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The Effect of Servant Leadership on Organizational Commitment; the Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Justice

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The present study is aimed at investigating the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment by considering the mediating role of psychological empowerment and organizational justice. This study uses a correlative research method through structural equation modeling (SEM). 250 employees of Maroun Oil and Gas Operating Company were selected by the simple random sampling method. Measures of this research include servant leadership questionnaires, psychological empowerment questionnaire, organizational justice questionnaire, and organizational commitment questionnaire. Data is analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM) and intermediate analysis. Analyses of structural equation modeling supported the fitness of the proposed model with the data. The results indicated the positive effect of servant leadership on organizational commitment and indirect positive effect of this relationship through psychological empowerment and organizational justice. It can be concluded that organizations may increase a sense of capability and perceived organizational justice in employees through the servant leadership style in the organization and enjoy the final result, i.e. committed employees.

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Keywords: servant leadership, organizational commitment, psychological empowerment, organizational justice.

In recent years, the world of business has witnessed many changes. The rapid changes of environment, industry, customers, clients, competitors, products, and services are forces that influence the organization and cause the need for superiority (Singh, 2008). Moreover, the combination of the labor force has also experienced dramatic changes. This combination has had many changes in terms of race, ethnicity, and age and finally a great interest in individual development has been created (Pater, Beaumont & Stewart, 2006 quoted by Sharifi, 2015). Expansive changes and globalization in today's world involve a new and different leadership style that realizes organizational goals through the optimal use of human and material assets and resources to develop capacities (Laub, 1999).

At the present juncture, ideal leaders are those who are inclined to serve followers and respect their dignity and position, value the organization's progress and maximize staff capacity (Graham, 1991). Servant leadership style is one of the modern leadership approaches that is remedial for facing human changes of working environments in the present era while traditional leadership approaches create some obstacles to fostering productive employees in the organizations. In new leadership approaches, particularly servant leadership, empowerment is regarded as an axial factor (Patterson, 2003).

Servant leadership improves respect for people and their growth, constructs of society, builds honesty, provides leadership for the benefit of the followers, and promotes the participation of all employees and those who receive the organization's services in power and position (Laub, 2003). Servant leadership style is perceivable when the leader serves the followers and subordinate staff. Self-service must not be a

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stimulator and motivation for the leader; rather he must rise to the peak of a higher motivational plan, i.e. focus on the others' needs (Russell & Stone, 2004). Servant leadership values equality of humans and seeks individual development of the organization members (Russell, 2001).

The results of studies have shown that applying servant leadership style may be effective on the organizational structures of the employees. One of the organizational structures of the employees influenced by this style of leadership is organizational commitment (Ramli & Mat Desa, 2013; Olesia, Namusonge & Iravo, 2013; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko & Roberts, 2009; Nasr Esfahani, Nasr Esfahani & Nouri, 2011). Servant leaders, due to their job description must fulfill needs, create, altruism, respect personality, serve, empower, empathize, pay attention to employees while others can increase staff commitment to the organization (Colquitt, Lepine & Wesson, 2011). Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian (1974) have defined commitment as the identification of the person with a specific organization and the degree of involvement in the organization (Porter et al., 1974). According to Allen & Meyer (1991), organizational commitment is described as a psychological mood that specifies the relation of the employees with the organization and reduces the probability of leaving the organization for them (Allen & Meyer, 1991).

Servant leaders are regarded as persons who always respect the followers, assign tasks to them, value individual development, promote growth of the followers, and seek to maximize staff capacity: these features increase staff empowerment. So, one of the outcomes of servant leadership is the psychological empowerment of the employees (Mehrara & Bahalou, 2013; Nel, 2013; Jones, 2011; Gholipour, Pourezat & Hazrati, 2009). Conger & Kanugo (1988) regard empowerment

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as the process of increasing the sense of self-efficacy in individuals through identifying and removing conditions that have made employees incapable. Being capable refers to the conditions for increasing motivation of doing tasks through a strengthening sense of individual self-efficacy. Having reviewed the related studies, Thomas & Velthouse (1990) argued that empowerment is a multi-layered concept and cannot be explained by a single concept. They have defined empowerment as an increase in internal work motivation that is embodied in four areas: competence, self–determination, meaning, and impact. Competence refers to the individual's belief in his capabilities to do occupational activities skillfully (Gist, 1987). Self–determination refers to the rate of feeling and perception of individuals of having independence for starting, regulating, and planning, occupational activities (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989). Meaning refers to the rate of the individuals' perception of the value of goals or occupational purposes that are judged in relation to their personal norms and ideals (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Impact refers to the individuals' perception of whether they are able to affect occupational strategies and enforce the results in their work or not (Ashforth, 1989). On the other hand, high perception of empowerment by the employees affects their interest in their job, their defense of the organization, and their loyalty to the work values, and these effects increase commitment to the organization and occupation (Baharlou, 2013). This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Baharlou, 2013; Goudarzvand Chegini & Kheradmand, 2013; Ambad & Bahron, 2012; Kim, Lee, Murmann & George, 2012).

Servant leaders have specific characteristics such as use of identical standards for all, removal of discrimination, attention to staff opinions and ideas, giving information about the process

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of decision making, and considering ethical standards that have a direct impact on the increase in perception of organizational justice by the staff. Therefore, another outcome of servant leadership is organizational justice (Zehir, Akyuz, Eren & Turhan, 2013). Organizational justice indicates staff perception of fair treatment by organization (Campbell & Finch, 2004).

Primary studies have underscored distributive justice; i. e. feeling equity for what is distributed among individuals. According to Adams (1965), people determine justice by evaluating the ratio between giving and taking. Then they compare this ratio with some reference standards to determine whether the outcomes they have received for their efforts are fair or not. Distributive justice is realized when the outcomes equal implicit norms of allocating advantages and resources like neutrality and equity (quoted by Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter & Ng, 2001). In the 1980s, the focus of studies on justice was drawn to the procedures by which outcomes are allocated.

Thibaut & Walker (1975) and Leventhal (1980) showed that in many cases, the procedures by which outcomes are allocated are more important than the outcomes themselves so that if a person feels that they have not received desirable outcomes, but they believe that the procedures by which these outcomes are allocated are in accordance with justice and based on accurate and acceptable principles, they will feel satisfaction with the received outcome (Ambrose, 2002). In the 1990s, the studies were directed towards the social aspect of justice. This type of justice that is called interactional justice was defined as interpersonal treatment the persons receive when implementing the procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986). Interactional justice is realized when the decision makers respect people and explain the logics of decisions for them completely. Greenberg (1993) divided interactional justice into two separate interpersonal and

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informational factors. Interpersonal justice refers to the behavior with respect and kindness without politicization of the owners of power in the organization (Nabatchi, Bingham & Good, 2007). Furthermore, Greenberg (1993) suggested that the explanatory dimension of interpersonal justice can be considered as the informational aspect of procedural justice because explanations mostly receive the information required for evaluating structural aspects of procedures (Greenberg, 1993). Informational justice refers to the adoption of clear decisions and the provision of adequate explanations and evidence about them (Nabatchi et al., 2007). On the other hand, when the employees have a sense of equity in the organization and perceive that they are treated fairly in all fields, they will have a positive attitude towards the organization and will show more commitment to remain in the organization.

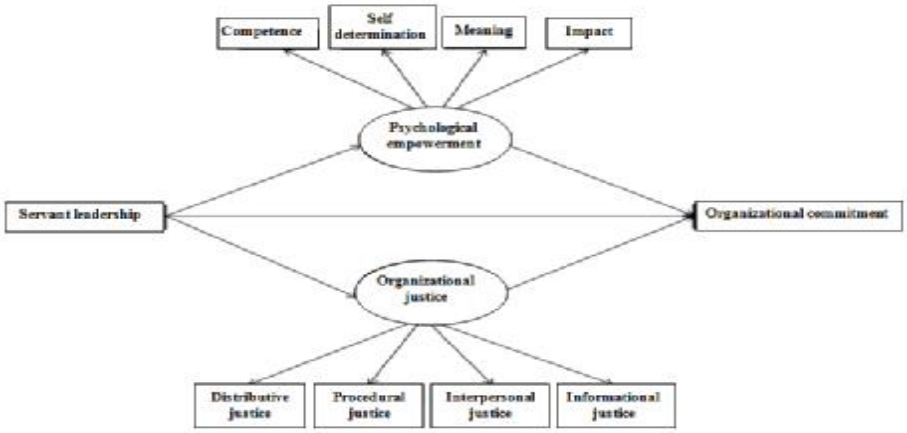


Figure 1. Proposed Model of this Study

Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to expand on prior research by examining the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment by considering the mediating role of psychological empowerment and organizational justice. The proposed model states that servant

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leadership has a direct positive effect on organizational commitment, psychological empowerment and organizational justice (hypotheses 1, 2, 3), and psychological empowerment and organizational justice have a direct positive effect on organizational commitment (hypotheses 4, 5). Further, psychological empowerment and organizational justice mediate the relations of servant leadership with organizational commitment (hypotheses 6, 7). Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of this study.

Method

In the present study, the statistical universe includes all official and contractual employees of Maroun Oil and Gas Exploitation Company that according to the report of human resources management of this company in 2014, they were 1200 persons. To test hypotheses, 250 persons were selected by using simple random sampling method.

Instruments

Servant leadership questionnaire. This questionnaire was made by Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson (2008). It contains 28 items and the responses are scored by a five point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Liden and colleagues (2005) have estimated its reliability coefficient at .90 by using Cronbach's alpha method. Gholipour & Hazrati (2009) have estimated the reliability coefficient of servant leadership scale at .90 through Cronbach's alpha method. In this study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was obtained .911 by using Cronbach's alpha method. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provided evidence for construct validity of this questionnaire in the present study.

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*Psychological empowerment questionnaire***.** This 12 item questionnaire has been made by Spreitzer (1995). For each dimension of psychological empowerment (competence, self-determination, meaning, and impact), 3 items have been considered and the responses have been scored by a five point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Spreitzer (1995) has determined the reliability of this questionnaire by using Cronbach's alpha method and re-test method and the reliability of Cronbach's alpha has been reported .72 in a sample industrial organization and .62 in a sample insurance office, and reliability coefficient of re-test has been reported .92 in a sample organization and .80 in a sample insurance office. Ghafuri Vernosfaderani (2008) estimated the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire subscales through Cronbach's alpha method for competence .80, for self–determination .821, for meaning .771, and for impact 0.808. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire scale has been estimated through Cronbach's alpha method .759 for competence, .821 for self- determination, .771 for meaning, and .808 for impact. Also, the total reliability coefficient was estimated by Cronbach's alpha method .918 for the psychological empowerment questionnaire. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provided evidence for construct validity of this questionnaire in the present study.

*Organizational justice questionnaire***.** It was made by Colquitt (2001). It contains 20 items: 4 questions for measuring distributive justice, 7 questions for measuring procedural justice, 4 questions for measuring interpersonal justice, and 5 questions for measuring informational justice and responses are scored by a five point Likert scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). By correlating four dimensions of organizational justice with the related scales in the manufacturing industries staff, Colquitt

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(2001) approved their criterion validity. Hashemi Sheikh Shabani (2007) has estimated reliability coefficient of four organizational justice scales by Cronbach's alpha method .91 for distributive justice, .79 for procedural justice, .90 for interpersonal justice, and .91 for informational justice. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire scale has been estimated by Cronbach's alpha method .734 for distributive justice, .858 for procedural justice, .815 for interpersonal justice, and .780 for informational justice. Also total reliability coefficient for organizational justice questionnaire was estimated .912 by Cronbach's alpha method. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provided evidence for construct validity of this questionnaire in the present study.

*Organizational commitment questionnaire***.** It was made by Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) which contains 15 item and its responses are scored by a five point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Carver (2008) has reported the reliability coefficient of this scale .83. To determine the validity of the organizational commitment questionnaire, Arshadi (2007) used Allen & Meyer organizational commitment scale and estimated correlation coefficient .69. The reliability coefficients of this scale were calculated .89 by Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was estimated .911 by Cronbach' alpha method. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provided evidence for construct validity of this questionnaire in the present study.

Data Analysis

This study applies a correlative plan through structural equation modeling (SEM) that is a multiple variable correlation method. Structural equation modeling is in fact an extension of

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the general linear model (GLM) that enables the researcher to test a set of regression equations simultaneously.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive findings related to mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores of respondents in the research variables.

Table 1
Descriptive Findings Related to the Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Servant Leadership	82	17.20	41	128
Organizational Commitment	45.79	12.53	15	75
Empowerment	36.53	9.13	13	60
Competence	9.30	2.68	3	15
Self – Determination	9.13	2.53	3	15
Meaning	9.09	2.68	3	15
Impact	9.02	2.58	3	15
Organizational Justice	56.50	11.04	27	85
Distributive Justice	11.20	3.09	4	20
Procedural Justice	19.84	5.16	7	33
Interpersonal Justice	11.41	3.16	4	20
Informational Justice	14.04	3.84	6	23

Table 2 presents a correlation matrix of the research variables. As shown in table 2, coefficients of simple correlation between the research variables are significant at the level $P \leq .05$.

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Table 2
Matrix of Correlation between Research Variables

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	**Servant leadership**	-											
2	**Organizational commitment**	.62**	-										
3	**Competence**	.43**	.38**	-									
4	**Self – determination**	.42**	.42**	.72**	-								
5	**Meaning**	.46**	.47**	.63**	.73**	-							
6	**Impact**	.46**	.44**	.58**	.69**	.73**	-						
7	**Psychological empowerment**	.51**	.49**	.21**	.25**	.25**	.28**	-					
8	**Distributive justice**	.31**	.37**	.10	.15*	.12	.14*	.14*	-				
9	**Procedural justice**	.26**	.34**	.15*	.18**	.17**	.19**	.20**	.60**	-			
10	**Interpersonal justice**	.35**	.37**	.20**	.21**	.23**	.27**	.26**	.30**	.25**	-		
11	**Informational justice**	.30**	.41**	.17**	.20**	.20**	.22**	.22**	.28**	.26**	.46**	-	
12	**Organizational justice**	.41**	.51**	.21**	.25**	.25**	.28**	.29**	.14**	.80**	.65**	.68**	-

$.01 \leq p^{**}, .05 \leq p^{*}$

To test the proposed model for the relation of servant leadership and organizational commitment to the mediating role of psychological empowerment and organizational justice, structural equation modeling method was used. The proposed model of this study has 4 variables: one variable as antecedent variable, one variable as consequence variable, and two

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variables as mediator variables. Fitness of the proposed model based on fitness indices is reported in table 3.

Table 3
Fitness Indices of the Proposed Model

Fitness Indices	$\chi 2$	Df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
The Proposed Model	85.32	32	2.666	.925	.871	.918	.947	.947	.925	.085

As shown in table 3, the proposed model has a relatively good fitness. It is to be mentioned that the structural equations, if (χ^2/df) of 5 does not exceed the acceptable. For other important indicators such as (GFI), (AGFI), (IFI), (TLI), (CFI), and (NFI) also fit 0/9 acceptable to the top. The final index (that), and RMSEA are certainly the most important index that accept or reject the proposed model. On the basis of amount to .01 to .1 acceptable and larger-than .1 is considered unacceptable (Beshlideh, 1391).

Figure 2 shows the proposed model of this study along with the standard coefficients of paths.

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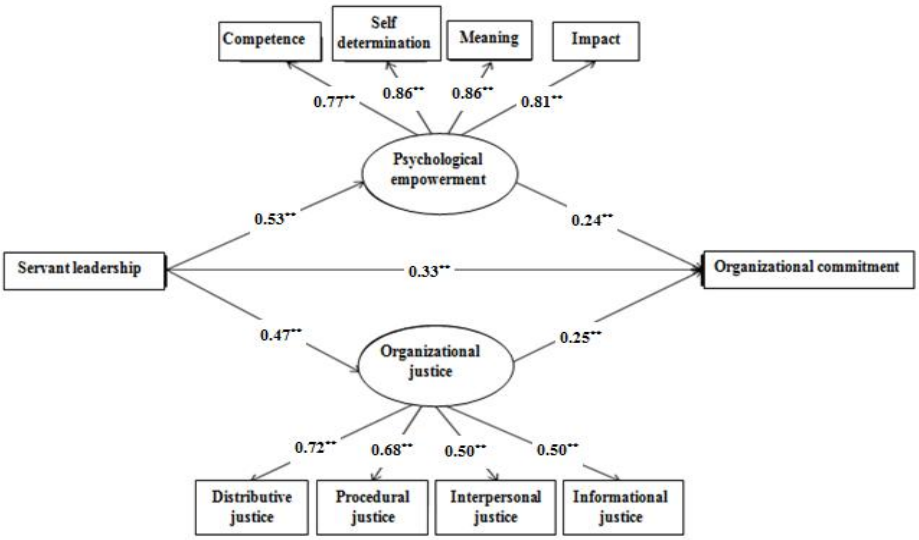


Figure 2. Final Model of the Present Study

A fundamental assumption of the model proposed by this study is the existence of several indirect paths. To determine the significance of any mediator relation and indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator variable, the bootstrap method was used in the Amos-21 software. Table 4 shows bootstrap results for mediator paths of the proposed model.

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Table 4
Bootstrap Results for Mediator Paths

Variable	Data	Boot	Bias	Significance level	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower	Upper
Servant Leadership **à** Psychological Empowerment **à** Organizational Commitment	.0870	.0877	.0007	.0002	.0327	.1389
Servant Leadership **à** Organizational Justice **à** Organizational Commitment	.0920	.0926	.0006	.0001	.0542	.1438

According to table 4, the significance level of psychological empowerment as the mediator variable between servant leadership and organizational commitment is p=0.0002, the confidence level is 95 and the number of bootstrap re-sampling is 5000. So, the indirect relation of servant leadership with organizational commitment through psychological empowerment is significant. Also, a significant level of organizational justice as mediator variable between servant leadership and organizational commitment is p= .0001, the confidence level is 95 and the number of bootstrap re-sampling is 5000. So, the indirect relation of servant leadership with organizational commitment through organizational justice is significant.

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Discussion

The objective of the present study is to investigate the direct effect of servant leadership on organizational commitment and also the indirect effect of servant leadership on organizational commitment through psychological empowerment and organizational justice. The obtained results revealed that servant leadership has a positive effect on the organizational commitment (H1). This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Ramli & Mat Desa, 2013; Olesia et al., 2013; Nasr Esfahani et al., 2011; Jaramillo et al., 2009). Servant leaders, due to such characteristics as fulfilling the needs, altruism, respect for personality, serving, empowerment, empathy, and attention to the employees and others can increase staff commitment in the organization. Servant leadership influences the organizational commitment that is one of the factors that are effective on efficiency that is among the most important goals of an organization (Colquitt, Lepine & Wesson, 2011). Patterson (2003) has attributed the positive relation between servant leadership and organizational commitment to common values and empathy of employees with the leaders and organization to a high extent. Servant leaders take care of the employees through attention to their leadership method. Therefore, the employees seek to continue their relations with the organization and so organizational commitment may stimulate the employees for significant involvement in the organization.

The obtained results showed that servant leadership has a positive effect on psychological empowerment (H2). This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Mehrara & Baharlou, 2013; Nel, 2013; Jones, 2011; Gholipour et al., 2009). According to Liden and colleagues (2008), to be effective, an organization needs to recognize, apply, and develop specific talents and potentials of its employees. In this regard, servant

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leaders play an important role in helping the employees to understand their potential capabilities. Servant leadership is focused on the development of the potential capabilities of employees. Also, today instead of obliging the subordinates to obey, management underscores empowerment, reliability, effective listening, kindness, and serving. The servant leadership model is a basis for empowerment of and attention to the employees. Servant leaders empower their followers to find their future path themselves. Servant leaders make the required efforts to preserve and support human assets of the organization. Servant leaders are regarded as persons that always respect the followers, assign tasks to them, value individual development and growth of the followers, and seek to maximize staff capacity, and these features increase staff empowerment.

The obtained results showed that servant leadership has a positive effect on organizational justice (H3) and this finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Zehir et al., 2013). Servant leaders who have specific characteristics show specific behaviors and specially influence organizational processes. So, the employees regard organizational processes and equitable decisions. One of these characteristics is to consider any person as a different creature in terms of needs and capabilities. This characteristic makes the manager expect any person according to his capabilities and reward any person according to his needs. This characteristic is raised, particularly about gender differences; because female and male employees do not have identical characteristics or identical capabilities and needs. If the manager does not consider this matter, the employees feel a sense of injustice. Among other characteristics of a servant leader, use of identical standards for all, removal of discrimination, attention to staff opinions , giving information about the process of decision making, and considering ethical

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standards can be mentioned that have a direct impact on the increase in perception of organizational justice by the staff. On the other hand, a servant leader is a person who stimulates trust, praise, and loyalty of subordinates. Trust makes them regard the decisions adopted by their managers fairly because they believe that their manager observes their rights. The important point is that measures and behaviors of official managers are regarded as an indicator of an organization's purpose rather than that of a specific manager (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The obtained results showed that psychological empowerment has a positive effect on organizational commitment (H4) and this finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Goudarzvand Chegini & Kheradmand, 2013; Baharlou, 2013; Ambad & Bahron, 2012; Kim & et al., 2012). As regards this hypothesis that psychological empowerment has a positive relation with organizational commitment, one can say that when employees feel a sense of capability in their work, they feel a sense of belonging and attachment to the organizations. This finding is logical because when the employees feel a sense of capability, they remain in the organization and get committed to it. In other words, high perception of empowerment by the employees is effective on their interest in their job, their defense of the organization, and their loyalty to the work values, and these effects increase commitment to the organization and occupation (Baharlou, 2013). As we know, the term psychological empowerment stems from theory X and Y. In the McGregor theory, characteristics of the managers who have attitude Y are namely: participation of employees in decision making, encouragement of bottom up communications, attention to staff opinions and suggestions, assigning more responsibilities to the staff, endeavor to develop the occupational richness of the staff. So, according to this

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theory, when employees are placed in such conditions, they will have more positive occupational attitudes including higher organizational commitment.

The obtained results showed that organizational justice has a positive effect on the organizational commitment (H5) and this finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Ayobami & Onyema, 2013; Rafei-Dehkordi, Mohammadi & Yektayar, 2013; Khodaparast Sareshkeh, Ghorbanalizadeh Ghaziani, & Tayebi, 2012). According to the theory of equity, when the employees have a sense of equity in the organization and perceive that they are treated fairly in all fields, they will have a positive attitude towards the organization and will show more inclination and commitment to remain in the organization. In other words, if the employees feel that the organization treats them fairly, they will preserve their positive attitudes towards work, working results, and organization to a high extent. Also, perception of organizational justice by the employees will make them willing to compensate the services. In this regard, more equitable interactions will lead to a relation beyond work contract and will increase attachment and organizational commitment in the employees. Also, according to the theory of social exchange, working conditions that are provided by the organization for the employees are an indicator of the value of employees for the organization. So, when employees feel that they are valuable for the organization, they are respected, and are treated fairly, their commitment and attachment to the organization increases.

The obtained results showed that servant leadership has an indirect positive effect on organizational commitment through psychological empowerment (H6) and this finding is consistent with the results of other research (Nel, 2013). Today, instead of

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obliging the subordinates to obey, management underscores empowerment, reliability, effective listening,

Kindness, and serving. The servant leadership model is a basis for the empowerment of and attention to the employees. Servant leaders empower their followers to continue their future path. When the employees feel capable, they feel a sense of belonging to the organization and get attached to it. This finding is logical because when the employees feel capable, they remain in the organization and become committed to it. In other words, high perception of empowerment by the employees is effective to the level of their interest in their job, their defense of the organization, and their loyalty to work values. These effects will increase their commitment to the organization and occupation. So, one can say that servant leadership may increase organizational commitment of the employees by increasing empowerment.

The obtained results showed that servant leadership has an indirect positive effect on organizational commitment through organizational justice (H7) and this finding is consistent with the results of the Almansour (2012) research. To explain this finding, one can say that servant leaders influence the organization processes by specific characteristics, including considering personal differences, use of identical standards for all, removal of discrimination, attention to staff opinions, giving information about the process of decision making, and considering ethical standards of behavior. This makes the employees regard organizational processes and fair decisions. On the other hand, justice and favorable working conditions provided by the organization for the employees is an indicator of value and importance of employees in the organization. Therefore, when the employees feel that they are valuable for the organization, they are respected, and are treated fairly, their

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commitment and attachment to the organization is increased. So, one can say that organizational justice plays a mediating role in the relation between servant leadership and organizational commitment.

With respect to the obtained results, it is suggested that organizations try absorb, hiring, and training managers and promoting a servant leadership style in the organization in order to increase the sense of capability and organizational justice perceived by the employees and to enjoy its ultimate result, i.e. committed employees.

Although the study findings lent overall support to the proposed model, there are some limitations that should be noted. First, the data was collected through self-report measures. Survey data may not adequately portray the complexity of employee perceptions of work environments. A combination of self-report questionnaires and objective assessments would be ideal. Second, given the cross-sectional design of this study, causal relationships among the variables cannot be established. Longitudinal studies should be employed to test the hypotheses. Longitudinal research clarifies cause and effect relationships. Finally, because the participants were the employees of Maroun Oil and Gas Exploitation Company, these results cannot be generalized without taking into consideration. According to the results of the present study on the importance of servant – leadership, servant – leadership have been made in promoting organizational commitment, employee empowerment, and also increasing perception and organizational justice. So organization managers supposed to have attention to recognize, and promote the servant at the leadership levels.

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