, 2023). Customers themselves motivate employees to execute their service issues through social abuses, corruption (Engidaw, 2022). Employees and leaders are not even in place in their offices during formal

working hours. This shows that their organizational belongingness is in question. This is highly aggravated by the ever-increasing number of population in the city administration which harnesses huge demand for municipal services too (Fetene et al., 2012). Tangibly talking, public grievances and complains in the study area is increasing alarmingly; the City Administration received 38,435 recorded public grievance complaints within a year (Grievance Management Office of Bahir Dar [GMOB], 2022).

Likewise, in the economic context, the municipality suffers from budget scarcity; high urban unemployment rate; lack of peace and security; and abject poverty. The annual budget is much more less than the service request of the inhabitants; the budget terminates usually before the third quarter appears (Bahir Dar City Finance Office Report [BCFOR], 2023). Besides, the capital budget is hammered by the on-going civil-war that swarms developmental finance instead. Moreover, the service delivery political context in the city administration is also full of inconsistency and shrewd activities (Pestritto, 2007). It is highly dominated by a party-oriented process that most top leaders, managers and office heads came from the ‘winning’ political wing with no sufficient conceptual and technical capabilities to lead their customer-intensive Organizations such as the urban land administration service sector (Fetene et al., 2012; Reddy, 2016).

The significance of this research study lies on establishing a part of sustained solution for municipal quality service delivery in the study area by streamlining the service delivery leadership based on the merits of the servant leadership style as it pays top priority and due focus on internal and external service-recipient customers (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017; Makau, 2021). To this end, this study identified the inherent relationship between servant leadership and quality municipal service delivery as mediated by affective organizational commitment in the context of the City of Bahir Dar.

1.2 Objective

The objective of this research study is to explore the relationship between servant leadership style and the perceived quality of municipal service delivery mediated by affective organizational commitment in the municipality of Bahir Dar City administration in which partial least square-structural equation modeling was applied.

1.3 Hypotheses

This research study has four hypotheses:

- H1: Servant Leadership Style is positively related to the perceived quality of municipal service delivery at the municipality of Bahir Dar City.
- H2: Servant Leadership Style is positively related to affective commitment in the service delivery process of the municipality of Bahir Dar City.
- H3: Affective commitment is positively related to the perceived quality of municipal service delivery at the municipality of Bahir Dar City.
- H4: Affective commitment mediates the relationship between servant leadership style and the perceived quality of municipal service delivery at the municipality of Bahir Dar City.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Service Delivery

Service delivery is widely spoken in all service industries including municipalities where there is dozens of municipal services. Different scholars tried to define service delivery based on different perspectives. Shittu, (2020:1) tried to define it as it is “the extent to which the services, the state or any other private actor provide, meet or exceed the expectations of the citizens.” However, Reddy (2016: P. 11) tried its definition more of in the context of municipal service delivery before Shittu’s attempt, in such a way that “service delivery is the provision of municipal goods, benefits, activities and satisfactions that are deemed public, to enhance quality of life in local jurisdictions.”

Within the framework of the definition of service delivery in the context of municipal service delivery, particular reference is being made to the discharging of municipal services, which can either be tangible or intangible. Tangible service delivery refers to the provision of municipal services that are construed as being visible to the municipal customers, such as public transport, electricity, housing, roads, water and sanitation systems, and the like, whereas the intangible service delivery includes services that are regarded as being essential, but not necessarily visible, such as public safety standards, drainage and sewerage systems (Ndudula, 2013).

2.2 Strategies enhancing Municipal Services

The report of the World Bank (2009) showed that most urban areas in developing countries faced many crucial service delivery challenges that urge (UN-Habitat, 2015) them utilizing viable and vibrant service delivery systems capable of improving citizen’s access to quality services as far as their economy bears to do so. Improving service delivery in all public and private organizations is not only a matter of survival but also it is a means to sustainable development in a state of strong competitive global economic and social interactions (ANRS BoCB, 2005; ECA, 2003; Makanyeza et al, 2013 World Bank, 2009; Wadesango et al, 2018).

The Economic Commission for Africa [ECA], (2003) suggested the following four strategies to improve public service delivery: implementing total quality management; practicing organizational strategic management; doing continuous capacity building; and employing the Lean Six Sigma strategy. Two years after the suggestion of the ECA, the ANRS BoCB (2005), suggested the nearest

and context-based five indigenous public service delivery strategies for the study area, Bahir Dar City Administration: conducting regular service delivery survey; maintaining sustainability and scaling-up the capacity of the service delivery review program; design complaint-handling mechanisms; employing inclusive public discussion; and establish mechanisms for experience sharing and promoting fair incentive mechanisms were set on practice.

Later after eight years, a research study conducted by Makanyeza et al, (2013) identified seven major causes of municipal service delivery: councilor interference and political manipulation; corruption and lack of accountability and transparency; inadequate citizen participation; poor human resource policy; failure to manage change; lack of employee capacity; and poor planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Thus, Makanyeza et al, (2013) urged to propose and implement the anti-theses of the causes of poor municipal service delivery: Regular practice of performance monitoring and evaluation; prompt responsiveness to customer complaints; promoting public participation in planning; ensuring on-time payment of service user bills; application of strategic public service planning; employing sound human resource policy; practicing proper change management practices; reducing the Degree of rampant corruption and increasing transparency and accountability; increasing executive and managerial discretions; partnering and outsourcing some municipal service delivery activities. Moreover, Wadesango et al, (2018) recently came up with identifying three basic causes of poor municipal service delivery: political intervention, lack of funds to run infrastructural projects and corruption. As the result, he recommended the anti-theses of these causes as in the case of Makanyeza et al, (2013) as strategic solutions: reducing political intervention, searching for funds and promoting and practicing intensive fighting for corruption.

In a nutshell, streamlining municipal service delivery contributes a lot in raising the service quality that in turn satisfies municipal customers. To this end, robust and resilient leadership needs to be in place, practitioners need to have access to continuous capacity building, clarity on the set objectives, develop a sense of servant hood, pay special focus on customer satisfaction and act on the basis of ethics and be committed in practicing public service values.

2.3 Service Quality

Efficient municipal service delivery is the factor product of the cyclical process of: identifying who are customers, fixing customer needs and priorities; establish existing service baseline, recognize improvement gaps, establish service standards, mobilizing service delivery, monitor and evaluate service delivery based on the pre-set standards. Service efficiency is a precondition to service quality. Excellence in service quality is achieved by giving particular attention to the service quality provision process that affirms service efficiency (Dcunha, 2017).

Quality is the centerpiece of competitive advantage in the service sectors (Gobena, 2019; Guan & Sidin, 2021). Temba (2013) showed that management literature has no simple and monolithic meaning for the word ‘service’, it can be defined as an output or a process, a performance, or an industry. Hand, (2003) in Temba, argues that most services are ‘intangible’, which their outputs cannot be grasped and seen tangibly which in turn makes its measurement more abstract than the tangible outputs. The concept of quality had been expressed intensively in the literature. To mention some, Hardie & Walsh 1994:530) in Temba (2013) tried to qualify the concept of quality as “Quality is product performance which results in customer satisfaction freedom from product deficiencies, which avoids customer dissatisfaction.” Juran, (1985:5) in Temba (2013) too tried to define quality as “Quality is the extent to which the customers or users believe the product or service surpasses their needs and expectations.”

Likewise, Gitlow et al. (1989) in Temba (2013) tried to define quality as it is “the totality of features and characteristics of a product that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.” To understand more about service quality, Parasuraman et al., (1985:42) & Ladhari, (2008:172) in Temba (2013) tried to qualify it as “it needs to acknowledge the characteristics of service: inseparability, intangibility, heterogeneity in way that service quality would be easily measured.”

Anyway, with regard to the definition of service quality, this research study employed the perceived Service quality, rejecting the expected service quality for it creates ambitious outcomes which may not be a reality on the ground practically. In most cases, quality is high when performance exceeds expectation and quality is low when performance does not meet customers’ expectations (Asubonteng et al., (1996:64) in Temba, 2013:13).

2.4 SERFPERF Model of Service Quality

This model is the extension of the SERVQUAL model. The SERFPERF model, the performance component of the service quality which measures the five underlying dimensions like in the case of the SERVQUAL Model: Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsibility (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This model was developed after the SERVQUAL model is rejected for its methodological complexity, negative averages that make difficulty to interpret results (Cabello & Chirinos, 2012). Researchers also detected problems to determine the overambitious expectations of customers that distort the over-all estimations. In most developing countries, customer expectations are much more skewed and the reality on the ground usually dwindles down (Meng & Md. Sidin, 2021).

As a result, the SERVQUAL model lost its fame and its proponents later produced the SERVPERF model that cancelled out customer expectations and took only the perceived service quality (Colmenares & Saavedra 2007; García & Díaz, 2008). The superiority of the SERVPERF scale over the SEVEQUAL scale was witnessed in many scholastic works (e.g., Jain & Gupta, 2004). As the result, the SERVPERF scale simplified the work of researchers by 50% for it removed the expectation wing. In strengthening the SERVPERF model and dumping out the SERVEQUAL model scholars did their best that questioned the conceptual and theoretical nature of the SERVQUAL scale and found it confusing with service satisfaction. They too provided empirical evidences considering the four service industries: dry cleaning, banks, pest control and fast food industries to confirm the superiority of the

SERVPERF scale and disconfirm the SERVQUAL scale (Jain & Gupta, 2004). Moreover, the SERVPERF scale is proved empirically superior to the SERVQUAL scale for being able to explain greater variance in the overall service quality, measured through the use of single-item scale (Fogarty, Catts & Forlin, 2000). Here it is important to note that both the SERVQUAL and the SERVPERF scales utilize the same items, indicating that higher perceived performance value signifies higher service quality and vice versa. Here below fig.1 shows the SERVPERF model of Service Quality.

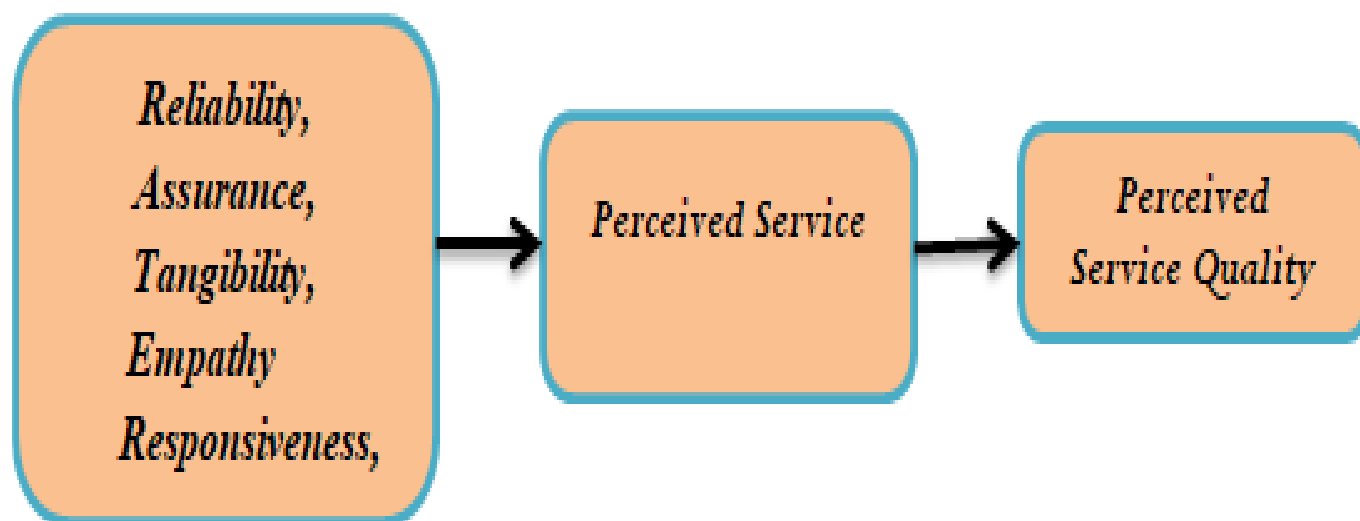


Fig.1 the SERVPERF model, adapted from Parasurman et al., 1988

2.5 Affective Commitment

Employee performance is not only influenced by leadership activities, rather it is also influenced by organizational commitment too, especially by the Affective commitment, employee's emotional feelings towards their organization (Alfarisa & Zakiyb, 2021). In a more advanced view, affective commitment is the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement of an employee in an organization (Febriantoro, 2016).

That is why that employees who have better affective commitment will have also a strong desire to work for the organization as they agree with the goals of the organization and decided to be dedicated to its goal (Mercurio, 2015). Burton et al., (2002: p.98) in Verkhohlyad and Mclean (2012) stated that “affective commitment is reported to be the most powerful dimension of organizational commitment as it is based on intrinsic, rather than, extrinsic motivation.” This dimension of organizational commitment is proved to have positive effect on employee creativity (Ardiansyah, 2019), which in turn increases organizational performance. High affective commitment tends to feel confident in an organization so that it will try optimally to improve the quality of performance in order to achieve the goals of the associated organization (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

This flank of organizational commitment develops whenever an individual becomes involved in recognizing the value-relevance of, or derives his/her identity from the organization he/she works at (Esfahani et al., 2014). The huge interest in studying affective commitment lays on the fact that it has an effect on many individual attitudes and behaviors in the workplace environment (Yousaf et al., 2015).

Among the three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective, continuance and normative), affective commitment is proved to have the strongest correlation with positive organizational outcomes and individual outcomes (Bell-Ellis et al., 2015). Moreover, affective commitment is more exposed to the scientific community than others (Bentein et al., 2000; Meyer et al., 2002). This component produces the most beneficial effects for the organization and for the individual (Bentein et al., 2000). A person's affective commitment will be stronger if the employee's experience in an organization is consistent with expectations and satisfies his/her basic needs. According to Robbins & Judge (2015), there are also several indicators that illustrate the occurrence of affective commitment out of which knowing the organization and happiness level with the organization are some out it.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the affective commitment is the employee's feelings towards the organization, which has defined employees as part of the organization, is deeply involved, and decides to stay in the organization because the employee really wants to stay with it with a strong emotional and psychological attachment. As the result, affective commitment discourages absenteeism (Burton et al., 2002), promotes organizational citizenship (Lambert et al., 2008), and favors high performance at work (Jamarillon et al., 2005).

For individuals, commitment is generally considered to have a positive effect on well-being and a negative effect on stress (Bentein et al., 2000; Maltin & Meyer, 2009; Meyer et al., 2002). In this study, affective commitment acts as a mediating variable between servant leadership style and the perceived quality of municipal service delivery. Most previous researches dealt the mediating role of affective commitment between the full-range leadership: transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership and employee performance (Donkor et al., 2021; Mahfouz et al., 2020). Figure 2 below illustrates affective commitment as the core essence of organizational commitment.

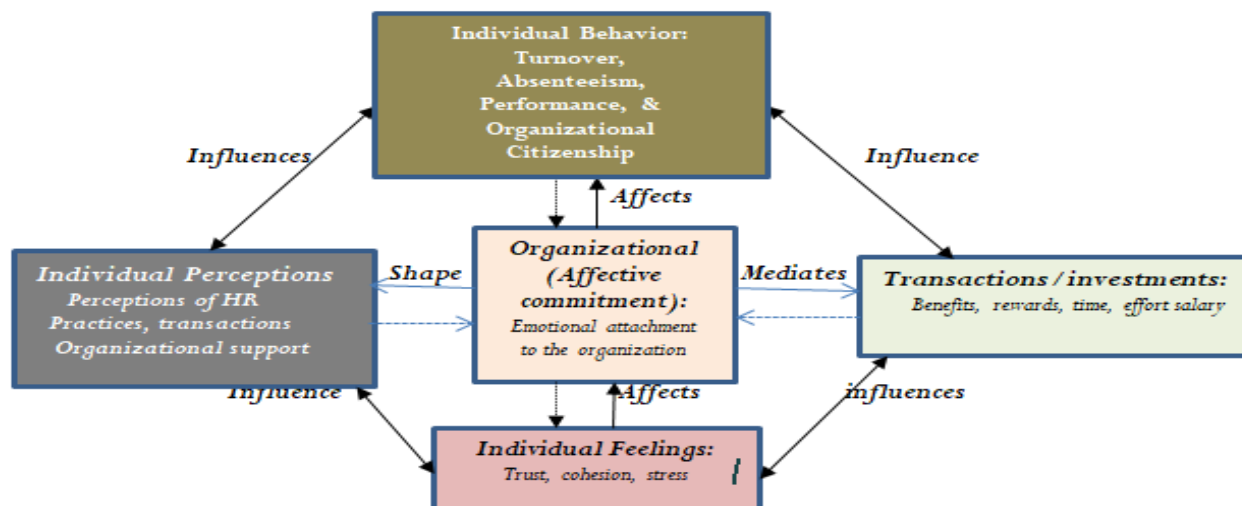


Fig.2: Concept map of affective commitment as the core essence of organizational commitment

Source: adapted from Mercurio, 2015, P. 406, Note. HR = Human Resource

2.6 Servant Leadership Theory

This leadership theory was initially mentioned in the influential works of Greenleaf, (1977) known as “The Servant as a Leader”. The formal beginning of this leadership theory elapsed more than four decades. Based on the concept of Greenleaf (1977), a leader to be gauged as a servant leader, he/she needs to serve their followers genuinely as spring board to future leadership success. The motive to serve their followers must also miniature from their inherent natural serving behavior. Starting from its beginning, many leadership scholars had continuously conducted through research studies and added additional knowledge capital on it (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Lo et al., 2018).

In this theory, follower interest must be given the top priority. The leader needs to be selfless. Serving first and selfless are the two fundamental features of the servant leadership theory (Panaccio et al. 2015). The Leader’s all-being must be given to serve the people (Pillay & Kikasu, 2024). The initial exposure of a subject as a leader servant gives him/her a two way pronged advantage: developing the skills of leadership and enables the candidate to measure leader credibility to check his/her advancement level to be the real servant leader (Lopes, 2009; Hai & Van, 2021). The rationale behind employing this leadership theory lies on that this leadership style gives top priority to serve others. Employees are given the priority as they are the immediate internal associates to the leader and subjects to streamline the services given to the esteemed customers. This is the art and science of laying basic conducive conditions to serve municipal customers by capacitating employees (Liden et al., 2008; Mankgele & Fatoki, 2023; Pillay & Kikasu, 2024). In this view, servant leadership is the style in which a leader serves others in the management process, helping subordinates to obtain development opportunities, trains subordinates to be excellent service providers, and ultimately benefit the organization (Tang et al., 2016; Bande et al., 2016; Eva et al., 2019). Thus, this leadership theory is supposed to play a noted role in providing genuine municipal services to achieve even service quality in Bahir Dar municipality and propagate its ‘spark’ to similar urban ar eas in emerging nations as well. To this end, it appears that this theory is relevant to support the hypothetical assumptions of this research work and serves as a theoretical background of this research study.

2.7 Empirical Literature Review

There is vast empirical research regarding the servant leadership style (Awasthi & Walumbwa, 2023; Ellahi et al., 2022; Gomez, 2022; Modise & Raga, 2023; Stauffer & Maxwell, 2020). In specific cases, Alafeshat and Aboud (2019) studied the impact of servant leadership on organizational performance and proved that it was positively linked with organizational performance. Similarly, Ye et al. (2019) studied servant leadership and proactive customer service performance and their findings revealed that servant leadership can promote hospitality of employees’ proactive customer service performance by sequentially boosting their harmonious passion for work and customer orientation. Alafeshat and Aboud (2019); Ye et al. (2019) critically assessed the relationship between Servant leadership and organizational performance and came up with positive relations. Moreover, Shaaban and Mohammed (2021) conducted an applied research on the effect of servant leadership on service quality in the Babylon Water Directorate and findings showed a positive impact of the dimensions of servant leadership on the service quality in the research organization. Recently, Kulachai et al. (2023) studied servant leadership and they revealed that servant leadership had a positive impact on employee engagement mediating the association between servant leadership and quality of service delivery. In addition, their findings depicted a positive relationship between employee engagement and quality of service delivery as well. Moreover, Zhang, Yin and Su, (2024) studied the impact of servant leadership on proactive service and their finding witnessed that servant leadership has a significant positive impact on public service motivation and proactive service behavior on junior civil servants. However, some considerable gaps were tangibly observed in the works of Alafeshat and Aboud (2019) and Ye et al. (2019), that all the assessed literature hardly displayed the effect of servant leadership style on the perceived quality of municipal service delivery. In addition to this, Bhana and

Bayat (2020) left us the gap of leadership on implementing front service providers of municipalities. Moreover, methodological gap of utilizing valid statistics of the PLS-SEM is also identified in the study conducted by Grobler and Floatman (2020), on the implication of servant leadership to leverage municipal service quality. Thus, this research study fits these identified gaps within the range of the intended objectives of this research study.

2.8 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The intended research model shows the relationship among the independent (Servant leadership style), the mediator (affective commitment) and the dependent variable (Perceived quality of municipal service delivery) in responding the four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3 & H4).

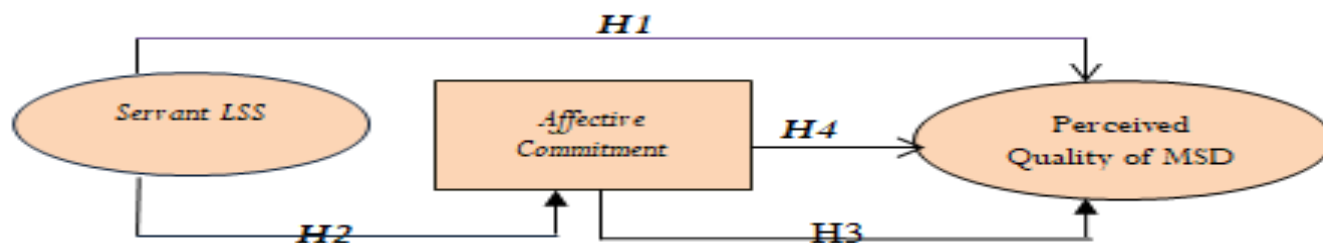


Fig.3: model of the research

3. Constructs of the Study

3.1 Constructs of the Servant Leadership Style/Independent variable

The servant leadership style that is measured using the seven constructs of the servant leadership model (Awasthi & Walumbwa, 2023): empowerment, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, emotional healing, conceptual skills, and creating value for the community and ethical conduct. Specifically, each construct is defined as:

- Empowering (E): encouraging and facilitating others, especially immediate followers, in Identifying and solving problems. Determining when and how to complete work tasks.
- Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed (HSGS): Demonstrating genuine concern for others' career growth and development by providing support and mentoring.
- Putting followers first: using actions and words to make it clear to others, especially immediate followers, that satisfying their work needs is a priority.
- Emotional Healing (EH): the act of showing sensitivity to others' personal concern.
- Conceptual Skills (CS): possessing knowledge of the organization and tasks to be accomplished. Effectively supporting and assisting others, especially immediate followers.
- Creating value for the community (CVC): a conscious, genuine concern for helping the community.
- Behaving Ethically (BE): interacting openly, fairly, and honestly with others.

3.2 The Mediating Variable:

The affective commitment which is measured by the six items of Meyer, Allen, & Smith (1993) is the mediating variable.

3.3 Constructs of Service Quality

The five constructs of service quality of the Parasuraman et al., (1988) model is employed (reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness). Each of the respondents in the study had provided answers to 33 questions related to service quality perceptions. Measurements of perceptions were done by using a 5- point ordinal scale. Face validity was used for ensuring validity.

3.4 Data Sources

This study was based on empirical research that involved primary data. The preliminary data has been collected first-hand through the survey approach. The researcher employed secondary sources such as books and journal articles for theory formulation and discrepancy checks in the discussion part.

3.5 Sampling Technique and Sample Characteristics

The sampling frame could not be fixed due to the security issues, the prevailing civil war between the Amhara National Regional State Rebel Groups and the Ethiopian Federal Government; the purposive sampling with some elements of the stratified sampling technique was applied to get responses from the Principal Municipality and its sub-city level municipalities in the city of Bahir Dar. The sub-cities included were: the Dagmawi Menelik, the Atsie Tewodros, Belay Zeleke, Fassilo, Tana and Gish Abay. The data-gathering period was from September 2024 to November 2024. This study paid due attention on the municipal service of the city of

Bahir Dar as it is the capital and melting pot of the social, economic and political situations of the second largest region in the country. Bahir Dar city as the capital of the region, most social turmoil such as municipal service delivery, which is the reflection of the region's status quo, is easily visualized and perceived.

The self-administered questionnaires were discharged through trained enumerators and a face-to-face approach was applicable for the interview, for this method is considered appropriate for collecting data from a large sample. This study employed the sample respondents who are working in the municipality of the city of Bahir Dar and its respective municipal service recipients. The sample was collected from the respondents based on the directions forwarded by Charoensukmongkol (2022) and Jena et al., (2018), who had a minimum of 2 years of experience and having at least one direct report to ensure the respondent's leadership position to confirm its consistency. It was also kept in mind that the respondent belonged to each key municipal service areas: urban land administration, urban transportation sector and urban waste management offices considering five members each (Klonek et al., 2021), that is 15 interviewees in total. About 385 questionnaires were dispersed through trained enumerators. Out of which 348 responses were received (response rate, 90%). After removing the incomplete questionnaires, the sample of 312 respondents were selected for the final analysis. The highest number of arrows coming to the dependent construct multiplied by 10 indicates the minimum sample size required as a rule of thumb (Goodhue et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2013). As per the rule, the highest number of arrows pointing to AC was four, making 40 the required sample. Thus, 224 responses were enough for analyzing the results in structural equation modeling.

The gender wise perspective of the study showed that the total percentage of male respondents constituted 60.1%, while the rest belonged to females, 39.9%. The majority of the respondents belonged to the age bracket of 30-40 years, i.e., 52.5%. The 35.6% belonged to the age category of 25 and 40 years, and the rest belonged to the age group above 40 years. Literacy wise, 25.6% of the respondents had postgraduate degrees, while the rest had bachelor's degrees. All the respondents worked in the same organization for two or more years. All the respondents belonged to the three key municipal service areas: urban land Administration, urban transportation and urban waste management that had at least one direct report to the Bahir Dar City Administration General Manager.

3.6 Procedure of Data Collection

The self-administered questionnaire was categorized into two parts. Part 1 of the questionnaire was related to the questions on the demographic profile of the respondents. Part 2 contained items adapted (rephrased) from the standardized instruments utilized for the study for measuring latent constructs, including StLS, AC, and PQoMSD, as displayed in Table 1. For Part 2 of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert Scale varying from 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

The 28 items of StLS were adapted from Liden et al., (2008) Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ). This instrument was used in the late dissertation research by PeyKar (2024). An example item was "others would seek help from the leader if they had a personal problem". The construct of the StLS demonstrated the acceptable reliability of 0.917. The Six AC items were adapted from Meyer et al., (1993). This tool was also used in previous research (e.g., Sharew, 2021; Quoc & Ghauri, 2022). An example item from this tool was "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization". The construct of AC demonstrated acceptable reliability of 0.911. The 33 service quality items, PQoMSD items in this case, were adapted from Parasuraman et al., (1988) service quality scale acronymic as RATER: Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness.

The Parasuraman and service quality measurement scale, the RATER had been utilized by a plethora of researchers, to mention some, Vu, (2021), Shrestha (2021) & Wang et al., (2023) are the important ones. Out of the 33-items, six items represented reliability, ten correspond to assurance, four of them stand for tangibility, eight of them belong to empathy and the last five items represent responsiveness in the perceived quality of municipal service delivery in the city administration of Bahir Dar. An example item from the Smith scale was "My leader shares communication usually in the forms of commands and instructions." The construct of PQoMSD demonstrated the reliability of 0.925 which is acceptable to conduct this research study.

3.7 Assessment of Common Method Bias

Common method bias was to be effectively examined for the data of the conceptual model's latent variables that came from the single respondents in a one-time survey data. Thus, statistical and procedural approaches were examined to minimize the potential, common method bias, (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Regarding the statistical techniques, Kock (2015) and Kock and Lynn's (2012) recommended that using the Smart PLS-SEM, considering a full collinearity test based on variance inflation factors (VIFs) is advisable. This approach explains that when an inner VIFs value was the 3.3 threshold, indicating presence of the collinearity issue, it ultimately suggests the presence of CMB. The inner VIF values for the proposed conceptual model ranged from 2.526 to 3.142, implying that CMB was not a significant issue in this research study. In accounting the procedural approach, Podsakoff et al., (2003) suggested that researchers had better make sure the confidentiality and anonymity of data provided by the respondents for it controls the possibility that the respondents might respond unethically. Besides, the proposed model variables were arbitrarily introduced into the survey to reduce respondents' cause and effect relations among the latent constructs.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Pearson's correlation & Descriptive statistics

Pearson's product-moment correlation (r) was determined to ensure the construct validity and multicollinearity between exogenous

variables. According to Nunnally, (1978), if the correlation coefficient (r) was less than 0.8, it indicates the validity of the constructs. Table 1, exhibited the mean (M) values, standard deviations (SD), and product-moment correlation (r) among the latent constructs. All correlation coefficients (r) were found below 0.8, indicating that constructs were valid but not highly related to each other, loose multicollinearity. PLS-SEM was employed to investigate the relationship of the three variables: StLS, AC, and PQoMSD. Smart PLS v 3.3.3 was administered to validate the study's proposed conceptual model. The PLS-SEM was applied based on the idea of Hulland (1999) that focuses on the evaluation of the research model consisting of two stages: the measurement model (the outer model) with validity and reliability of the latent constructs were examined. The structural model (inner model) was assessed in the second phase and a hypothesized path association between latent variables was estimated.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics & simple correlations (r) between StLS, AC, and PQoMSD

Construct	Mean	SD	StLS	AC	PQoMSD
StLS	3.493	0.827	...	0.741**	0.669**
AC	3.597	0.769	0.751**
PQoMSD	3.551	0.478

**** Significant correlation at 0.01 levels, one-tailed**

Table 2: Measurement Model results

Reference (source of standardized Scale)	Selective items (after factor analysis)	Factor Loadings	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Liden et al., (2008): StLS1, Conceptual skills		0.758	0.917	0.937	0.613	1.937
	StLS2, Empowerment	0.811				-3.211
	StLS3, Helping subordinates to develop and succeed	0.728				
	StLS4, Behave ethically	0.719				
	StLS5, Put subordinates first	0.754				
	StLS6, Emotional Healing	0.837				
	StLS7, Commitment to community development	0.867				
Meyer et al., (1993):	<i>AC1, happiness to spend the rest time career in this organization,</i>	<i>0.813</i>	<i>0.913</i>	<i>0.923</i>	<i>0.572</i>	<i>0.813</i>
	AC2, feeling as if this organization's problems are my own,	0.741				-3.212
	AC3, do not feel like "part of my family" at this organization,	0.732				
	AC4, do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization,	0.711				
	AC5, This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me,	0.731				
	AC6, do not feel a strong sense of belongingness to this organization	0.727				
Parasuraman et al., (1988):	REL, ability to gain the confidence of the local citizen through its services	0.813	0.876	0.892	0.677	1.733
						-3.161
	ASS, ability to perform local service accurately and on	0.817				

	time,				
	TAN, physical facilities, equipment, building, personnel appearance, communication methods, service techniques, mechanisms and equipment to provide municipal services	0.742			
	EMP, the relative good attention of the municipality in service delivery,	0.751			
	RES, provide municipal customers with immediate service as quickly as possible	0.878			

Significant level of all indicators loading is at 0.001 level ($p < 0.001$), where CA stands for Cronbach's alpha; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; VIF, variation inflation factor; StLS, Servant Leadership Style; AC, Affective Commitment; PQoMSD, Perceived Quality of Municipal Service Delivery

4.2 Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The latent constructs were utilized to explore the PLS-SEM measurement model. PLS-SEM assessed a reflective model to measure the constructs and its indicators were determined through convergent and discriminant validity. In the first place, the reliability of the variables was gauged by Cronbach's alpha, CA and composite reliability, CR measures. Secondly, the convergent validity assessed the value of the indicators similarly as interpreted by the participants and scrutinized by the average value extracted (AVE) results. Lastly, based on Kock (2017), discriminant validity determined that the indicators related to one latent construct should not measure the items of the other latent constructs. As displayed in Table 2 above, factor loadings of the latent variables were higher than the required minimum threshold value of 0.60. All the factors' of outer loadings were statistically acceptable and were higher than the cut-off value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2013). A total of twenty eight items of three constructs

Diagonal elements showed the square root of AVE coefficients; Off Diagonal elements showed the correlation between constructs. Refer to Table 3 for constructs' abbreviations had to be removed due to outer loadings below 0.7 & multicollinearity 3.3, and ultimately, 18 items with factors' loading varying from 0.710 to 0.883 were kept. The study's findings in Table2 show that StLS, AC, and the PQoMSD had satisfied the reliability scale's criteria. All CA and CR values are above the minimum value of 0.70, indicating that reliability is acceptable. Next, the AVE for all constructs was greater than 0.5, Fornell & Larcker, (1981), that fulfills the minimum threshold value recommended for significant convergent validity. AVE coefficients in table 3 shows acceptable and found appropriate to the intended model. To evaluate the possibility of collinearity issues between the constructs, the VIF should be 3.3 (Kock, 2017), and as can be displayed in Table 2, the VIF values for all constructs were below the cut-off value. Coefficients among the constructs exhibited the discriminant validity of the latent construct as proposed by Fornell & Larcker (1981). The square roots of each diagonal AVE values are found in line with the (Hair et al., 2011). Thus, the results depicted that the measures utilized in this study have sufficient discriminant validity.

4.3 Evaluation of the Structural Model and Mediation Analysis

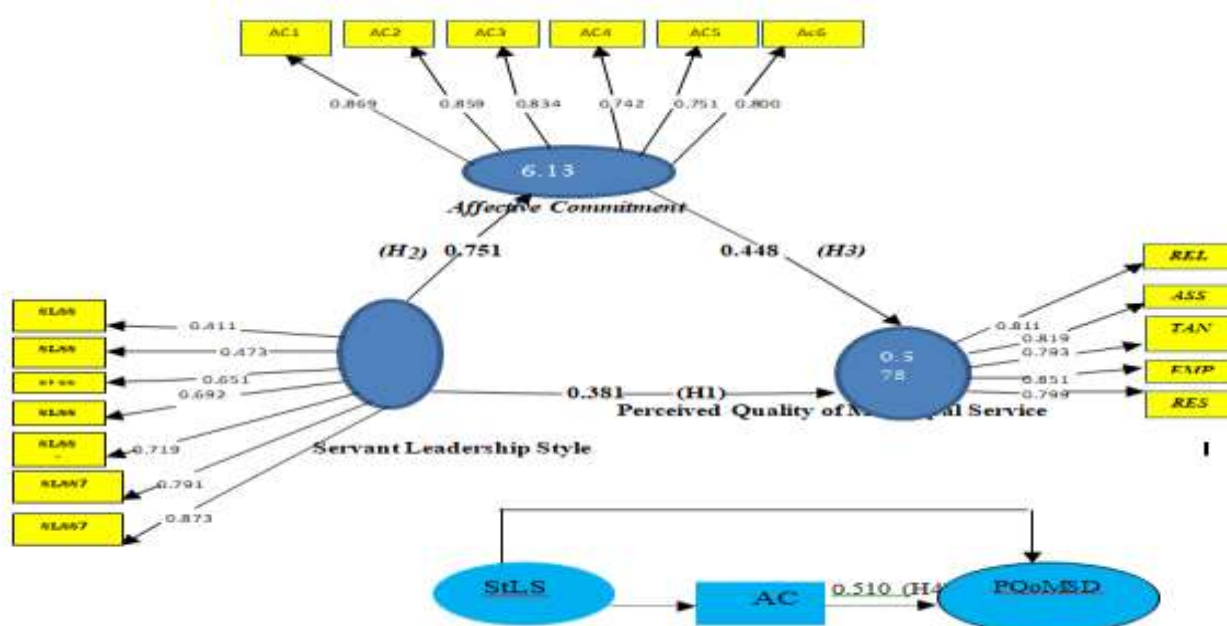


Table4: Parameter estimates of direct effect

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	DE	SE	T-Statics	P-value	Results
H1	StLS-QoMSD	0.381	0.127	2.892	0.003	supported
H2	StLS-AC	0.751	0.051	16.188	0	supported
H3	AC-PQoMSD	0.381	0.111	3.376	0.002	supported
H4	StLS-AC-PQoMSD	Mediation (Refer Table5)				

Where, DE= Direct effect; SE, standard error; B= standardized path coefficients,

Primarily, this elucidates that the existence of servant leaders plays an essential role in creating a positive environment through the involvement of affective commitment in fostering the perceived quality of municipal service delivery. Second, the path analysis showed that StLS was positively and significantly related to AC ($\beta = 0.751$, $p = 0.000$, H_2 supported). This positive association implied that some servant leaders of the Bahir Dar City Municipality are insightful in creating high levels of trust in influencing and empowering followers to sustain the AC in the urban land administration, transportation and waste management sectors. The findings were in line with the prior studies (Pahi et al., 2022; Lo et al., 2024; Rutgers, 2024). Third, the finding analysis showed that AC and PQoMSD were significantly positive ($\beta = 0.448$, $P=0.002$, H_3 supported). This positive relationship indicated that AC is a significant factor in enhancing the successful implementation of PQoMSD. These results were corroborated in prior studies linking AC to PQoMSD (Kania, 2023; Pakhshi, 2024).

4.3.1 Mediating Analysis

Table 5 illustrates the parameter outcomes of the mediation model of this research study. The indirect effect of AC on the relationship between StLS and PQoMSD was found statistically significant ($\beta = 0.510$, $p = 0.001$, H_4 supported). VAF (value adjustment factor) was utilized to further measure the indirect effect by dividing the indirect effect value by the total effect value, which as the result, if $VAF < 20\%$, there is no mediation role between the independent and the dependent variable; if $VAF > 20$ but $< 80\%$ revealed the occurrence of partial mediation effect, values, $VAF > 80\%$ results depicts full mediation effect (Hair et al., 2012).

Table 5 shows that the VAF for hypothesis H_4 was evaluated about 51.03% with an indirect effect of 0.510. This affirmative association concluded that AC partially mediates between StLS and PQoMSD, thus covering the research gap. This observation concludes that servant leaders in municipalities can efficiently and effectively manage the PQoMSD whenever it employs effective servant leadership and affective organizational commitment on its followers.

4.4 Prediction power and model fit of the conceptual model

Though two model fit procedures were applied: SRMR and NFI, only one model fit was adequate.

Table5: Parameter Estimates of the indirect effect

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	IDE	TE	SE	VAF	P-Value	Results
H4	StLS? AC? PQoMSD	0.312	0.612	0.102	0.51	0.001	Supported PM

Where, IDE= indirect effect, SE= standard error; VAF= value adjustment factor, TE= DE +IDE; PM = partial mediation and TE= total effect

The predicting power of the proposed model was examined through the structural model with the existence of a mediator (i.e., AC) by assessing the Coefficient of determination (R^2) of the endogenous latent constructs. Also, R^2 is explained in the amount of variance of an observed construct. As displayed in Fig. 4, the coefficient of determination (R^2) for AC and PQoMSD were attained at 61.3% and 57.8%, respectively. It explained that the model had a higher prediction power and could describe all the endogenous constructs very well (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009). The SRMR value obtained was 0.063 (< 0.08), implying that model fit was achieved (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The obtained NFI value (i.e., 0.778) was slightly lower to consider as it needs to be 0.90 for a good model fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). However, the model fit is regarded as a rising field; unlike in CB-SEM (confirmatory analysis), its utilization is not mandatory in exploratory and predictive analysis (i.e., PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2017).

5. Conclusion

Some research studies have explored the relationship between servant leadership, affective organizational commitment, and quality of municipal service delivery. Though, parts of these studies have been conducted in the Ethiopian context, but this area needs to be further explored for customer satisfaction is at standstill in almost all Ethiopian municipalities. The originality of the present

study is significant

as no prior study explored the mediating role of affective organizational commitment on the relationship between servant leadership and the perceived quality of municipal service delivery, specifically targeting the employees' of the urban land administration, transportation sector and waste management service sectors in the study area, Bahir Dar City Administration. Most of the previous studies have assessed the role of employees in influencing variables in solid waste management services and potable water service areas. The study described the theoretical inference to prior AC research by contributing and validating an empirical, conceptual framework as a significant intervening variable between the independent available and outcome variables in the specified municipal service areas even at the National scale in Ethiopia and the Horn at large. The other significant outcome derived from this study is that it acts as a trigger for deeper insights into different service area contexts. Eventually, such studies will serve as an enabler for cultivating quality municipal services through the application of pertinent leadership style and organizational commitment.

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