THE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR SUPPORT AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON VOLUNTARY TURNOVER

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate the predictive validity of perceived supervisor support and servant leadership on voluntary turnover. Data were taken from employees and ex-employees of five batches of the development program in a company in Jakarta, Indonesia (N = 92). The data were analyzed using a logistic regression technique on Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The results show that both perceived supervisor support and servant leadership are negatively related to voluntary turnover. The servant leadership accounts for more variance on voluntary turnover and perceived supervisor support. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are further discussed.

Keywords: perceived supervisor support, servant leadership, voluntary turnover

INTRODUCTION

The research of employee turnover and its impact on the organization's performance has been examined for a century from a diverse perspective, including organizational psychology (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017; Park & Shaw, 2013). From the studies, employee turnover is identified as a significant problem for the organization. It is because turnover results in direct costs such as costs associated with recruitment activities, replacement employee search costs, and indirect costs such as costs associated with employee training (Park & Shaw, 2013; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Davidson, Timo, and Wang (2010) have described the costs incurred to replace outgoing employees. It consists of advertising costs for finding new employees, the cost of labor agents, the cost of selecting, the time for management to conduct interviews with candidates, and to provide training for new employees.

Coomber and Barriball (2007) have defined employee turnover as, "The movement of an employee out of an organization." Similarly, Shaw, Delery, Jenkins Jr, and Gupta (1998) have divided turnover into two types; those are voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover. Involuntary turnover is the employee dismissal from the organization due to poor performance or workplace violations. Meanwhile, voluntary turnover is defined as, "Employees leaving the organization because of their desires." This research focuses on voluntary turnover because this type of turnover incurs many costs to the organization because of the loss of knowledge and skills of the outgoing employees (Aguinis & O'Boyle, 2014; Becton, Carr, Mossholder, & Walker, 2017).

The present research is conducted in the largest media company in Jakarta that employs One-Year Account Executive Development Program (AEDP) for fresh graduates. At the end of each development program, participants will be distributed to their new offices. AEDP is the program developed by organizations to recruit the best people who will be placed in the management position. Every year, the company recruits more than 500 applications and selects only 25 people to participate in the program. From 2011 until 2016, 126 participants are participating in the program, and 109 participants pass. However, in 2016, only 37 participants of AEDP remained in the company. Many graduates voluntarily left the program, making the management questioned the effectiveness of the program. In the present research, the researchers examine the causes of voluntary turnover of the programs to help the company to decide whether it should continue the program or implement other more effective programs.

The researchers draw social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) to investigate factors of voluntary turnover. Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains the reciprocal relationship between the two involved parties. According to the theory, employees will show positive attitudes and behaviors as they perceive that the organization

treats them well. SET posits that the relationship between two parties (employees and the organization) develops over time as trust and commitment between them increase (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Superiors, like immediate supervisors, are the representations of organizations. They may directly affect employees because they provide daily directions, feedback, and job evaluation of subordinates (Kottke & Pelletier, 2013). Based on this theory, supervisor support is one of the important factors of voluntary turnover (Arici, 2018; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). Particularly in collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, ideal leaders are seen to have paternalistic, nurturing, and authoritarian qualities (Hanges, Aiken, Park, & Su, 2016; Purba, Oostrom, Van Der Molen, & Born, 2015).

Moreover, exit interviews from the company record that the main reason why employees leave the program is the lack of supervisor support. Supervisor support is the employee's perception about their relationship with their superior and how well employees can rely on their superior to care about their interests and well-being (Hsu, 2011). Supervisor support can also be interpreted as to what extent an employee feels that they are supported by their superiors (Choi, Cheong, & Feinberg, 2012).

The researchers identify two theories related to supervisor support. Those are perceived supervisor support originated from perceived organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002) and servant leadership originated from leadership theory (Barbuto Jr & Wheeler, 2006; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Perceived supervisor support is the employee's view of his/her supervisor in the aspects of the contribution they have given and the attention of the superior to their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). The examples of supervisor support include supervisors providing feedback on the work of their employees, appreciating the work of employees, and respecting employees. Perceived supervisor support, a dimension of the perception of organizational support, is considered to have a strong effect on voluntary turnover (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Maertz Jr, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007; Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2012). The researchers argue that employees who believe they are receiving positive treatment from their superiors will feel the need to serve their superiors. In turn, it leads to their willingness to stay with the organization. Therefore, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived supervisor support has a negative and significant relationship with voluntary turnover

Another variable related to supervisor support is servant leadership. It is defined as, "The perception of employees that their leader has the quality of the leader. It is related to a sincere feeling that arises from within the heart to serve others" (Van Dierendonck, 2011). A servant leader that he/she places followers' needs as priorities, accomplishes something with others, and helps others achieve a common goal (Greenleaf, 2008). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) have suggested the conceptualized characteristics of servant leadership originated by Greenleaf as fostering good relationships with subordinates, encouraging subordinates, helping subordinates to grow and succeeding, behaving ethically, having the conceptual ability, putting the interests of subordinates above their interests, and creating value for all employees. They have composed of eight characteristics built on the more influential works in the field (Greenleaf,

2008; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Those are altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, organization stewardship, service, humility, and vision. In other words, servant leaders concern about followers' holistic development (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). This framework is fundamental for servant leadership and consistent with Greenleaf's original message. Although the research about servant leadership is relatively understudied cross-culturally, Pekerti and Sendjaya (2010) have compared servant leadership in Australia and Indonesia. They have found that the concept is valid and reliable across cultures.

Previous studies have found that servant leadership as perceived by employees, is negatively related to turnover intentions (Hunter et al., 2013; Jang & Kandampully, 2018; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). To the researchers' knowledge, none of the previous studies do research servant leadership in relation to voluntary turnover. However, Purba, Oostrom, Born, and Van Der Molen (2016) have studied employees in the restaurant industry and found that trust in supervisor predicts turnover intentions via on-the-job embeddedness. In turn, it influences voluntary turnover. Thus, the researchers are the first ones to test the relationship between servant leadership and employees' voluntary turnover. The researchers argue that employees who perceive that their supervisor shows attention by encouraging, helping, behaving ethically, putting others' interests above self-interest will tend to feel positive about their supervisor and choose to stay in the organization. Thus, the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership is negatively and significantly related to voluntary turnover.

Despite the evidence that the relationship between servant leadership and voluntary turnover has not been studied previously, both perceived supervisor support and servant leadership variables are found to be related to other forms turnover (Hunter et al., 2013; Jaramillo et al., 2009; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016; Maertz Jr et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2012). The researchers argue that servant leadership contributes to incremental variance on voluntary turnover and perceived supervisor support. This is because three dimensions of servant leadership are not found in the perceived supervisor support. Those are behaving ethically, having the conceptual ability, and creating value for all. Those three dimensions are considered important for employees to develop trust and commitment to their supervisors. Five of eight dimensions in the servant leadership dimensions from Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) are not covered in the dimensions of perceived supervisor support. Those are emotional healing, service, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship, and vision. Thus, the definition of servant leadership is broader than perceived supervisor support. Based on the argumentation, the researchers hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership explains incremental variance on voluntary turnover and perceived supervisor support.

METHODS

The researchers approach 109 people involved in five batches of the development program in a company from 2011 to 2016. It is with help from the Human Resource

(HR) department of the largest media company in Jakarta. The researchers ask the data from the HR department and contact all prospective respondents using an email with a link to the online survey.

According to the company's records, from 109 people, only 37 people (34%) are still working at the same organization. Meanwhile, 72 people (66%) have left the organization. In the letter to each participant, the researchers introduce themselves and explain the aim of our survey. The researchers ensure the participants that their participation is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. They are also informed that they can stop their participation at any point in the survey. From the 109 people contacted, 92 participants agree and fill out the online survey (response rate = 84%). Of 92 participants, 37 participants (40,22%) still work in the organization, and 55 participants (59,78%) have left the organization. Female participants are 51 (55,4%) and male participants are 41 (44,6%). The mean age of the participants is 1,55 (SD = 0,50). About 82 participants (89,1%) hold a bachelor degree, 8 participants (8,7%) have a master degree, and 2 participants (2,2%) hold a college degree.

All scales are originally in English. Those are back-translated from English to Bahasa Indonesia and back to English by two independent bilingual organizational psychologists. They use Brislin's back-translation procedure (Jones, Lee, Phillips, Zhang, & Jaceldo, 2001).

To measure voluntary turnover, participants are grouped into two groups. Code 1 is given to those who are still working in the organization. Meanwhile, code 2 is for those who have left the organization at the time of the research.

Perceived supervisor support is measured using the 6-item scale developed by Ramus and Steger (2000). The researchers ask participants to think and assess on their former supervisor when they are in the development program in the company. Likert-type scale with a 5-point response rate ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) is used. The example of the item is, "My supervisor always gives me feedback about my work." The reliability coefficient of the scale in this research is 0,92.

Servant leadership is measured using 38 items using the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) proposed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006). It consists of 8 dimensions, namely, altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, organization stewardship, service, humility, and vision. The researchers ask the participants to assess how they perceive their former supervisor when they

are in the development program in the company. Likert-type scale with a 5-point response rate ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) is used. The reliability coefficient of the scale in this research is 0,95. The example is, "My supervisor is good at helping me with my emotional issues."

Previous researchers have found that gender is related to turnover variables (Nouri, 2017; Selvarajan, Slattery, & Stringer, 2015). Nouri (2017) has conducted a research on several public accounting firms in the US. The results indicate that the turnover is higher among women than men. Selvarajan et al. (2015) have found a different relationship between gender and turnover among temporary workers in the US. Women are more likely to have lower turnover intentions than men. Education is also related to turnover variables (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). The employees with higher educational level are more likely to have higher turnover intentions than employees with lower educational level. For that reason, gender and education variables are controlled by including them in the analysis as covariates.

Data are analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The relative effects of the two predictors are tested using multiple logistic hierarchical regression technique as the outcome variable is a categorical variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows the results of mean, standard deviation, and correlation of the variables. Before testing the hypotheses, the researchers analyze the correlations between demographic variables and the studied variables. Table 1 suggests that gender is not related significantly with perceived supervisor support, servant leadership, and voluntary turnover (r = 0,06, p = 0,53; r = 0,05, p = 0,64; r = 0,07, p = 0,53, respectively). Similarly, education also has no significant correlation with perceived supervisor support, servant leadership, and voluntary turnover (r = 0,04, p = 0,62; r = 0,00, p = 0,99; r = 0,04, p = 0,70, respectively).

Hypothesis 1 states that perceived supervisor support is negatively related to voluntary turnover. The results show that perceived supervisor support is negatively related to voluntary turnover (r = -0,38, p < 0,001). It means that Hypothesis 1 is accepted. The employees perceiving that their supervisor is supportive, tend to stay in the organization. Then, the employees perceiving that their supervisor is not supportive, tend to leave the organization.

Table 1 The Means, standard deviations, and
inter-correlations between the variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	1,55	0,49	NA				
2. Education	2,06	0,32	0,18	NA			
3. Perceived supervisor support	17,7	6,11	0,06	0,04	(0,91)		
4. Servant leadership	105,5	36,8	0,05	0,00	0,84**	(0,98)	
5. Voluntary turnover	1,40	0,49	0,07	0,04	-0,37**	-0,45**	NA

Note: N = 92. Voluntary Turnover is dummy-coded (1= still working, 2 = resign). Gender is dummy-coded (1 = male, 2 = female). Education is dummy-coded (1 = Diploma, 2 = Bachelor's degree, 3 = Master degree). The Cronbach alpha values are presented on the diagonal. *p < 0,05; **p < 0,01. NA = not applicable

Hypothesis 2 is about servant leadership, which is negatively related to voluntary turnover. The results showed that servant leadership is negatively correlated with voluntary turnover (r = -0,45, p < 0,001). Thus, it supports Hypothesis 2. The employees who perceive that their supervisor shows servant leadership tend to stay in the organization. Meanwhile, the employees who perceive that their supervisor does not show servant leadership tend to leave the organization.

To test Hypothesis 3, the researchers conduct multiple logistic regressions because turnover is a dichotomous variable. Table 2 presents the odds ratios (b) of gender, education, perceived supervisor support, and servant leadership on voluntary turnover. The -2-log likelihood function of the model with gender, educational level, perceived supervisor support, and servant leadership variables as predictors and voluntary turnover as outcome variable are 104,081. The Nagelkerke R2 is 0,263. Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test shows that the model fits the data well (χ2 = 6,282, p = 0,616). Table 2 shows that perceived supervisor support has negative effect on voluntary turnover (Δχ2 = 7,31, Wald statistic = 11,09, p = 0,015, b = 0,14) and gender and educational level.

Hypothesis 3 states that servant leadership accounts for variance in voluntary turnover and gender, educational level, and perceived supervisor support. The results show that servant leadership has negative effect on voluntary turnover (Δχ2 = 12,65, Wald statistic = 5,87, p = 0,015, b = 0,03) and gender, education, and perceived supervisor support. It indicates that the data support Hypothesis 3.

Table 2 The Effects of Perceived Supervisor Support and Servant Leadership on Turnover Behavior Using Multiple Logistic Hierarchical Regression

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		χ2
	b	Wald statistic	b	Wald statistic	
Gender	0,15	0,11	0,26	0,28	
Educational level	0,39	0,30	0,23	0,10	
Perceived supervisor support	0,14	11,09**	-0,02	0,07	7,31
Servant leadership			0,03	5,87*	12,65

Note: b value above 1 implies a positive effect, b value of 1 indicates no effect, b value below 1 means a negative effect. * p <0,05, ** p <0,01

The results are in line with previous studies that find the negative relationship between perceived supervisor support and employee turnover (Arici, 2018; Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Nichols, Swanberg, & Bright, 2016). Moreover, the results also show that servant leadership has a negative and significant relationship with voluntary turnover. Similarly, previous researchers find that servant leadership is related to turnover intentions (Hunter et al., 2013; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Since most of the previous studies examine the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intentions, this research is the first to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and actual turnover, namely voluntary turnover. This is the first research to look at the incremental variance of servant leadership on voluntary turnover and perceived supervisor support. The previous researchers have generally only seen the effect of perceived supervisor support and servant leadership and the influence of these two variables with turnover variables separately. Next, servant leadership is also proven to contribute to voluntary turnover and perceived supervisor support.

The findings are also in line with the social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) between the supervisors and the followers. The principle of reciprocity between supervisors and followers suggests that if supervisors do not act as expected by their followers, the followers will likely tend to respond negatively by performing withdrawal behaviors such as leaving the organization. The core of social exchange is trust and commitment. The supervisors who are trustworthy in the eyes of the followers will get the commitment from the followers. The findings show that those who perceive their supervisor to have a servant leadership style tend to stay in the organization.

The findings have proven that leaders are an important entity in organizations that predicts employee attitudes and behaviors in a collectivist culture (Hanges et al., 2016; Purba et al., 2015, 2016). The leaders in Indonesia, especially in Javanese culture, are expected to take the role of surrogate father. It is characterized as having strong role of power, authority, and legitimacy (Irawanto, Ramsey, & Ryan, 2011). Servant leaders work by serving followers and seek holistic well-being of followers to create a positive work environment (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). It is just like a father protecting and enhancing his children's well-being. A failure to act as a father may lead to negative impacts for an organization, including turnover behavior.

The researchers also find that the correlation between perceived supervisor support and servant leadership is high (r = 0,84). It indicates that the collinearity between perceived supervisor support and servant leadership is high. However, collinearity does not affect the prediction statistic in multivariate models (Kock & Lynn, 2012; Kraha, Turner, Nimon, Zientek, & Henson, 2012). Since the researchers' goal is to make a prediction, collinearity is not a problem in the research. Moreover, collinearity is expected because the researchers conclude that both variables are similar to some extent. Servant leadership has a broader definition than perceived supervisor support. Thus, the researchers argue that perceived supervisor support can be a part of servant leadership. For that matter, it is expected that future researchers should test the construct validity of these variables on broader populations.

There are some limitations to this research. First, this research uses specific samples in an account executive development program of a company. Although the findings in this research can provide valuable input for the company regarding why employees leave the company during and after the programs, the researchers are not sure whether the findings can be generalized to a bigger group or other populations. Future research is suggested to replicate the study to other populations to confirm the predictive validity of the study variables. Second, the researchers employ a cross-sectional design that limits the ability to confirm the causal relationships between variables. It is suggested to use other designs, such as longitudinal design by taking data at several points in the development program to examine the fluctuations of data change over time. Third, the researchers

use self-reported measures to examine all studied variables. It raises the possibilities common method and social desirability biases (Fuller, Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, & Babin, 2016; Krumpal, 2013; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, common method bias (Fuller et al., 2016) is likely not a problem in this research, because voluntary turnover is an objective data gathered from the company record. To minimize the potential of social desirability issues, the researchers ensure participants that this research is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential in the introductory letter.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research show that participants of the AEDP programs are selected because only a few people are accepted at the beginning of the program. Therefore, the organization must retain its selected employees to avoid direct and indirect costs of employee turnover. To do that, the organizations are suggested to give more attention to supervisor supports that can be derived from perceived supervisor support or servant leadership. Supervisors must know how to be a servant leader to increase employees' perceived supervisor support positively. For that reason, the HR department must know how to develop leaders in their company by honing their servant leadership skills through leadership training, workshops, and coaching interventions. Also, it is suggested that HR department considers implementing servant leadership to a broader level in the company so that it can become a culture and minimize voluntary turnover.

In this research, the researchers find that servant leadership contributes to incremental variance on turnover and perceived supervisor support. The researchers suggest future studies to replicate the findings to other populations to see if the results are valid across cultures.

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